**Ramps on the Moon Podcast transcript**

Interviewer: Michèle Taylor

Respondent: Maximillian Fairley

**MICHÈLE Welcome to the Ramps on the Moon podcast. I'm Michele Taylor, director for change, and I work to elevate the place of disabled people in the mainstream cultural sector. In this second series of the podcast I've chatted with some brilliant disabled actors as well as non-disabled allies from arts organisations who, with the support of Ramps on the Moon, are embedded anti-ableism into the work they do. Each episode makes sense on its own, but do go back and listen to the earlier episodes if you haven't already. Join us, as we change the world. So welcome to this next episode of the Ramps on the Moon podcast. Honestly, I am running out of ways of saying how delighted I am to welcome my guests onto the podcast, but we've got something very special for you today, because I am talking to Maximilian Fairley who has assured me that it's fine to call him Max, so I will be doing that. We're going to hear about Max, we're going to hear about his career. I want to be nosy about Max's life and what he's up to and what's coming next. So without further ado, I'm going to say hello Max.**

MAX Hello hello.

**MICHÈLE How are you today?**

MAX Not too bad. Its nice the sun is shining which makes a huge change from the last few weeks I feel.

**MICHÈLE Oh it does doesn't it. Where are you logging in from Max? Where are you based?**

MAX So I'm currently logging in from London at the moment. I've been here since- Hang on, I've been here since 2019 now, since I came up here for drama school originally, so yes.

**MICHÈLE And which drama school were you at Max?**

MAX I went to The Central School of Speech and Drama, 2019 to 2022.

**MICHÈLE How was that?**

MAX It was interesting. I think- I think for me, my experience was different to a lot of people because I was there in the middle of Covid, so of course I had to do the whole online Zoom shenanigans, everything. But I think, you know, it's an experience, I'm glad I had it. I think it definitely prepares you for what it can be like once you're out and about there. Yeah. It's always difficult trying to find the words to describe it really, because I feel like my experience was obviously so different to everyone else due to what was going on in the world at the time. But yeah. I don't know. That's a very, very rambling answer isn't it?

**MICHÈLE Not at all, no. I think it's fascinating and I'm- As soon as you said it, of course, I'm thinking how on earth do you do a drama school training online? How does that work?**

MAX I don't think you can to be honest.

**MICHÈLE Oh, is that what am I thinking.**

MAX Yeah, it- To be- I mean, fair play, they did the best they could. But I mean when you are trying to do something like animal studies, I think it was sort of a bit of a low point of my time there was definitely trying to do animal studies on Zoom and I think my animal was a weasel, because apparently that's what I look like and behave like, according to my teachers who sort of gave me the animal, and I remember sort of being in front of my Zoom screen doing weasely things and I took a glance out of my window and that's when I suddenly realised the bin men were outside watching everything I was doing in front of this- In front of my laptop. I think that's kind of one of the moments where I was thinking oh gosh, I'm spending nine grand whatever it is a term or year or something on this, you know? So I think there's a lot of stuff like that and I think it was very much they try and do what they'd do for us in person, but online and again, you know- It is around the time when everyone's still trying to figure out how to use Zoom and what comes with that and all of the amusement which can come with that but also the frustrations, wi-fi breakdowns, everything. I think in hindsight I can understand why a lot of people were quite angry. I mean, not even just drama schools. I think university students in general because it's just nothing really beats being in the room and I think with acting especially you just- You need that energy and that connection with the other person there with you and it just doesn't translate over a potato webcam on your laptop or something. It just doesn't translate at all, you know? But fair play to them, they tried.

**MICHÈLE Yeah, yeah. Because in the end, is this truly a thing- In the end, it is about relationship- Relationship with other people that you're performing with but also relationship with people you're performing to or for or whatever the right word is.**

MAX Absolutely. I think- I guess that's kind of why people struggle with self tapes and everything these days because again there's that loss of the relationship in front of you, you know? Sure, you might have a reader and things like that, but it's never quite the same, and I think especially- Well, especially for me as an actor, where I prefer to sort of work off instinct as opposed to like going into really meticulous detail, so much of that is based on what the other person is giving you and actually being able to feel that energy which exists between the two of you. And when you are kind of- You feel like you're giving but you're not receiving anything back or what you're giving can't be properly received back. I think it just naturally feels- I mean it doesn't always translate onscreen. Sometimes you actually watch it back- Okay, that wasn't too bad. But certainly for the actor I think it can feel very stripped back and lonely I think and I don't- There's never a good place to feel I think when you're an actor, at least in my opinion.

**MICHÈLE Have you ever experienced that over Zoom? Do you think it's possible? That relationship, that feeling the energy, that getting something back, giving- Either when you've been acting or even just chatting with people, social contact over Zoom.**

MAX I'm trying to have a think. I think- I think I remember when I was at drama school and we were all obviously struggling with the fact that there was a loss of that sense of connection, I did used to try doing Meisner with some- Which is kind of like a repetition exercise, with some friends of mine and there would be those little glimmers, I think, where there was that something special. Still nothing compared to actually being physically present in front of a person but there would be those little glimmers at times and I mean, because it's interesting, because obviously sometimes even when you're working onscreen, you don't always have the other person there in front of you. Obviously, when the camera's faced on you, and of course, it's kind of your job, I suppose, to find that thing which makes it feel real for you, but it is always a blessing, you know, when you're on set and you do have the other person standing next to that camera who you can work with. I just don't think anything beats actually having that person in front of you in my opinion, yeah.

**MICHÈLE Which of course you have when you're onstage.**

MAX Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. I think that’s why onstage I've always kind of felt that stage is sort of where actors get better in a way. I think yeah, it's just a bit- And again, that all comes down to the relationship I think and learning how to work with someone, especially when it goes wrong, you know. Whereas I guess when you're onscreen, you've always got the- You're always lucky enough, you know, if time's available you can just- Okay- Oh gosh, that was fucking dreadful, let's do it again, you know? But of course, when you go to- When it's stage and it just happens, there's a paying audience in front of you, you can't. You've just got to go with whatever you can do to sort of rescue it and I think- But weirdly, I think that's actually when the best work comes about when it's not been planned. I think that's always when the most organic moments happen, in my opinion.

**MICHÈLE Do you know, I was going to say to you, Max, don't you think that's when the magic happens.**

MAX Absolutely, yeah.

**MICHÈLE And it's such a thrill isn't it?**

MAX Absolutely. Yeah. And it is and when you do pull it off, it is the most wonderful feeling, you know? Especially when the audience don't even realise something's gone wrong, you know? Stuff like that, and they just assumed it was part of the show. That's also a wonderful feeling as well. But as you say, it even happens onscreen you know, when sometimes you fluff a line and you sort of try and recover, stuff like that. And then you see a real beautiful moment happen, I think, when that happens sometimes.

**MICHÈLE Yeah I don't know if you know- If you know the film Secrets and Lies? It's a Mike Leigh film. But I watched it again. It's a 1999 film. And I watched it again over the weekend and famously, he works with improvisation and it's a wonderful film and you can just tell, I think, that all the way through the filming, all the way through there's that jeopardy of what's going to happen and will it work? And as a result, the final cut that you see, the final version of the film, is just gorgeous and the relationships feel almost tangible. They're just lovely. I mean fantastic performers as well. But yeah, I think you can tell it's improvised.**

MAX Oh absolutely. There's another film like that. It's a Cantonese film called Happy Together and- By Wong Kar-wai, and that's one of my favourite films and I think the exact same thing. Most of it is improvised and the director sort of just pulled from these improvisations and I think it is thanks to that, and the organic nature of that, that it's one of the most affecting films I've ever seen. And it's the chemistry between the two people. I think most actors love improvisation for that reason because it isn't planned, it is organic, it is happening in the moment and it's, yeah, you can't beat that feeling when it happens and I think it translates.

**MICHÈLE I agree. I agree. Max, you're an actor. We first met when you were part of the company for Village Idiot which was a Ramps on the Moon production which toured in early 2023 I believe. You played the part of Harry Honeybone and you got an Offie nomination for best newcomer.**

**[00:10:43]**

MAX Yeah. So that was very surreal. Very surreal indeed.

**MICHÈLE Can I ask you Max, describe the show for us, just briefly. Because I think-**

MAX Oh gosh, where do I begin? It was sort of a wild kind of amalgamation of a Shakespearean love story tied in with a protest against HS2, a dark comedy and lots and lots and lots of swearing.

**MICHÈLE And a meat raffle. Don't forget the meat raffle.**

MAX That too, yes, can't forget the meat raffle. No, it was brilliant.

**MICHÈLE It was such a great show, written by Samson Hawkins who's a wonderful, wonderful writing. Yes, so the Offie nomination, tell us how that felt.**

MAX It was really surreal because I mean Village Idiot was my first job out of drama school. So yeah, trying to- I graduated in 2022 and then, you know, Village Idiot was the first thing which came along, so of course- I think when you're starting out you don't really expect anything like that to happen. I think you sort of assume that that's stuff which happens when you've already got a few things under your belt. But no, when I did get the- I think it was- Well I think I first found out- Because Samson was nominated himself and I actually messaged him saying oh, congratulations, you know, you really deserve this, this is amazing. And then he said to me oh, congratulations to you too and I was a bit like, what? What do you mean? You know? I didn't have a clue. And then I think it was Nadia, the director, gave me a call maybe an hour later to confirm that this had happened. No, I was absolutely over the moon, you know? It really was a big confidence booster for me, because I think especially after drama school I'd been struggling a lot with my self-esteem as an actor.

**MICHÈLE Right.**

MAX And I think to receive something like that so early on in my career was- It was a really wonderful thing. It really, really was and no, I was incredibly grateful for that nomination, you know? It was a really- It made me feel like oh yeah, okay, maybe I can do this sort of thing.

**MICHÈLE Maybe you can Max. Maybe you can. Village Idiot of course, as you mentioned, directed by Nadia Fall who was at Stratford East at the time. We have to talk about Unforgotten. I mean, forgive me, this is purely self-indulgence because it is one of my favourite shows on television. But you say maybe I can do this acting business. I mean, Max, there you were onscreen with the likes of Sinead Keenan and Sanjeev Bhaskar and Michele Dotrice for heaven's sake and Victoria Hamilton in this show that has, in its six seasons, featured people like Trevor Eve and Ruth Sheen. I mean some wonderful performers. And you don't just hold your own, you are mesmerising as Marty Baines. I mean just wonderful. How- How was that whole experience for you?**

MAX Wonderful. It was wonderful. I think it was one of those rare moments, I think, where I've- You do feel like you've struck gold. I mean, similar to you, I was a fan of the show since it first came out. I used to- I remember, I think, when it first came out I would be sat at college and I'd come home and I'd watch it with my parents and then I've sort of obviously followed it all the way through. So first things first, to actually even end up on that show was a bit like oh gosh, this is really weird, you know? Because I've been watching it for so long. But it was also the experience was truly lovely. Everyone from production to the casting team, Victor and Seth, Andy Wilson the director, Chris Lang, all of them were just so, so lovely as well as Sanjeev and Sinead, you know? Everyone treated me so well, because of course, I'd not done- It was my first TV job so I didn't have a clue what to expect and you're kind of sort of warned at drama school to expect things to be a bit chaotic, crazy, people might be a bit short with you because they're short on time. But it was the opposite to that. Everyone was respectful, courteous, kind, you know? Just so, so lovely. And I think when you're in that situation you feel like you can go to those places because everyone's just being so encouraging and, well, I mean you're working with fantastic actors, so you know, they're giving you everything you need. I mean, especially Michele was just wonderful, you know? All of them. Sanjeev, Sinead, everyone just treated me so, so well and everyone got along so well as well, you know? There was- It was like a well-oiled machine, because I think they've had the same team sort of in charge from the very beginning. But I think the biggest blessing of course is, you know, when you've got a writer like Chris who knows what he's doing, and the character of Marty was someone- Something which was very important to him, so it just felt like an absolute honour to be trusted with that part because again, as you say, you've had some incredible people in that show and I guess, for me, a sort of complete unknown, sort of being handed this really tasty part to be with, it was- It is still something I'm kind of processing to be honest, you know? And again, it's another thing where I think after Village Idiot, I'd been out of work for about eight months and I was really starting to, you know, like a lot of actors do, get down and wonder am I ever going to work again, have I had my peak, is that it for me? And then sort of Seth Mason, I think, and Victor Jenkins kind of approached me and asked me to tape for it and again, it's all- By that stage, I'd had so many rejections again that I kind of felt to myself- Do you want to know something? This is probably going to be like the other tapes. Whatever. I'm going to do it, you know? Had fun doing it. To my surprise I got called back. Did the call back, thought to myself when I walked away from that call back, I've completely jacked this audition up. I was so angry at myself. Had one of those auditions where I just felt like I was- I mean they were lovely to me and clearly they liked what I did, but me, I sort of think like I'm just- I've been watching myself. Oh gosh, I feel so in my head. And then when I actually did get the phone call I remember I was- I think I was lounging around. I was really feeling even sorry for myself and I was actually having a shower I think and it was in the middle of a shower my phone went off and I just kind of thought, oh it could be important, I ought to pick it up, and it actually turned out it was my agent who then said that I had it. And I was really, really happy you know? And it was and it went on to be everything I could have wished it to be and more, you know? It was truly wonderful.

**MICHÈLE How amazing. And all the- All the fantastic reviews that you've had. So, so well received. Absolutely brilliant. And you've talked about how complex a character Marty is. I think you've said there's a purity and an innocence to him but he's not without flaws and you must have really relished getting your teeth into a part like that. I mean, forget- Forget that it was Unforgotten, this fantastic primetime television programme. Forget you're following in the footsteps of so many brilliant actors. Just the part. And as you say, so well written. You must have really, really relished it.**

MAX I felt so lucky, because I think again, when you're that early on in your career, you don't expect to get something like that and be trusted with something like that. And it is- He really was a joy to play because as you- As you say, it's just, you know, yes, he- Being able to play with that light and shade is- It's very rare that you get that and it's actually written really well and it makes sense in the character's journey. And I suppose with the fact that you've got this kind of really, really fragile side to him but there's actually something quite dark and violent there at the same time, you know, without giving too much away, I suppose, for those who haven't watched it yet. But I've always wanted to play parts like that, you know? With the complexity. With the sort of, you know, you can feel sorry for them but at the same time they get under your skin a little bit. And yeah, no, I just felt so lucky. So, so lucky.

**MICHÈLE I have to be completely honest with you, I sat and started to watch it and realised that Marty was- Had been written as an autistic character and my heart sank and I thought oh, what are they going to do with this. And then I saw that it was you. I realised that it was you. And I thought okay, okay, well A, they've cast it authentically, big tick. And B, I know Max isn't going to mess around with this.**

MAX Very touching.

**MICHÈLE So I felt safer. I felt safer. And I- It could so easily have gone so badly wrong, couldn't it?**

MAX Absolutely yes.

**MICHÈLE So had you seen the whole script when you agreed to do it?**

MAX Yes. When I was offered the part they send us the whole series so we can read through it all and I mean, of course, it was Unforgotten so I was going to do it anyway, you know? But you know, and I remember reading through it and I think that- One of the things which I did really appreciate was how Marty wasn't- Yes he was autistic, but it wasn't- That wasn't all there was to him.

**MICHÈLE Exactly.**

**[00:20:41]**

MAX And I think it sort of gives me a lot of hope that the industry is starting to realise now that when it comes to writing people who maybe you haven't seen so much on screen of before, you don't need to pussyfoot around it. You can write a complex, engaging character as you say, with flaws and good things, and you can give them something which isn't just about oh woe is me, I'm this. You know? You can actually give them a really, really exciting journey where you don't have to keep referencing this. It's just a part of this character's story and in the case of Marty, his story is, you know, finding a place. Where does he belong? Who does he fit in with? And that's a universal human experience but also, at the same time, has Marty Baines chopped someone up and ditched them in a marsh, you know, kind of thing. It's so- Such a relief. Because I actually think that very often people in the neurodivergent community, people who are disabled, we're often written as victims in a way, or people who kind of get relegated to the side you know? We might be- Maybe we're something which drives the protagonist to do noble things but it's very rare that we actually get such a complex journey like we saw in Unforgotten. I can't really think of many other characters like Marty out there who have been- Well, as you say, who have sort of been given this sort of thing. Because very often, when I do watch representations of neurodivergent and disabled people onscreen or even in theatre, I don't know, it just feels like that- It does kind of feel like they've appeared. Okay, they've done their bit, off they go kind of thing. And it was just-

**MICHÈLE It's they've done the job that-**

MAX It was a privilege to have that.

**MICHÈLE Yeah exactly, exactly. Too often we're just there to advance the plot in some way, aren't we?**

MAX Yes, as opposed to being an integral part of a plot. Yeah, absolutely.

**MICHÈLE Yes, and as you say, complex. And it's boring and it's lazy.**

MAX Yes absolutely it is.

**MICHÈLE I love this thing that I read that you'd said, the way in which a group of people are depicted can be very influential on how the community is perceived by the general public.**

MAX Yes.

**MICHÈLE Is it important to you- Has it been so far, is it going to be important to you, in terms of the work that you choose to do? That the depiction of different communities is complex, authentic, multifaceted? What's important to you in that representation?**

MAX Absolutely. I think obviously representation is important and I think especially when it comes to the autism spectrum, I guess you do find that- I mean I remember when- I was first diagnosed when I was six and even then, so much has changed in the way in which it's talked about and how people- Sort of what labels are used for it and everything and I think the difficulty is that everyone has a very specific idea of how this might look. And how people behave. When actually the truth is, it's so vast. I mean, who I am and how I behave is so different to Marty, you know? And the way Marty's traits influence him are a world away from how my traits influence me. And I think it is very important to me, and I mean, not even just with neurodiversity and disability, I think in general, you know, even going beyond that, I think it's- To me it's very important that actually I can be a part of proving that we are just as capable as neurotypical actors in portraying roles which have an integral part to the story, in even portraying stories in which maybe neurodiversity and disability aren't discussed. We are capable of doing it, you know? We're not a liability. We're not incapable of reaching the same highs as, say, I don't know, like, oh gosh, like Olivia Colman whose performances absolutely floor me, you know? We can do that too. And we don't just have to be only brought in when we need these people to be depicted. We all have a right to be considered equally with other actors who may be- Might be able bodied, might be neurotypical, you know? We're just as capable of doing it. But at the same time, I do respect it's important that we do also tell our own stories as well and my hope is that, you know, I might be able to have the opportunity to do both. I would love to- I've always thought to myself, what do I want to do? I want to play heroes. I want to play villains. I want to play kings, I want to be peasants, I want to be grotesque, I want to be elegant, I want to be vulnerable, I want to be horrible, I want to do all of it. And, you know, Shakespeare, contemporary, everything. I want to do it all. And I guess that's kind of why I choose to be open about it because let's face it, there have been loads of actors out there in history who have been neurodiverse, who have been disabled. But probably didn't feel like they could be open about that because they were scared. But if I'm open about this I'm not going to get work. And of course, you know, I'm not going to deny I do have that worry sometimes, you know? Am I only ever going to be seen as this? But actually you know, when I grew up I didn't see anyone else like myself really who were audibly talking about this. I mean I think the only thing I recall is Anthony Hopkins mentioning that he was diagnosed as neurodivergent and that was a big deal for me. Oscar winning actor. He's played Hannibal Lecter, he's done all of these incredible things and I love his work, and it's really important to be to actually, do you want to know something, you know? Prove that we're just as capable, we can do it and we can do it fucking well as well. You know? We don't have to be just relegated to the sidelines, you know? And yes, we can play our stories but we can also do more than that and that's important to me. Very important.

**MICHÈLE I mean, I couldn't agree more. So well said. And as you say that, we can play our stories and we can do so much more, yes. And part of what that means, isn't it, is that those stories that are not written to be about neurodiversity or disability, or whatever else it might be, actually become our stories too.**

MAX Absolutely. So much of what we all experience is universal.

**MICHÈLE Of course it is, yeah.**

MAX You know, love, it's universal. Jealousy is universal, you know? Joy is universal. Hate is universal. We all experience it. And we can all do it. And actually, in the day to day, you know, we get a lot of people who maybe you don't typically see being depicted who are up there and actually, they're not thinking about their identity every single second of their day. We, like everyone else, we go through the exact same things. We might have a different perspective on it, but it doesn't mean we don't have experience of that or the skill to be able to articulate that.

**MICHÈLE Do you think it's important that the character of Marty was played by someone who is neurodivergent. Suppose you'd been sitting in your living room watching series six of Unforgotten and the character of Marty emerged and developed and you realised it was a neurotypical actor playing that part. Neurotypical, non-disabled, hearing actor. How would you have felt about that? Would that have been- Well, how would you have felt about that? Let me not put words in your mouth.**

MAX I guess as an actor I'd be like oh bloody hell, that- I could have done that.

**MICHÈLE I suppose you would.**

MAX I think that would have been a big part of it, you know, if I'm completely honest. I mean, it's a very complex question because it is something which is obviously hot in discussion at the moment. I actually think- Well, look, put it this way, when you look back in the past and you see autistic characters who have been portrayed by neurotypical actors, some of those performances have been incredible. They have been very good performances. But the problem is, is that you've always seen the same depiction of what autism is. Because I think for a drama, people want the depiction which is very, very visible and also, I guess, like sometimes people see someone which is so opposite to themselves, that's easier to inhabit and I can understand it, I really can. But I guess my argument would be, for example, we accept that actually the role of Othello, for example, is written for a very specific person and actually, portraying- Well, putting someone who clearly isn't written as Othello is written, it just doesn't make sense when you look at it and actually, you can see how that could be- I can't find the words for it, but you can kind of see how actually that can be insulting to people and that's probably the wrong word, but I can't think of a better one.

**[00:30:23]**

But I think for me, when it comes to autistic people, I think when we get to portray our own stories, that's when you can see the diversity of the spectrum. And you can see the truth that we're not all this one thing like, say, I think a lot of people might assume Dustin Hoffman in Rain Man. We're not all like that. We can, you know- You get some people, you look at them, you wouldn't actually think they were autistic to begin with because they don't have the obvious traits but maybe it is in the way in which they process extreme emotion. Maybe it is in the way in which they have certain tics or stimming. You'll get other people who maybe do have the more visible look but they don't overload. They don't do this. They're actually very in control of themselves. And then other people who are a bit in between. And I think it's by depicting- I think it's by people who have that experience who depict it, you get more three-dimensional portrayals I think. I mean, as I say, Marty is different to me and how I interact with autism. Very different. But there's those shared experiences, I think, we all have as people whose brains don't think in the same way as other people that I think even audience members have kind of said they found it more authentic because it was coming from a root of truth.

**MICHÈLE That's so, so interesting and so well put. I have a theory that Rain Man was single handedly responsible for an entire generation of people thinking they knew what autism was and being completely wrong.**

MAX I agree.

**MICHÈLE And I'm kind of not exaggerating-**

MAX And I have to be honest, sadly there are consequences to that, I think, in the sense that maybe- Well I mean, I remember sort of in the early days of me being an actor, it was heavily encouraged I shouldn't mention that I was autistic because I won't be taken seriously. I will be seen as a liability. And even beyond that, I mean, I think there have even been instances where, you know, I have applied to live in a place or something like that, in my time living in London, and of course- I think it had been- There were public articles by then describing me as an autistic person, and I- When a landlord who previously actually had already met me, really liked me, but then read that, they then took the offer away and the room away because they were worried that that's how I was going to be, that- Well, as you say, I think there's this belief that- And yeah, I do get, a lot of the time, as you say, people saying but you don't seem autistic. You don't behave autistic. You don't look autistic. Even in some roles I've applied for, you know? I mean, one of the big reliefs is that- And what made me so passionate about Marty is reading it and going oh gosh, this is so different. But there've been a lot of things I have applied for, well, taped for, auditioned for, which had an autistic character in and it was hard to feel passionate about it because it was, kind of again, it was sort of like- Well the way it was written it was kind of like he autistically blinks and autistically walks up the stairs and autistically walks down the stairs and oh my gosh, he shat himself because he's got a mint Magnum instead of a chocolate magnum or something, you know? And it’s like I don't- This isn't my experience. And again, I think it comes from the old television, Hollywood depiction of how this looks and so many people have kind of gone, that's all how it's been and I've definitely had to fight with that for a long time and though, you know, don't get me wrong, I actually think Dustin Hoffman did a great performance. Sadly, as you say, with that sort of being the main thing in mainstream media which was referred to for so long, it has had an effect and I do think it's long overdue that that changes now.

**MICHÈLE Yeah. Agreed. Agreed. And that film is also a brilliant example of what you talked about earlier which is when the disabled character- Their only function is to be the means of the protagonist going on their journey.**

MAX Absolutely. And kind of almost being incapable of being in control of their own destiny.

**MICHÈLE Yeah, yeah exactly. I noticed that your Instagram profile- On your Instagram profile you describe yourself as a deaf Anglo Catholic and then, I'm not reading this, so I'm not going to quote it exactly but it- You definitely said a deaf Anglo Catholic with an accent, an RP accent from 1952. Talk us through that.**

MAX I thought it was a good way of condensing myself into a sentence. Absolutely. Yes, it's- In fact it came about when obviously when I used to do emails to agents and everything and it's like how the heck, you know, there's so much I want to say about myself but how do I condense it all? I can't remember who exactly said that but it just really stuck and it's like oh my gosh, that is it. That is me. No.

**MICHÈLE Brilliant.**

MAX I've put that one with me ever since.

**MICHÈLE Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. So let me take you back to young Max. When and how did you decide you wanted to be an actor?**

MAX It must have been when I was- From primary school days I always used to play act. I played video games and I'd then replicate scenes from video games and you know, be really cringey, sort of, you know, like really melodramatic stuff but I'd bring that into the playground and stuff like that and people would be wondering why am I running around, you know, pretending to be characters from Final Fantasy and that. But that's how it all sort of began and then I sort of developed an obsession with kings and queens and then I'd wander around the playground pretending to be, I don’t know, Henry VII or something like that. You know? And everyone's like why the heck is an 8-year-old kid, you know, trying to like behave this way? And apparently, like, I don't remember this, but an old teacher said I used to just sit on a chair in the playground pretending I was in a throne room, you know? Like very, very camp. And it sort of began that way and then I think it's when I got into secondary school, I went to a school which was quite academic and though my grades weren't necessarily bad I wasn't like a straight A student and I was painfully, painfully shy and I didn't have the greatest of social skills and I did find it very difficult to fit in. But in my drama classes, you know, we'd be doing Shakespeare and things like that. I don't really know what it was, something would just come alive within me and I remember, I think it was when I did a performance of Twelfth Night. I was Sir Andrew, probably when I was about 13, and people were coming up to me saying you're actually really good, you know? In those exact words. I don't think anyone really- Because I was so shy and shrank into the background, no one really expected anything from me really. And it grew from there. And I think to begin with, of course you know, all you ever hear about with acting is how it's such a difficult industry and people- Most people don't make it. So of course, you know, I was a bit like oh gosh, well, I want to make sure I earn money. So for some bizarre reason, despite that fact that I fail- I was, you know, I think I was consistently getting Ds and Es in maths. I mean, that's one autistic stereotype I don't fit. But I was consistently getting Ds and Es and for some reason I still thought, oh well, obviously if I want to make money I need to be a corporate lawyer, you know? And I'm thinking- I mean, that was never going to happen, let's face it, you know, with the grades I was getting.

**MICHÈLE That's quite a leap.**

MAX I was always good at- Yeah, I know. I don't really- I think it's because I opened a book which had like a guide- An A to Z guide to careers and I saw corporate lawyer and I saw ooh, they get £100,000 a year. I want that. So I'd sort of be saying to people that that's what I wanted to do, but actually deep down I knew that I really loved acting. And I loved theatre. I loved- I mean I began doing the classics. I loved the classics. I loved that connection. And I think because I found it so difficult to initially connect with people as a teenager, and you know, let's face it, I mean, bloody hell, I had no social skills. I was heavily closeted. All of that, you know? I was a walking, talking disaster really, but, I could connect with people on that stage and people did take me seriously on that stage. And then from there I fell in love with film, with cinema, with TV, all of it. And then before I knew it, much to my parents' chagrin, you know, I decided no, I do want to be an actor. It's always quite funny I think, because when I came out as being gay, you know, my parents were like oh not a problem. When I came out as saying I wanted to be an actor, they were like oh goodness me, how could you do this? No, no, no. They've won around by now, of course you know, they're very supportive of what I want to do. But I think there was that- I come from a family where everyone sort of went down, I don't know, teaching or accountancy and that sort of thing, so no one had pursued an artistic career before and I think, you know, everyone was quite surprised because there's so many things I used to be really bad at sticking at, you know? I tried going to the gym and getting a six pack and everything. That didn't work. I tried to become like, I don't know, a great sprinter. That didn't work. I- Like there were all these different things I'd always pick up and then I'd just drop. But acting, acting stayed and I think eventually they realised- Well I think everyone sort of realised I was never going to give up. You know? And even though I was so fragile and everything, I found it so hard facing rejection and everything, for some reason I could handle rejection as an actor. And it kind of just went, you know, it went on from there and it grew and grew and grew until eventually here I am now.

**[00:40:48]**

**MICHÈLE Here you are now.**

MAX Yes.

**MICHÈLE And talking to you Max, I love- I love- I'm feeling- I'm sitting here feeling like you just, you just want it all. There's not an experience you don't want.**

MAX Absolutely.

**MICHÈLE It's yeah, I'm here for it.**

MAX I want to do everything, you know? Like Anthony Hopkins. When I think what career do I want, I want his, you know? I want his. And Olivia Colman's another person I always looked up to as well. That's what I want.

**MICHÈLE What is it about them? About them as actors? About Anthony Hopkins, about Olivia Colman, any others, what is it about them that really catches you?**

MAX Olivia Colman I think I sort of fixated on her when I was- It was after I watched The Favourite and it was when I was at drama school and, of course, your biggest anxiety then is am I going to get an agent, am I going to work? And especially after Village Idiot as well when I just, I sort of went from that wonderful experience and then it went very quiet and it was her openness about the fact that her career was a marathon, it wasn't a sprint, and that gave me so much hope. And yet you watch her and she's amazing. Just amazing. I believed everything. And she, from what I hear, works from instinct and everything and-

**[Audio ends: 00:42:15]**

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| **Key** | |
| [unclear] – unclear audio  [s/l] – sounds like  [ph] – phonetic | [overtalking] – to an extent no conversation can clearly be heard  [audio distorted] – connection issues/other noises which results in no conversation being clearly heard |