

# **BRANDON MORGAN**

Actor - Houston, TX

@actoratwork88, @actors\_quarantine\_corner

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**Amy C. Evans** [00:00:01]: All right. It is Wednesday, August 12th, 2020. This is Amy Evans.

And I am speaking on Zoom, the technology of the moment, with Mr. Brandon Morgan.

Brandon, could I get you to say your name and tell us what it is that you do?

**Brandon Morgan** [00:00:18]: Hello, everyone. My name is Brandon Morgan, and I am a professional actor in Houston.

**ACE** [00:00:26]: Awesome. And then may I ask you to also share your date of birth, for the record, please.

**BM** [00:00:31]: Well my birthday is zero, seven, twenty-two, eight-eight. So that's July 22nd, 1988. I just had a birthday. I just turned 32 years old.

**ACE** [00:00:42]: Happy Belated Birthday. Wow. Birthday during a pandemic. How did that go?

**BM** [00:00:47]: Oh, it was weird. It was really weird. I think the one thing I did do, the week of my birthday I rented like an Airbnb out close to Lake Conroe. And I was just out there for like two days, and I just sat there and I did absolutely nothing. Like literally nothing. And it was great. It was great. Although, it's not like I've been doing much of anything at home, during the pandemic. *[Laughs]*

**ACE** [00:01:14]: Right. But a change of scenery is worth a lot these days. Worth a lot.

**BM** [00:01:19]: It was not real different.

**ACE** [00:01:21]: Let's get a little snapshot of the beginnings of Brandon Morgan. Are you a Houston native.

**BM** [00:01:28]: Yes. Born and raised. I'm from the Northside of Houston, Acres Home, Greenspoint area. I grew up here. I've been here literally my entire life. I have traveled enough, being an artist. But I mean, this is home and always will be. I don't care if I'm making fifty million dollars, I'm definitely always going to try to live in Houston, for sure. I love it here, man. Been here forever. I went to Eisenhower High School. Graduated Eisenhower. And then I left Eisenhower and went to Prairie View A & M. Did not finish college, actually, although I did go to school for theater. Left Prairie View in about, maybe 2010, and just lived life for a couple of years. Just trying to figure it out. Freshly ex-college student living at home with his mom. Like, what am I going to do with my life? **[00:02:31]**

But before theater, I was a swim instructor. I swam all four years of high school. And that literally the only job I ever knew before I even could spell theater. I was a swim instructor from about maybe seventeen to twenty-six, about. About that long. So that's literally all I knew in life was just teaching swimming and going home. That was it. And I don't know, those two years after college, you just sit there and you're like, "Damn. What's going to happen? Am I an adult yet? Do I get a job?" I don't know. **[00:03:12]** I never even had a dream of being an actor at all. I was interested—just to backtrack a little bit, how I even got immersed into theater. I was in high school, and I was a very mischievous kind of kid. Basically, I got in trouble a hell of a lot. Like, all the time. I was always getting in-school suspension. **[Laughs]** You know, the in-school suspension. And I always had a theater class, and my theater teacher, shout out Mr. Freddy Buckner, Freddy B, he used to come into SAC [Student Assignment Center]. And he was like, "Man, you're always—every time I look on my roll, you're in SAC. And I just don't understand why. Is there something we need to work out?" "I'm just here." He was just like, "Well I could

deal with you. I'll come get you out of SAC every day after school. You can come and help on my show." **[00:04:09]And** I think they were doing Flyin' West by Pearl Cleage, and I was basically a stage hand. I was helping pull curtains and sweep the stage. Which was great for me, because sitting in one classroom from 7:20 in the morning until 5:50 in the afternoon is pretty much baby jail. **[Laughs]** That's what the fuck I called it. I used to call it fucking baby jail. So, yeah. It's baby jail. It was not fun. It was not fun. But he worked that out with me, man. And I always was appreciative of him for that, so I always took his class. Every year, every semester, I always made sure I had the theater class, because that was like my sophomore year in high school. So I just had to make sure, just to give back. Like I respect him like he respected me. **[00:04:59]** And senior year for the class, we have to do, of course, like a monologue for our senior project or whatever. We have to pick a monologue, learn it, and perform it. But the catch was, we were performing for our college professor, which was C. Lee Turner, who was the professor at Prairie View, because my high school director is a former student of C. Lee Turner. And that's kind of like the big thing. You're in high school, you get a big college professor come in and critique your monologue. Little did I know, I really didn't even care. I just wanted to pass the fucking class and get out of college—out of high school. Just trying to graduate, literally. **[00:05:44]** So I did the monologue, and he approached me afterward and he's like, "Man, would you like to come to Prairie View, learn how to act?" I was like, "No, not really, because I don't really plan on going to college. I'm probably going to get a job or some other shit that I probably should not be doing." **[Laughs]** So I was not worried. But I told my mom about it, and that may have been like the best and worst mistake, because when she found out, she was like, "Well you need to go find out." She did not want me to go to college for theater. That's guaranteed. That was not her plan. Supposed to be like computer science and computer technology. But she was

like, "Whatever we got to do to get you in the damn school is what we're going to do."

**[00:06:33]** So I ended up at Prairie View. I got a partial scholarship. And you know, being a young college student, not really interested in your major, but being in college—my grades weren't the issue. It was my attendance. **[Laughs]** My attendance was definitely the issue in college, because I don't have to wake up anymore and stuff. I did what most college students do. So, yeah. I left in 2010 and to catch it back up. **[00:07:08]** Those two years after college I was at my mom's house like, what the fuck am I going to do with my life? And I got a random phone call from one of my friends from college who was in theater with me, and he was like, "Hey, man. You want to come do this show?" And I'm like, "A show? What the fuck? Bro, we are not in school anymore. Are you not going to get a job? My mamma told me I need to get a job, so can we do real things? I thought play time was over. I thought we were having fun doing theater in college, but now it's like real life. Let's go to work." And he was like, "Man, just shut the fuck up and just come audition. We need somebody." You stay really, really close. **[00:07:55]** It was an express children's theater, actually. It was actually housed in Northwest Mall at that time. This is 2012 or '11, 11-ish. And this is literally about January or February in 2012 when he calls me, and I had just found out previously before that that I was about to have a son. So with all those things swirling in my head, I'm like, theater is not the thing that I should be trying to do right now, knowing I'm about to have a son. This was February, and I had Josiah in July, July of 2012. So that's when my son was born. So literally all within that year, this whole transition into theater happened. **[00:08:46]** I don't know. I don't know. I went to the audition. I met Shirley Whitmore. I call her my mother in theater, because—I did the audition. I have a do-rag on. I look like a guy that just came off the street to be like, "Hey, I want to come do something." She looked at me, and she was like, "I don't know. Something about you. I'm not figuring it out yet. But I don't

know." She's like, "You look kind of like a thug, though." **[Laughs]** I was like, "What?" She's like, "I think I'm going to call you Thug Thespian." And that was literally where that name comes from, from 2012, this lady, she adorned me with that. **[00:09:32]** I don't know. I think just the fact of doing that and actually doing the show and actually feeling that feeling of performing for kids, nonetheless. It was a children's theater, so we rarely performed for adults, except for the guardians or supervisors that were there for the kids. And kids definitely are the best and most brutal audience member that you could ever have. I do shows for adults hundreds of times a year, and after every show they're like, "Good show. Great show. That was phenomenal. It was so great. Oh, my gosh. You blew me away." And I've had kids that was like, "I didn't like you. You were scary." Like, "I did not like this." Kids will go, "I am confused." They don't really hold back at all. **[00:10:22]** So just being immersed into that world, I don't know. It truly did something to me. And from that moment, I never looked back. And I also knew that I was going to have a child, too, so I was like, "Fuck it. We're just going to go balls in. All full throttle. We're just going to throw all the eggs in the basket and just see how far we can get." And 2020, here we are, man. **[00:10:51]**

It's been a good ride. It's been a very annoying ride. I've definitely had no clue I would even be here, be nominated for things, and working at the Alley Theater. It's a great life. Like I'm going to say, coming from the things that I know I could be doing, or could have been doing at the time, before I even thought about theater, it's amazing. It's amazing. And my son loves what I do. I love it just as much as I do. So I feel like everything just worked out for the better. I have like the best life. It does not come without its hardships, of course. Coronavirus and scheduling and trying to get jobs and health insurance. But it is truly the best life, honestly. I don't know what the

hell else I would do anymore, if I wasn't doing theater. I would go back to that same question, before I started. Like, what the fuck am I going to do with my life? I can't think of anything else. I'm clearly going to die here in this stage area, somewhere. Somewhere on stage, I'm pretty sure.

**[Laughs]**

**ACE** [00:12:02]: Well it sounds like theater was looking for you for a long time. And then you're finally like, "Okay, theater. **[Laughs]** Let me pay attention to you."

**BM** [00:12:09]: My mother said that God works in mysterious ways and never makes mistakes. It's no coincidence that I've always been involved or around theater for some amount of my life, whether I was aware of what it was for or not. But I've definitely always been around. Because my mother, she's actually been a subscriber to The Ensemble [Theatre] for years. And she used to drag me there when I was little. And I fucking hated it. I hated going to the theater with my mother. It was like the one thing I used to dread because they always go on Sundays. It's my mom, my aunt, my grandmother, my mother's best friend. It's always a thing. They subscribe to all the shows. I just hated it. I truly hated it. But I think that's because my mother is a fan of musicals, and I definitely am not a fan of musicals. If you catch me in a musical, it's either a very, very good check, or someone hit me over the head and convinced me to do a musical. Those have got to be the only options because I can't sing at all. **[Laughs]** So there's no reason I should be there.

**ACE** [00:13:30]: Well let me ask you this because this is kind of a question for the end, but I'm going to ask it now, before I forget. You said you got in trouble a lot at school, and theater was a way to kind of distract you, and it sounds like you channeled all that energy into theater. So what

would you say to a kid today whose parents drag him to the theater and they hate it, but then it turned your life into something you never expected?

**BM** [00:13:56]: I could say, just—I think as a kid, growing up, I think the thing that we should tune into more as an adult is the things that we reject the most as children. You know what I mean? As kids, we are very not aware of how things fit, how the puzzle pieces work. But when you go back and you analyze all the things that you used to reject, it's like, oh, yeah. Even as a kid, I didn't eat bread. I still don't eat a lot of bread. People say it's the weird kink of Brandon because I really don't eat a lot of bread. Like biscuits and flatbread, white bread. I just don't. But as a kid, it was like, no. No. But when I grew up, I was like, well why the fuck would I ever—Bread is not bad. I just don't want a lot of it. I just don't want a God-awful amount of bread. **[00:14:53]** So just a simple analogy. Those kind of things. Because I hated theater, but once I got involved, I mean I was like, this is like the most amazing thing that I think I could ever do. Like, ever. So I would just say just be a lot more open to the things that you would normally or initially reject because there's so many stigmas about theater. I can even remember a time at high school, maybe like tenth grade, we were all at school, because I played a lot of sports. I was definitely a sports—I ran track. I was very, very good at track. But I think that more of like my father's dream for me than just mine. That's kind of how I got into swimming because I'm a rebel. I got to do my own thing. If you take away my choice to pick, then I'm definitely going to do something else, so that's how I got into swimming. **[00:15:49]** We used to kind of joke about the theater kids in high school. Literally, like that kind of thing. And I even have some friends from high school say things like, "Man, you're an actor now? Do you remember when we used to sit in the cafeteria in the morning and talk jokes about theater and how lame it is?" And they was like—they was like, "But man, you're a professional actor." I was like, "I know, right?"

The ironies of life." **[00:16:16]** So just, please. Always remain open to whatever is happening to you in your life, because you truly never know what twist and turns that this universe, or God, or your source, or whatever you think or want it to be, you have no idea which way it will twist you. And it can twist you in so many ways. It can bring you so much joy or also so much pain. Because if you are not walking in your purpose, it will eventually demolish you. I think demolish your spirit, as far as what I think. **[00:16:55]** Because when I was swimming, I love teaching swimming. It's one of the few passions I have outside of theater. But I wasn't that happy. I loved the kids. I truly loved the kids and loved teaching the kids. It was such an easy transition into children's theater after teaching countless kids how to swim. It's like water daycare. That's what I used to call it. Water daycare or water play time. But you just got to literally stay open, man. Because I know I was a very stubborn kid and very close minded towards theater and towards all kinds of shit. That's just not how I grew up. That's not what we do. That's not how it works. And I'm like, fuck that. Keep that over there. This is our bubble and this is how we want it to stay. **[00:17:48]** Theater would turn that upside down. Theater will expose you to so many different facets and ideas and thoughts of different people. My job is people. It's not Brandon or my environment. It's truly people. If I had to play someone you know, I would have to get to know you and how you are as a person to see how you can interact with your friend. It's truly about people. And I think that alone has made me so much of a better person now because, growing up in certain places, you see a certain thing, so that is what you're used to. I call it, what's the saying? Like product of my environment kind of thing. So it's what you're used to seeing. **[00:18:37]** I tell people all the time, I know it's a bad comment. I don't really think it's that bad. But I didn't really meet that many white people in my life until I started doing theater, because I went to a predominately all-black and Hispanic school, high school. Went through an HBCU

[Historically Black College and University], and it was even more African American people there, which there was much more of a mix. I met—I think the first person—international, I think she was from like Turkey. I'd never met anybody from Turkey before I went to college. But literally, I just wasn't exposed to enough to actually be ready for it. And when I first started doing theater, I was very—I'm not going to say reserved. I'm not really reserved kind of person. But I was a little more quieter. Like self-conscious about am I intelligent enough to say what I want to say? Can I articulate it correctly? You know, just the type of self-conscious things you have, being in a new circle. **[00:19:48]** But theater's not like that, man. It's just like everybody's—it's just like the greatest people. I think theater people, or artists themselves, are more genuine people, because we operate in the realm of reality and truth. So I think, for me, that makes—those are good ingredients for a good human. I could talk about this theater thing all day. I could. I really could.

**ACE** [00:20:23]: I love. Love it. I love that here you find yourself the Thug Thespian on the roster at the Alley Theater. You've come a long way, baby. So let's talk about that. I love what you said, though, about the creative—artists and creative people being passionate about finding truth and knowing people and being based in reality. Let's talk about all of that in 2020 and all we have facing today and how you're dealing with it. You're pushing through it. What you've lost. What you've gained.

**BM** [00:21:02]: Oh, man. This is as candid and PC [politically correct] as I can say it, but this is a shitty time. Of course, I'm thirty-two. It's not like I've lived for ages, eons. But I've never really experienced anything like this. This is brand new to me, and I think a lot of other people. Like my grandmother, she survived a flu epidemic back in her time, and I was like, "Damn. That's

crazy." But me, I never have. I have lost pretty much every single job and contract that I had from last year and coming into this year. Oh, man. It's difficult. **[00:21:59]** I have not had a quote-unquote nine-to-five job since 2014, actually. 2014 was also the year I decided I was going to be a full-time actor. I started in 2012. But when I did my first show, I was still kind of doing swimming on the side. I had little odd jobs working at Saltgrass [Steakhouse] and Holiday Inn in conjunction with, but the scheduling—I started doing more stuff, and the scheduling just didn't work out. And in 2014, I was like, okay. Cutting all the other shit out and I'm just going to do nothing else but theater, like every day. Hopefully, I can make some money. And literally from 2014 to 2019, I have done about four to five shows each year. Like literally, or just about each year. I think 2018, I did about seven in one year, which is fucking amazing. Like, even for me. I don't even know how I physically did it. But it happened. And to do all of that and come to zero, it's almost like a culture shock. **[00:23:16]** It's hard. I get in my head a lot. Just almost back to that feeling like, what the fuck am I going to do? What am I going to do with my life right now? Because as an artist, we are independent contractors. Luckily for me, I am a part of the Actors' Equity Association, which is the union for actors. So they back us. They make sure we have health insurance, 401[k], and things like that. But the catch is, we have to work a amount of eleven weeks for six months of coverage for our health insurance, and nineteen weeks—excuse me— for a year of coverage. **[00:24:03]** So how that works is it's basically like one week of rehearsal is one week, you know what I mean? So if I do a show, and my contract is for nine weeks, nine weeks, those are the weeks that count towards that eleven. And right now, after I finished [performing in the play] *Passover* [at Rec Room Arts], I was sitting at about eight weeks, and I had HGO [Houston Grand Opera] coming up right after that. We were doing *Salomone*? [*Salome*] I think that's the name of the show, I believe. Forgive me if I didn't say it

right. And I was going to acquire the rest of my weeks for that show. But I get the email signing my contract on March 10th. And March 13th was the shutdown of everything. So from day one, I don't have health insurance right now. Even though I've been Equity for two years, and I've always had health insurance. But you know, it's on a basis of working. And it's hard, man.

**[00:25:16]** And more so than that, fuck theater. I'm more worried about school. You know, I have a son. He turned eight years old, July 25th. He's in the third grade now, and I'm just not happy with how this shit is happening. I'm not happy at all. If they told me I could go run back into theater and do theater right now, would I? I probably would. I probably would, because I think that my body and my mind is strong enough to withstand what could happen. I can assess the risk a lot better. But he's eight. He's eight, man. And I'm just not really happy about that. And losing—that's one thing that I've lost is the ability for my son to learn well. **[00:26:09]** He does very well in school, but I mean, he's eight. Doing this computer thing with an eight year old and his TV's right there, although it's off, and his toys are over there in the corner, although they're not moving, it's just a recipe for not a good situation of learning. And since my son has been in school, all his teachers say, "He's so great." He sits by the teacher. He's very involved with his classroom. Even talking to him at home, he's like, "I miss my teachers. I miss my friends." Because he learns so much better in that atmosphere. And I'm sure he loves me, but he does not want to sit here and get lessons from Dad all day. I give those to him after school, too. So it's like he doesn't want to get in school lessons and out of school and life lessons all from the same person in one full day. For me, that is the one thing that I'm losing and missing out on the most right now during coronavirus. And I think second would be money. Fucking money, man. Money. It makes no sense. I don't know. I don't know.

**ACE** [00:27:26]: Let's talk about money, because that brings me to Actors Quarantine Corner, and I know you all throw your Cash App [handles] up there. Tell me how that came to be.

**BM** [00:27:34]: Excellent. Me and Joe [Palmore]—Well I actually went to college with Kay B [Kendrick Brown]. Kay B went to Prairie View also. When I was a freshman going into my process to get accepted into Prairie View I did like a shadow program where I as a senior in high school came to the school and walked around with one of the upper classmans all day. Like talking to them, and giving me—and that person actually happened to be Kay B. So it's just crazy how the world just wraps around for me, man. When I decided, I was, okay. I'm going to go to theater, I meet Kay B. He's like, "Yeah." And everybody's like, "Oh, he's just a damn good actor. He's so great. You've got to see him." And then he takes me around the school all day. I'm just so like, "Man, this is great." And then, here we are. We work side by side. You know, side by side.

**[00:28:30]** And same thing with Joe [Joseph Palmore]. My first time working at the Ensemble, I met Joe. And of course, Joe is a staple at the Ensemble, way before I even decided I wanted to be involved in theater. He's always on main stage shows, and I'm doing children's theater. And to be honest, Joe P. is really one of the main and first people who actually kind of helped me navigate whatever the hell this theater thing is. Because I truly went in just unbiasedly but also very ignorant. I didn't know how to make a resume. **[Laughs]** I didn't know how to find an audition. What you should say. I didn't even know you were supposed to like slate at the beginning of an audition. I thought you were just supposed to walk in and be like, do the thing. **[00:29:26]** I was so rough. I'm still very rough and raw around the edges. I'm still that way. But I'm thankful, because I learn every day. And I think that the passion that I have for this thing I think is very noticeable. So I think people don't mind feeding into that, you know what I mean, because it

shows them a piece of themselves. And Joe, man, he was literally that person. He was like, "Well, you got to get a resume. You need to format like this. You got to get a headshot. Make sure it's at least from chest up. Or if it's going to be lower, it needs to be farther." You know, just the little things that no one ever told me, even in college. Or maybe I heard it, but I just wasn't paying attention at the time. That's also a possibility, but we'll have to go back and analyze that later. **[00:30:21]** But yeah, man. I tell people all the time. Me and Joe been at this for a long time. We've been friends. I don't know if people know how much we do hang out in real life. We talk all the time. And Kay B as well, because Kay B and Joe P. are like super best friends. They became friends through theater, and I'm just the young guy who kind of came in the mix who's mutually connected to both of them. And quarantine happened, and me and Joe, we talking on the phone like we always do, and we're like, "Man, this is stupid. Like, what the fuck are we going to do? How do we do this?" He's like, "I don't know, man." I was like, "I guess that podcast that we were going to do is not going to happen now." Because we were actually talking about trying to put together a podcast in, I want to say, maybe February [2020] we were talking about it. We were like, "Man, we're going to get it together." And then coronavirus happened, and we like, "Shit. We're never going to do it now." **[Laughs] [00:31:22]** And then I was like—**[Laughs]** Literally, my word, I was like, "Fuck it, Joe. We could just go live in the corner or some shit." That was my line. That was the word. And from that moment, I don't know what happened. The balls just kept rolling. We were like, "Hey, maybe we could. We could just go live, right? Just talk, or something." And I don't know, the first two weeks, we were outside. Then we moved into the corner, and people just started watching. **[00:31:58]** And then we started getting more involved. We were like, "Okay, well now we got to come up with actual topics." I know it may seem like we are just very freeform, like we don't really plan it out. You can see my

wall right here. *[Points to the wall behind him]* This is my AQC [Actors Quarantine Corner] side. This is all the crap that's coming up for the next four or five weeks. We do a lot of thought into it as far as just the order of the show, like the process of the show. Like what are we going to do at this time? What are we going to do at that time? What are we going to do at that time? But it's not scripted at all. And we just of just kind of go off the cuff. **[00:32:47]** We had a topic about voting, right before early voting ended. We were like that Monday, and early voting ended on a Tuesday. So our theme for that week was "Vote, Bitch." But it was censored through text.

*[Laughs]* But I can say, I told them that week, we personally all went and did a lot of research. Like Joe basically looked up any and everything that you would need to vote with, like as far as ID [identification]. And if you do not have those things, what are the alternatives as far as like you need two—I think it was like almost like you need two bills in your name or two articles of mail from one address. That was Joe. I think I looked up what's the voting process for people with felonies. **[00:33:44]** So it's a lot more that goes into us just literally having the actual fun on Mondays, which we enjoy because it's almost just like doing theater. We do have fun when the lights go up. But there's a shit-ton of work that happens for at least two months before that day even comes. I don't know. So we just kind of just threw something together. It was just supposed to be like a thing to pass the time, and then people were like, "Hey, we really like this thing. Keep doing this thing." And we were like, "Well should we keep doing it every Monday?" And then we were like, "Okay, well we'll keep doing it a couple more Mondays." I remember like Memorial Day, we were not about to do the show. Like literally, we didn't even talk about doing it. We were like, "Fuck." And then Sunday came, and we were like, "We're going to do the show. And we are not—it's just going to continue." **[00:34:46]** There's no success or lucky pot at the end of the rainbow without consistency, because that's one of I think my greatest traits as an actor

is like, I want to be always in something, always working. It's one of my hashtags: never not working. Not to be a hog. We all can work. I hope that we all can work. But I know that I want to work. I can't speak for everybody, but I want to be—it's not even being in everything. I could be in something over there while you're in that over there. I just want to be working because I don't like that idle time. I've learned where that goes in my life. *[Laughs]* [00:35:36] At this moment, I was like, "I have to stay working." Because during those famous two years of, what the fuck am I going to do? I was way idle and so many things—I just got into so much shit for no reason. You know, just trying to figure yourself out. Thinking you want to do this but you really don't, and you realize that you shouldn't. Or you know that you shouldn't do that, but you're like, "Hey, I'm going to do that anyway because it might work out." Just the normal season of being a teenager. And I say that as I was like twenty to twenty-two, also. I was still kind of teenager-ish at that time. *[Laughs]* Very much so, with choices and decisions, man. [00:36:23] But I'm just so thankful for [Actors] Quarantine Corner because it gives us to chance to, I guess, just do it. Do the thing that we do. Granted, we're not physically in front of people, but we're definitely live. It's all live. We get one time to do it. We can't go back and rewind it and fix it and fluff it up and make it nice. And people are responsive. People are very, very responsive. I remember when we first started, we was like, "Who the fuck is going to watch us three?" *[Laughs]* And Joe was like, "Man, we all damn good actors. They should want to watch." But I'm like, "Yeah, but like, we not going to be acting all the time. It's like, if we not acting, what the fuck do they care?"

*[Laughs]*

**ACE** [00:37:14]: Let's talk about—I logged on on Monday night, and you had the first of a four part series about the state of the theater in Houston. I mean, you're doing these amazing kind of forums for the community. And I, not even being a theater person, I learned so much. And I went

to high school with Tamarie [Cooper] and Jason [Nodler from Catastrophic Theater]. I know Matt [Hune] and Alex [Schwenke] from Rec Room. I know the people, and I've seen you perform at Rec Room. But that was so enlightening for me. It was really, really cool.

**BM** [00:37:43]: I do think that may have been—I don't know about best, but—It was our best. It really was our best show, because it was fun. And the thing how we started is because we just wanted to perform so bad. That was our thing. If you look at the early videos of Actors Quarantine Corner, it's really just us sitting there like performing just a monologue-a-thon. Like all of us just learn a monologue, or co-read a monologue based on a certain theme that we had thought of. That's pretty much how that worked. I don't know, we just wanted to perform. But once you have the platform, and you know what the platform can do and reach, we kind of like, I guess, veered away from that. **[00:38:32]** It's definitely all going to wrap up into the four part series. We're definitely still going to perform because that's really what we all want to do. But we've been doing this twenty weeks now? The 17th will be week twenty-one. So twenty-one consecutive weeks of—well, minus one. So you can say nineteen consecutive weeks of just us. Just us performing, making things, probably going live with people and that. But literally just us. We're like, "When are the people going to get tired of us?" *[Laughs]* So maybe we should just turn the camera around on what we do. And that's kind of how the state of the theater [episode] came up. How can we take the live camera off of us and turn it on theater while still doing the show? That's pretty much where that all came from. I was like, "We should talk to all the theater representatives." I'm like the receptionist of AQC. I email everybody. Make sure everybody's ready. Make sure everybody is technologically savvy to go live. We had a couple of people who were like, "I don't know how to go live." *[Laughs]* So I'm definitely in charge of that part.

**ACE** [00:39:54]: Well tell me how—because during that conversation, you also really held people accountable for the future of theater. Like the guy from The Alley. And you're like, "Okay, so how many Black, indigenous, people of color are y'all hiring for 2020/2021?"

**BM** [00:40:07]: That was Joe. We all kind of had set questions, because me and Joe are Equity. So my question was definitely about when can we get back to work? Simply put, when can we get back to work? Because Equity sends us these random-ass emails that truly don't—that are so vague at best. Like, "Oh, everyone be safe and we'll try to make sure everyone's back by September. But no contracts." And I'm like, "Wait. That's what we want. We want the contracts. We don't want the hope." You know what I mean? So, yeah. We know that theaters are very more involved with their talking process than they are to us. We're just the kind of foot soldiers that pay the bill on both sides. And I really want to know that because I'm almost to the point where I need to get back to work. **[00:41:05]** But Actors Quarantine Corner is definitely fulfilling that void for me. And I mean, we do get paid. Like I always tell—they be like, "I know y'all get paid a lot." I was like, "No, it's not. It's really not like that." We didn't do it expecting to get money. You know what I mean? It was just like more of a—it's a thing. Like Joe said, you go to New York, you pass by at least fourteen people on one street with the guitar case or a hat. And everybody is doing the same thing, so I don't see what's really different from what we're doing. I do tell them, though. I was like, "I don't want to make it look like we begging for money." He was like, "We are not begging for money." But we are. Because all of these people will still come and pay their hard earned money to come watch us perform in these different spaces. So why can they not pay a fourth of that just to watch us do a monologue on live." And I was like, "You know what, I can't fucking argue with that." **[00:42:09]** So, yes. Put the Cash Apps up, tell them

what they need to do. We're going to perform. You can send me three dollars or five dollars or thirty dollars, and we're going to do it again next week. I was like, "It sounds foolproof to me." We're still getting a small hit of the thing that we want, to perform. We still get to sit down and learn a monologue, like dissect it for ourselves. It's the same process, just on a smaller alternative scale, now because of COVID.

**ACE** [00:42:45]: And I love what you did where you just compared it to people playing on the street corner. Because it's like the twenty-first century busking, where you're going on Zoom or Instagram to see people do what they do, and put something in the tip jar. It's where we are. But for Actors Quarantine Corner, y'all have put so much into that. You have branding, you have the little logo, you've got the introductions, you've got the hat you're wearing, you've got the t-shirts, which I love, because y'all are wearing masks.

**BM** [00:43:16]: We've got more t-shirts going. More merch. More merch.

**ACE** [00:43:22]: Are you making money with merch too? Little bit?

**BM** [00:43:24]: Yes. Well we haven't actually published out like, "Hey, we're selling this." We have about ten shirts right now, just pre-made already, outside of the eight that we were already given. We're just giving those away right now. We're not really pushing the merch. We want to get our guests. But that's the thing about selling clothes, inventory is a bitch when it comes to business. So you don't want to overstock, but definitely have about ten shirts and just every other week, or randomly, like whenever we get the idea, we're like, "Hey, we got a question." And we just—we've already given away two shirts. I just mailed one out last week. So just going to pass them out, and once we get a little more inventory, then—it's all a process, man. **[00:44:16]** The

idea that me, Joe, and Kay B are going with is, before this whole coronavirus started, we were already planning this thing. We already kind of had the idea of it. But coronavirus forced us into action with it. And we're just basically using the quarantine time to just gather everything. Like this is not even the full picture of what we want to do. It's just what we are able to do and what we are doing. Gain a following, build a brand. And the idea is that once coronavirus is over, we'll be able to actually move into a legitimate spot, which we did have. We have had a studio, we had sound technicians, we have many different resources at our disposal, being actors, and artists, and knowing techies and stage managers and sound and lighting design. And people are willing to work with us, which baffles the hell out of me. I'm like, "Y'all will really just do this for us?" They're like, "Yeah. Yeah. No problem." We're like, "Great! Fucking, great. That's awesome."

**ACE** [00:45:36]: Man, I don't think you can leave the garage.

**BM** [00:45:38]: I don't know, man.

**ACE** [00:45:38]: I don't think you'll be able to leave the garage. *[Laughs]*

**BM** [00:45:46]: A lot of people say that. A lot of people say that. I was like, no. Summertime is not a place to be outside at any time of night. So I don't care if it's 8:00 AM or 8:00 PM. Just sometimes not the place to be in Houston. Outside, man. Gets a little hot in there, definitely. Hot topics and hot bodies.

**ACE** [00:46:05]: So y'all got the setup in there.

**BM** [00:46:06]: It's nuts, man. It's nuts.

**ACE** [00:46:08]: So listen, on your personal Instagram, you have so much going on. It's like motivation and social justice and humor and acting. You've got a lot going on on there. And I see that you've imbued Actors Quarantine Corner with a lot of that. But I wonder, from the social justice piece, did y'all—I think I remember an episode, like, we're not okay or something. Was that an episode?

**BM** [00:46:34]: Yes.

**ACE** [00:46:35]: And then I want to ask you, too, if you did anything after the murder of George Floyd [Houston and Third Ward native who was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020] and how that has affected y'all as Black men in Houston.

**BM** [00:46:43]: All of those actually came after the murder of George Floyd, during the protests. And they were actually written by Joe P. Joe P wrote “Black,” “Black Now,” “The Black Version,” and the “What Now?” and the “We Are Not Okay.” Joe actually authored all of those. Because, if you don't know, Joe is actually a poet, and a very, very damn good one at that. I think he's been doing poetry way before theater at all. And Kay B is a teacher. So with all of our powers combined, man, everything just works out. [00:47:22] But as far as those things, that's the beauty of our show. All of that happened literally in the midst of the week of us planning what we're going to do for the show. We have—we meet—we talk on Tuesdays. We meet, have a virtual meeting, on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Wednesday or Thursday. And we usually meet on either Saturday or Sunday to possibly rehearse or go over anything kind of semantics as far as like detailed stuff. And I think—what day was the protest? I believe it was Tuesday? I think the actual big protest downtown was Tuesday [June 2, 2020]. And that was literally like the day after

we had decided—we were just talking about the injustice, right? We were like, "Oh, this is bad. That's fucked up. That's not good. This sucks. That's not good." And then the next day were the protests. And me and Joe, we were out there. Masks on, everything. We were out there. And it just changed the landscape of the whole week. **[00:48:33]** When we came back from that protest, we talked on Thursday with Kay B, because Kay B has newborn twins. Well, they're about one or two now. A boy and a girl. So Kay B's not always physically available to us because of those twins. And I totally understand. But he definitely wanted to be there, though. He definitely, but—once we talked about it, everybody was just so on fire. We were all so on fire. And in that moment, we were all having an argument. **[00:49:06]** Kay B was like, "Man, we need to burn shit down. We need to burn shit down." Joe's like, "No, no, no. We need to organize. We need to organize." And me, being the person, I was like, "Hey, we need to organize to burn some shit down. That's what we need to do. That's what we need to do." And just sitting there, I don't know what happened. We were all sitting there, literally passionately arguing our points. We're friends. We're always going to be friends. But it got heated in there. It's always just us. And Joe was like, "You know what? Why don't we just write this down." And I was just like, "Why would we write this down?" And Joe being the wonderful poet that he is, he literally took everything we said, he wrote it down on a sheet of paper. **[00:49:55]** The next day, we came over there. He gave it to us. We read it. We learned it. We memorized it. And we did it the next day. And that type of thing is what I want to remain true and consistent with us. You know what I mean? Because it breeds more originality. It breeds honesty because it's not like—like we could have planned to do musical topics, right, in the midst of whatever this is. And by us wanting to stay stationary to that, in the midst of this crap going on, you're talking about musical things. It keeps the honest energy of the show. And I think people that know us know that we are very candid and honest

people. I just use little more profanity than the other two. *[Laughs]* That's usually how that works. I was like, "Oh, shit. My mother's watching now. Damn it! This is not working."

**ACE** [00:51:03]: We've been talking for a while now, and we can kind of wrap it up. But I want to ask you a couple more things real quick. One is, when y'all did the show on Monday, the first installment of the state of theater in Houston, and our friend Matt Hune of Rec Room—and I want to say for the record, too, I saw you last year in [the play] *The Royale*.

**BM** [00:51:21]: Yes, one of my favorites.

**ACE** [00:51:23]: Oh, my gosh. I'm telling you. I would listen to a dramatic reading of the phone book, if you were the one doing the reading, because your voice is so powerful. My gosh.

**BM** [00:51:34]: Thank you.

**ACE** [00:51:34]: So, anyway. But back to Matt.

**BM** [00:51:36]: Thank you.

**ACE** [00:51:36]: Y'all had Matt on the show, and I love what he said at the end of his interview with y'all, because he's like, "You know, we can't go back to normal, because normal doesn't inspire great art. So, as hard as it is right now, everybody is being their most creative selves, solving problems, doing things differently than they've ever been done before." And so thinking about building on what Matt said on Monday night, what do you think the future of theater in Houston is for you?

**BM** [00:52:13]: That's an amazing question. I think we're all literally scratching to find that answer. It's like an economy boom. Like if you can be the first person to find that way that makes this thing work, you're definitely going to pioneer the next whatever happens. And I'm not. The thing now is Zoom. Zoom is definitely the thing now. **[00:52:41]** I actually have to do a—I'm a part of a play now for Northern Stage Theater. It's actually in Vermont. And it's a two-person show. We're going to do it over Zoom. We're going to rehearse it. I will actually be getting paid under like a SAG [Screen Actors Guild] media contract, which I'm not happy about, because it's a loophole to get away from Equity. It's a loophole because we're technically going to be recording it, and it's going to be streamed via the theater. So it's not like a staged version. So they're going through SAG to give us the contracts. Which sucks, because I'm not going to get any—you know, loopholes. It's okay. It's coronavirus. That's what we're doing. That's off topic. But they're pretty much going to do their first three shows of their season like that. **[00:53:40]** So Zoom seems to be the direction that things are headed in because a lot more things are virtual. You saw they changed—like once [the musical] *Hamilton* came on Disney+. I felt the change. I felt like this thing is going to be different. And then you think back to like the Tyler Perry era, when everybody was like, "You're recording plays? How dare you record a play and sell it to people!" That was fucking ten years ago, right? And everybody's like, "This is horrible. Why would you do that?" And this is literally the new thing now. So it's almost going to be like the only way. **[00:54:22]** My hope is, kind of like what Tamarie said, I want to go outside. I want to go outside in the elements and act. Don't get me wrong. It's great inside a theater. It's ventilated. There's good air. I'm wearing thirty layers of clothes and possibly makeup. I want to be cool. But I do want to go outside. I want to bring theater to people that never really had it in their face before because, if something does happen to where we're allowed back into a space, now we

have new audience members. Now we have real audience members. Not subscribers, not friends of theater goers. We have actual people who would never give a fuck about theater any other day of their lives because they go to work every single day. But now, they have things happening in front of them, and they are entranced by it. And from that moment on, they're like, "I want to see more than that, even if it's not me. I just want to see something that's like that again." Or maybe I'll go to an art gallery now. Maybe that wasn't my thing, but now I want to do something of that nature. [00:55:37] And Tamarie, she like—I just think that's the best option. Me and Joe, Kay B, I probably shouldn't say this out loud right now, but I don't care, because I don't usually care.

*[Laughs]* But we're thinking about trying to produce Shakespeare in the park at Emancipation Park with, hopefully, a full African American cast, if not, but the majority of African American cast of a Shakespeare show at Emancipation Park. Joe is Third Ward. His father and mother have been in that community for years. They have so many connections. They have friends. He always has something at Emancipation Park. So it's not a hard space to acquire. The thing is permits and how many people we can have, what we can do and what we can't. Just a lot of red tape and semantics that go into that. But I think that's what's happening. [00:56:46] I think that may be my ideal of what the new alternative is: take it to the streets. We can't go inside anymore. Just, fuck. Take it to the streets, man, where theater actually used to happen at first. Outside. Then they started building amphitheaters. It was definitely done outside, without seats and chairs for people to see and rake the seats. It happened way before that. And I think when you get back down to zero, you go back to the essence of what it is. And it is literally just performing. Like if we go outside on the corner, even if nobody's there, if we just start performing and we're honest about performing, and the duration is long enough, we should eventually have a crowd of people by the time we're done. Just off basic curiosity and wanting to see people do something. [00:57:46]

Everybody wants to see somebody do something, whatever it is. I love sports. I definitely want to see them playing sports. I do. That's what I want. Basketball is not enough. I want to see baseball. I want to see football. I want to see soccer. I want to see all the shit. But I want to see somebody do something, too. So I think that's very normal of human nature. And I think we have a very, very good opportunity to tap into that now and reach people that know nothing about theater in a way that we could never reach them before, via streaming and via like personally in your face. Because streaming does open up a lot of doors and opportunities for people to see that they would not normally see. And I'm okay with that. I just—I might have gotten to theater a little too long ago, and I just don't believe in recording theater. It's a thing for me. It's a stigma that I think all older artists have a thing about.

**ACE** [00:58:56]: Well an actor needs his audience.

**BM** [00:58:58]: True.

**ACE** [00:58:58]: That came up on Monday night, too. You need to feed off the energy of the crowd you're performing in front of.

**BM** [00:59:03]: Yeah, I know.

**ACE** [00:59:04]: Yeah.

**BM** [00:59:06]: It's something to perform a show with just like four people in there and you know you're not going to get much responses. But it's something else to perform for a full theater and still, it sounds like there are four people in the audience. That's a thing, too. Those are two different things. They both breed different emotions during the show, too. It's like, am I sucking

right now? Do they like it? I thought they said it was good last night. They said it was good. But nobody is saying anything right now. So maybe it's not.

**ACE** [00:59:45]: Man. Well you started out at the beginning of our conversation talking about how—I guess when you're talking about being from Houston and you're like, "I'm never leaving. I'm staying here." Tell me what it is about Houston that makes you want to stay forever.

**BM** [00:59:59]: Just the culture. Like even learning so much more about Houston. I probably didn't make it past [Interstate] 610 until I was about like twenty, twenty-one. Like, yeah. Yeah, right? Like crazy, right? I mean, ventured past 610 to do something but not like riding with my parents or something. I was always being in my little area over here on the Northside, man. So when I finally got Houston opened up to me—I already loved Houston. You know, Htown. That's what we do. That kind of thing. But the city, man. The energy in the city is like none other. There's major, major energy in LA and New York, but the—I think the speed at which the culture moves here is definitely my speed, of course. **[01:01:03]** Houstonians all go from so many different places. I have so many African friends. I have friends from the Ivory Coast. I have friends from Ethiopia here. I have friends from Europe, all here in Houston. Literally, I can go to their houses. They're not that far. It's just amazing to me, man. The culture here is ready and willing to accept something super diverse for this city. I don't think we have obtained that fully yet in artistry but definitely food. We have definitely obtained that in food for Houston. And there's no place like home when it comes to food. I think that's the thing that makes home home is the food. **[01:01:49]** I went to New York, and I'd die for a taco. I got a taco, but it just wasn't like the taco that I thought I was going to get. Like a pure, pure street taco. Like with no cheese, just the bean and the onions and the cilantro, and I was just like—it just wasn't the same. It just

wasn't the same. I would have killed for a taco. Even in Atlanta. I went to Atlanta. I would have died for a taco or burrito. I didn't want to eat chicken that weekend, because I ate chicken the whole week before, when I was here in Houston. **[01:02:28]** But definitely, it's the culture. The culture here, man. I've met so many different people. So many like just genuine, honest people. And being an artist, I get the chance to travel a little bit. And it's just something about those places. They're great to work. I would always go there to work. If they called me to be in New York for a month and go to LA for two more months and then go to Europe for three more months, I would do all of those things. And once those five, six months are over, I'm coming my ass right back home, because it's just—I don't know. **[01:03:15]** Everything I know is here. People always ask me, "Brandon, why haven't you left?" Like, "Brandon, you need to go to New York so you can be a star." And I'm like, "I'm pretty sure that I could be here and do the same thing and still gain the level and notoriety of what I need to do." We're only going there to work. I don't have to go there to live, right? I don't think I have to move in and resell somewhere to work in a different location. That just doesn't seem feasible to me. And also, I have a son. He can't travel with me every day. I mean, it's coronavirus, so we probably could pack up and leave now. But before, I can't just like pack him around on my hip at rehearsals and everything. So it makes me a little more biased on not wanting to leave or, I guess, just relocate. **[01:04:15]** I don't mind relocating. If it's for theater, I'm there. I'm always there. You just let me know. Let me the terms, the times, and the contract and I'll make it happen. I don't mind that at all. But I don't want anyone to think that I should or need to relocate, because that is not a—I'm not going to say it's not an option. But I don't see the need for that if I'm only—you know, I'm an independent contractor. Once my time is up, my time is up. There's no need for me to continue this thing along, unless we're going to extend the run, you're going to bring me back for the next show. And

if that's the case, I'm pretty much be here. I don't mind. **[01:05:00]** A lot of people ask things like, "Could you possibly become a local?" And I'm like, "Nah. I'm here, so we're probably going to have to work out housing and transportation and all of those things, because I will be with you guys as long as you can contract me for. I will. I will. But once that's over, I've got to go back home and see my boy, man. Go back home." I'm sure he's missing me right now while I'm talking to you guys up here.

**ACE [01:05:28]:** I know. I'm not going to keep you but a couple more minutes. I want to ask you if there's a dream or goal you're chasing that is like your ultimate role to play?

**BM [01:05:41]:** I can't really say. I'm very ignorant when it comes to theater. I say that honestly and confidently, though, as far as, like, theater history is. I'm not very knowledgeable of old playwrights or new plays or names of directors and all of those things. When I first got into theater, I was totally entranced in just the art and craft of acting. I wasn't exposed to much else, like the theater history of—you know, just all the things. So to say what my favorite is is hard, because I read new American classics all the time and like, "Shit, why have I never read this? Why did I not ever know this play existed?" **[01:06:35]** But if I had to pick, if I had to choose. Like there was no other choice, I might—I think it would maybe have to be *Topdog/Underdog* [by Suzan-Lori Parks]. But I don't like that, because it's pretty cliché. But what's not cliché is, I would like to play Lincoln and not [his brother] Booth. I definitely have been considered for Booth in that show many, many times. If you're familiar with *Topdog/Underdog*, Booth pretty much fits the bill of me, the kind of guy he is. But I really want to play Lincoln. **[01:07:15]** Me and my friend were actually going to try to produce that show, like a filmed version. It was basically going to be staged, but filmed also. Like we're going to get a couple of B rolls, shots.

But obtaining the rights to that to be filmed was insane. Like the number that they told us, we were like, "Guys, come on. We're just two dudes in Houston who enjoy the work and we want to do it, and you guys are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars." And we're like, "You can have it. Don't worry about it. But thanks." But we were actually going to try to put that together, man. But it didn't work out. **[01:07:54]** But I was actually going to have that opportunity to Lincoln because my friend Omar [J. Lewis], he also went to Prairie View, he's actually a very prominent film actor. He lives in Austin now. He was going to play Booth. Which when we both were originally considered for that show here in Houston, it was the opposite. He was Lincoln and, of course, I was Booth. So we were like, "Man, we're going to switch it around and do it ourselves." Because that's the thing. To go back to your other question, I think that is the new alternative: it is self-creation. **[01:08:34]** Everybody is either forced—or, not forced, but you have to create it on your own now. There is not many avenues that you can use to put out your art if you do not create it on your own. And I just had to go back to that because the light bulb went off. We just had to create it on our own because even when we were presented from a theater, they were not okay with the character change. They were very adamant about, like, "No, Brandon. You are going to do this part." And us as actors, I'm like, "Dude, I don't give a fuck how you think that I am, but I am an actor. This can go away very quickly, or you can still see this as something else. So for you to already have the idea of what I am or what I'm going be in your head, it kind of takes away from my creativity as an actor." **[01:09:44]** They always tell us, "Never judge a character." Like, whatever the character, there—there should never be judgment in what you read. Because the moment that you judge that character, when you get to that moment in the play, you'll never be able to be honest about that because you personally have blocked yourself off from obtaining the emotions behind what that is. Like some dude killed his

mom in a show, I could definitely judge like, "This dude is fucking nuts. You killed your mom? Dude." But when it comes time for that moment in that show where I have to either speak about that or that happens, I would not be able to get over my own judgements of that. You just got to relinquish all of that. Relinquish it all and just throw it all in there. **[01:10:36]** And I think that's all of our best options right now. Just throw away whatever we thought was going to work or is trying to work and just start from scratch and create something brand new that we all can have access to and that we all can use and that will be our new theater. I don't know what that is, though, which is the hardest part. I don't know what that is. It kind of makes me sad, because I sit here every day like, "Fuck, man. What am I going to do?" **[01:11:12]** How do we make this work? How do we put everything back together. Not normally, but just so we can get to the process of it that makes us feel like we're being normal. Like the world doesn't have to be normal at all. It's just how can we get back to producing art and enriching the lives of people and challenging people to turn the mirror towards themselves. How do we get back to that? Because if we don't have that, we're going to have a lot of these political heads just running around and running amok, because we have nothing to show the human side of that. Because if we rely on TV and media, we'll be lost forever. We would definitely be lost forever if we just relied on them. **[01:12:10]** And the world truly needs this outlet, as much as people don't believe it or not, because I wasn't a person that believed it. But we truly, truly need this outlet. It is the only outlet where people can see people in true human form. Not flashy like TV. It is the only place you can come in as a human and be stripped down of your own self, built back up together, and leave in one piece. It's something that we all need, definitely right now. **[01:12:50]** The talking heads that are definitely talking in the world—we just need a little bit of escape from reality to watch reality, if that even makes sense. I don't even know if that makes sense. It just kind of came out

of my mouth hole. But that's the best way I can explain it, because even I need it. I need it too. I want to escape reality into another reality to escape that. I think we all need it. It's a double edged sword. I get so much out of it just as I hope everyone else does. It changes me daily. Each character changes me in a small way as far as what I agree with or what I can approach with somebody. [01:13:44]

We just really need this new thing to happen, whatever it is, I'm wanting it too. I'm trying to put in my best ideas in the pot. I'm sorry. I'm filibustering right now. But this is—I believe it. We need this thing. We truly, truly need it. I'm not sure what it is, but I'm so hopeful that we find it, or I can be a part of whatever that thing is. I just definitely want to be in the game when it happens. Definitely. [01:14:19] So that's my spiel. I just want us to come back and make somebody's life change. That's it. So I can change mine a little bit too. Because if I'm not challenging myself to do that, I'm not really leveling up at all either. So I want that part too. I want to keep growing to help other people grow. It may sound selfish. I think it goes hand in hand, though. You know, scratching my back a little bit, I scratch yours. We're all happy.

**ACE** [01:14:54]: Well it's about that shared experience.

**BM** [01:14:55]: Yes.

**ACE** [01:14:57]: We all want and we all need that. And it's hard to see while you're in it, Brandon, but I think you're doing it with Actors Quarantine Corner. I mean, it's a really cool thing y'all have going there. And I'm going to keep logging on because I really enjoyed it.

**BM** [01:15:13]: Yeah. We'd love it. We'd love it.

**ACE** [01:15:14]: My take-away from Monday [episode of AQC], I learned a lot about the inner workings of the theater world, and all the people you talked to. But I just sat there thinking about how many creative people there are in this town that need to connect because I teach with Writers in the Schools. I know a lot of writers. I know Matt. I know a little bit about Rec Room and Tamarie. I'm peripheral in the theater world. But there are all these little pockets. And I think part of what could happen is all of those people coming together to do something new and cool.

**BM** [01:15:46]: Well it's powerful, because—Houston is a theater community. I learned that. You go to LA and we know what kind of community that is. It's not a theater community. It's Hollywood. It's Hollywood. We know what that is. And even in New York. There is a very, very strong theater community in New York, but it is not a community, like the actual word of community. There is just a shit-ton of actors and working actors in New York. And this place, man. I've never even been to another place where theater is involved and actually been able to sit down and hang out with—there's such a home connective feeling here in Houston. There's so much theater happening. Before, there could be anywhere from eight to nine, maybe even ten shows at a time running in the city at one time. For me, I see opportunities. I'm like, "Fuck. I can get some of those jobs." If there are ten shows within two months, I'm sure I could work at least two of them. Two of those, I could do. **[01:17:11]** It just keeps my motivation up, because I know that if theater dies in most places, it won't die here. And that's scary to say, because you would think that if theater could die in a place like New York where we all aspire to work and go watch, where we all want to go. If theater dies there, you would assume that there's no hope for theater here. But we are all so intertwined and connected that I don't even think that we would allow that to happen. Like even Fourth Wall. Fourth Wall was pretty much just done. Like done,

closed for business, out of money. Somebody was like, "No. No, no, no, no. We love that place. We love what you do. Here you go. Do this. Make it happen again." Even The Alley [Theater]. The Alley, after [Hurricane] Harvey, all the funding that they got. I don't think that people would allow that to happen in Houston, because truly the arts are a part of Houston. [01:18:23] There are so many theaters downtown. It's crazy. And the one thing I learned in college that I kept with me, there is more theater seats in Houston per capita than New York. But I think that is attributed to the space that we have also. We have a lot more space. We don't have to build up like New York. We can kind of build out, and even our small theaters tend to be way bigger than New York. Like Rec Room, that could be like a Broadway or a off-Broadway theater, what Rec Room. You think about that and you go like, "Damn." But look at The Alley and they have like 771 seats. And you're like, "Oh." [01:19:17] But for actors, Equity actors, that's the thing. That's what I've learned working at Houston. When actors come to Houston and work, they fall in love. They fall in love. Because one, of course, as an Equity actor we get paid by the seats, the amount of seats that are in the theater. And of course, because Houston is slightly bigger, they get paid a little more. And they're like, "Hey, I fucking love it here." But the community that we also have, it was like I've never even done a show, and literally everyone was like my friend. Like everybody was so nice, from the director to the crew to the makeup artist, the hair designers. It just changes the idea of people. [01:20:07] I was working in *The Winter's Tale* and Tiffany [Rachelle Stewart], she play—I forgot the characters name, but they were doing *Winter's Tale*, and she's been on New York. She's been on *Law & Order*. This is her first time actually working at The Alley, connected through Rob Melrose. She's like, "This is literally like the best experience of my life. I want to do a show in Houston every single year." When I heard that, I was like, "Yes, because this place is truly the place for that to happen." [01:20:41] Theater will

not die here. It just has to change. I think that's the only thing that we have right now. But it's definitely not going to die because I'm not going out without a fight. Like, we just going to have to blow the whole world up to make me stop. And then when that happens, I'll just perform some shit about the world blowing up. **[Laughing]** I don't know.

**ACE** [01:21:04]: Oh, man. Well, Brandon. That is—I don't know if it's a good note to end on, the world blowing up, but it's an ending nonetheless. Is there anything that you would like to add to this conversation that didn't come up or that I wouldn't know to ask you about? A final thought?

**BM** [01:21:25]: Not that I know of. I mean, if you think of something, you can just—I'll say it again. But I can't think of anything. I think we pretty much got it. And I've definitely talked enough about theater. I know that I have because I get very long-winded about theater.

**ACE** [01:21:41]: Well it's been a lot about theater and a lot about just life, I think—and theater is a metaphor for everything else, and so you captured everything we're going through and up against and what we need to do to keep going. So thank you, Brandon, for this time. I have very much enjoyed it, very much. Thank you.

**[END]**