

Interviewee Name: Michael (Mike) Moshos

Interviewer Name: Jordan Fyfe

Date of Interview: 10th of December 2021

Location: Curtin University TV Studio. Mike chose to include only the transcript on the website.

Length of Interview: 20 minutes

Transcript

Jordan: Can you tell us a bit about yourself what you do, what you think we need to know about who you are, where you're from and what experiences have helped you become the person you are today to help us understand your work in disability in the arts?

Mike: Yes, so I'm Mike, I'm 31 years old. I'm 31 years old. I live with the condition called achondroplasia. So, I'm short statured, shorter limbs and... and all that. And yeah, I'm a little bit like, I guess Peter Dinklage or, you know, that's the only one that's coming to mind right now. So, for my day job, I'm an arts worker. I work at DADAA Inc., providing art support work to varying young adult artists who are also living with disability as a way of providing them a method of expression and developing their artistic skills. I also do a lot of community theatre stuff, and I'm involved with another group called Sensorium, where we basically go around to different towns and schools and we provide accessible, interactive performances and storytelling experiences to kids. And these experiences are multi-sensory, so they're primarily designed for children living with various special needs.

Jordan: And what about a bit of growing up and what's shaped your way, how you've gotten to being an artist or an arts worker?

Mike: So from a young age, I was always very much into storytelling and goofing around, and so that sort of shaped my two main passions of writing and acting. Yeah, high primary school. I was doing pretty alright in primary school, but then in high school there was, you know, whether or not I wasn't one of the popular kids or that I hung out with the other outcasts. Uni was alright. But then like, Yeah, I guess I started as I was

getting older, becoming a little more politically aware, although technically I was always politically aware of who and what I was. And I think that helped that sort of got further spurred along, and I started working with other artists living with disability and other people who had experiences in working with artists, living with disability and the like. And so now I consider myself to have got a lot more active on that in that regard for standing up for the rights of disabled folk and also to ensure that disabled artists get all the same sort of outcomes that anyone not living with a disability would get.

Jordan: Wonderful. What about are there any experiences in your past, any events or particular projects that you've been a part of that you feel have been really formative in getting you interested or getting you to where you are today?

Mike: Uh, yeah, so I did, for a little bit of my early twenties I was involved in like I did film school and all that, which was like, Yeah, okay, I did a bit of corporate work after that. Which, yeah, was a bit soul-crushing. But you know, I think it was when I joined DADAA that I started, that was where, yeah, it got me really interested in just further pushing like these whole boundaries and all that. And in DADAA and in Sensorium in particular, like, that's where it also became more aware of, I guess, my own needs because I hadn't really been used to people asking me, "Hey, how can I support you?" And that's kind of a really important question to ask an artist living with disability because it's about, you know, making sure that the environment for them is also one that's suitable to provide that that equity and equality needed to better to have a better experience. Yeah. I guess also like, you know, there were times that I would face certain individuals who were a little less okay with maybe arts access or with the idea of accessibility because they thought it's like a burden or an inconvenience to cater. Well, they saw it as like favouritism. Or maybe I don't know. Well, they might have just been bad people. But yeah, and yeah, I guess seeing that and seeing how that just makes it harder for folks living with disability, when we removed of that equity, it's like one something might not even really be an inconvenience for anyone to just plop a stool down or to make sure there's a stool to make sure there's ramps and clear path for people in wheelchairs, for instance, that sort of stuff that's essential to visually describe a room for an artist who lives with a visual impairment or to make sure, like, for instance, I keep my hair out of my face now because like more often because I know that when I work with folks who have hearing impairments, it's important that they see my face.

Mike: So, yeah, at the very least, I take my hair behind my head, and that's just a really small gesture. It's not like I'm not going to be like, Oh, whoa, no, what? I have my hair in front of my face. But like, I want those artists to have that same experience of working with me that anyone else would have. And I want them to not have to have some inconvenient moment where there's a miscommunication or something because, you know, I didn't take one second to brush the hair out of my face or I didn't take a bit of time to describe the room. I didn't take some time to make sure the doorway was clear. And because I mean, that's from my own experience of knowing what it's like when someone doesn't cater to the sort of needs that I might have as a person living with short stature when it comes to carrying heavy things and reaching objects that are really high up. Yeah. Yeah, I guess it was sort of that. I know what it's like other than I was living with disability, and that's made me also be more adamant about making sure that other disabled folks, whether they are or not, have. Yeah, that that equity that they need.

Jordan: That's a wonderful answer. What about presently, what motivates your work today and how do you feel like you've changed over time over the past 10 years or so?

Mike: I guess, like a lot of my motivation for my work is probably that I love doing it. Again, like in my early 20s, I was doing a lot of corporate stuff, and that wasn't as motivating. I mean, sometimes I'd do work for like a charity group that had a really cool goal or something like that. Like I, I directed a video for Zonta House, and they had a really amazing thing of, you know, protecting victims of domestic abuse and all that. That was something that helped push me. So, when the, when it's an important message, yeah, then I would be motivated or anything like that. Now it's well, like it's just doing things that are, yeah, that are fun or that are about putting a smile on the kid's face because I'm playing a space man with Sensorium. And yeah, that sort of stuff that that can be a real motivator. You know, I'm in the midst of writing a novel, and I'm kind of hoping that people like that. But I also just like getting lost in that world when I'm writing it, and I like getting lost in the characters that I play. Yeah.

Jordan: Do you want to tell us a bit more about any of the plays or what you're writing at the moment? Can you go into as much detail as you want to?

Mike: Yeah. So, I'm in the midst of writing a sci fi novel, I guess sci fi is a good word. Which is currently like sitting somewhere at around seventy thousand words and has been for the last two or three months. Yeah, I guess one problem with the writer is like, we have that habit of just always going back and editing our work again and again and not moving forward with. But yeah, yeah, this is something that was like a bit of a brainchild of mine for a long time. And I guess as the years gone by and even as my own political views have reshaped, like my idea behind that whole world that I've created that is reshaped. And in a way, it has become a bit more of a sort of progressive tale, but also one that's still very much about like heart and soul and all that and a lot of silly hijinks. Yeah, probably one of the worst things was when *The Expanse* came out, and that was really similar to the old concept. So, I had to completely rework it to be something zanier and more alien-esque because one was also set in the Solar System. And yeah, I couldn't really do that anymore. So, it's like, OK, cool back to the drawing board that goes, Yeah, but that was that's... that's been a fun thing to write. And like, I've actually recently looked at the idea of maybe doing a children's book in the same setting, but yeah, working with rhyme and all that. But that one's also sort of. Yeah, no. I'm like, Do I write this and then forget about that one? I don't really want to do that, but I think it's one of the classical, classical things of a writer.

Mike: One of the classical pains is occasionally we just we just get stumped. Yeah, see. Case in point, George R.R. Martin. But yeah, yeah. No. Yeah. In terms of acting and roles, well in the show *Whoosh* that I do with Sensorium I play a space engineer called Bing. Tell kids, "Hey, kids, I'm Bing, the spaceships engineer." It's great. Bing's wonderful. Bing is just a big a ball of energy made manifested in like a humanist form. He's all about just bouncing around and being full of ridiculous amounts of happiness, which I do modulate to make sure it's not too well *exaggerated scream* for the kids because they, some kids might not react as well to that. But yeah, so I do change exactly the sort of his tempo, depending on the kids we're working with. But in general, they love it because, yeah, he's a really zany one. I mean, all the crew members are zany. We've got a robot who sings and is just he's fun, Phonic. We've got a plant lady named Flo, and then we've got our captain, Zola, who just has that cool accent and very commanding presence. And yeah, working with that cast has been great as well because, like, in a way, I still kind of I think we're still kind of think of each other as a captain, as the characters. And we, yeah, we've sort of built that like bond working together and having all these amazing experiences where we're... we're sort of

connecting and then we're connecting with these kids as well to to bring them like an amazing, amazing little space odyssey.

Jordan: Lovely. So when you're working in your field, then also as an arts worker, do you like to or want to be identified as someone living with a disability? Or do do you rather just being another artist the same as everyone else? How do you feel like you like to be identified?

Mike: I would say it's honestly a bit of both. I mean, you know, it's not like a thing to make a big a big kazoo out of. But like, you know, it's not also something that we should deny. I guess in my past, in my youth, I might have been a little less OK with it, wanting to just be to just be me or some of that, or to not try to brush aside, especially during my teenage years. But as I got older and I've got, I guess, yeah, I'm further into my thirties, I've become a bit more proud of that. I mean, yeah, even... even like that probably really kicked into gear around what like five or six years ago, I started becoming a bit more or a bit less ashamed. Maybe, yeah, that would be the word, you know, like I've had, like a growing support network that's helped me feel okay with that. Yeah, you can call me an artist living with disability. You can also just call me an artist. And both are fine. Just, I guess. Yeah. First and foremost, I'm an artist, but I don't take any shame and also being a person living with disability.

Jordan: Lovely. What do you think about what other people perceive of disability in the arts? So, your job at DADAA and the people that you work with at DADAA? And then also when you perform, what do you feel like the general public kind of has the perception of this community, this...

Mike: Yeah, I'm, I feel like I think just the public's perception of people with disability still have a way to go. You really just need to take it the depictions of disabled folk in the media to see how far we still need to go in that regard. Yeah, there's still a lot of problems there. And I think in a way that might even shape how they, how some folks might look at the way, at our organizations, but then I think a lot of people there, when we're performing for kids that were like, they're, they're sort of outward perception. They... they start to realize that we're a whole lot of fun, that spaceship, there's... there's people that come on there who might be like the teachers or there might be parents. And when we do the general public show, we might have a few neurotypical

folks or mainstream folks who don't have disabilities, but like they still end up having a blast. And I think they they kind of realize that and they might see the people living with disabilities who are their fellow crewmates, who they're in this together with. And we've had plenty of shows where we've had mixed groups like that, and I think that's changed a lot of perception for those... those crewmates of ours, the audience. And likewise, I feel like with DADAA as we as we do a few more public shows and try to get the work of our artists out there that can have some, some really good impacts because it's all about just showing that, you know, I mean, we all make great art and we can all make great art like anyone else. Yeah, I think it will improve. But yeah, right now it's just about combating that stigmatism. And that almost, I guess, either mocking or fetishizing portrayal that we see in the media.

Jordan: And do you think that you or even all the general public, do you feel like there is awareness around the history of disability arts in Australia? Or do you feel like it's pretty unknown what's happened over the last...?

Mike: Yeah, I feel like it's almost people aren't terribly aware of like I mean, in terms of in Australia and even in the world like, there's probably been so many artists who have lived with disability even in the past, who would have probably been disabled that we wouldn't have known about, like we don't like. I mean, you know, all these famous painters and all that, would they have all been say, neurotypical or would they? No, not really. I mean, Beethoven was deaf, and he still produced work that people still listen to today. But at the same time, it's like, I guess people aren't as aware yet, but like as we start, as we start pushing this art out there and as we start showing that we make the same stuff, we make work that's just as good as any other artist and probably better. Yeah. Sorry. You know what I mean? Yeah. As we as we show that we can be just as good and that some of us can even make stuff that's outright better than what some mainstream person makes, then. Yeah, I feel that will improve. But right now, yeah, I think people aren't terribly aware of it and they need to be made aware.

Jordan: Great, kind of final question. Do you think that art is political or should be political or cannot be political? What are your thoughts on art being political?

Mike: So I think all art is inherently political. And even when the artist doesn't try, there's still that expression of themselves. I mean, it's always been political in every like

painting has some sort of a thing to it every, every song, it might not be political in like a really broad scope, it's not like it's made up. It might not be political in the sense of, say, Radiohead or someone or like singing about, you know, Fuck the system or N.W.A., which with its amazing song. Anyway, I won't sing any of those songs out loud, but I do sometimes find myself agreeing with their messages. And yeah, but like, yeah, sometimes that might not be an overt message and sometimes it might be a bit more personal. It might just be on the matter of relationships. But even then, I can be political because I mean, the way we perceive certain types, the way certain members of the public perceive certain types of relationships in regards to how we've just managed to get, like what same sex marriage equality, how we're still, you know, there's still a long way to go on trans rights and and non-binary folk is still dealing with stuff there as well. That's like things that's all a result of more subtle stuff that we've been trying to put forward, even like when you look at and even with racial equality, I mean, we saw what was happening last year in the wake of George Floyd and his death. And, you know, it's just there's still a way to go. And all art, even in the past, still solely had something political about it. And it's funny because you see people's reactions to shows like Star Trek today, where they're acting like it never was political or Star Wars. But like Star Wars, the bad guys were basically the Nazis, and in Star Trek has always been about, you know, all matters of equality and had a very diverse crew for a TV show in the 1960s and the first interracial kiss. And like people want to act like suddenly being political, you know, in art is bad, but I mean, they're just pooppy heads.

Jordan: Great. I agree. But what about is there anything else you want to talk about or anything that you feel like we haven't asked?

Mike: Oh, oh. Nothing's come to mind. Like, I could end this with something silly, but it's just not there.

Jordan: Well, it has been wonderful talking to you. Great insights. If you think of anything else, maybe I'll just give you like. One more minute, while the camera is still rolling before we turn it off and then.