

Transcripts: ICPP Interview #2 with 600 Highwaymen

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Guest Artists

600 Highwaymen (Michael Silverstone/Abigail "Abby" Browde)

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Paul Bonin-Rodriguez 0:06

Great. I'm just going to start briefly and then I'm going to hand it over. You received our note this morning about the process at this point, but also one of our big proposals today is to switch from sort of like an economics mind to a broader system of support. We recognize that that ties into your work more directly, because you, as we've been reading through your work, are very relationship driven. The first thing I want to do, and then you have the questions, which we'll come back to, but the first thing I want to do is ask you if you have any questions for us about going forward that we can come back to at the end of the conversation. We are planning to end the conversation with a next steps discussion with you. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Sarah Wilbur 1:23

Yeah, and we have kind of talked a little bit over email with you about this really iterative set of studies, we've made a couple of recent restructurings, where we're taking kind of a hive mind approach to them. Now that maybe wasn't happening even in March, the four of us, triangulating between Katrina and Deborah and Paul and myself, are kind of co-investigating across the studies in a certain way, but we know you've been principally talking to Katrina offline. So the questions that we came up with today were sort of based on our morning discussion. We're trying to set up a framework for the future interviews at the same time based on what we learned in this process. So again, I just want to echo the thanks for experimenting on this with us. And I don't know if it helps to retread those steps but to still say that these questions here are half-driven out of wanting to represent the uniqueness of the strategies that your career has led you down to sustain a working livelihood, but then also to deal with some structural issues in the field that we as researchers can report out on, irrespective of what

anybody says, the models are outmoded; the grant, the partnerships aren't tending to this aspects of practice, so the questions are toggling both. Some of them are structural critiques of the system and then local practices. A lot of these four questions are resting between the two. We just wanted to guide our short time together.

1. Catch us up on what has been happening in your practice since we spoke in March. You had talked about new work. A break. Where are you now? What are some of the highlights? What are the challenges? Feel free to talk about *1,000 Ways to Listen*, *Manmade Earth*, and *The Collectors* as well as anything else.

Katrina De Wees 2:50

Yeah. And I can jump in with some of these questions we're all sharing. I've spoken with people more recently, but if you could catch all of us up on some of the work you've been doing most recently since we last spoke in March. You talked about making new work and taking a break at that point, so can you tell us where are you now? What are some of the highlights of some of the things you've been working on? And what are some of the challenges that you've been facing? And you can talk to us about some of the projects we see you have slated for later this year in 2020? *1,000 Ways to Listen*, *Manmade Earth*, and *The Collectors*. Is there anything else?

600 Highwaymen 3:46

I think since March, the main things that we've been doing...We were in Germany working on a new project. And now we're sort of working on preparing *Manmade Earth*, which is the show that started up in Buffalo, preparing it to perform it in the city in September and then working on *1,000 Ways to Listen*, which is the project that we're doing in Philadelphia in November. Those are sort of the three main things that we're working on. And the other thing that's happened since March is that in April, we did a two week, very dense run of *The Fever* in New York City...We did like 25 shows or something in two weeks, so it was like a really busy time...Things feel really positive right now they feel straight forward. There aren't any crazy surprises, we're just kind of putting our heads down and doing the work as much as we've been doing all the things that we're supposed to be doing. Some other developments have happened. Since 2015, we've been getting money from the Mellon Foundation and then your theater program. And we did not get renewed support from them; they made a big shift in their administration of their funding for that program. We were one of the handful of companies that were defunded. The other companies that were defunded look like us a little bit in that they were the smaller companies, they were the companies where it wasn't a company that was dedicated to creating the work of other artists and supporting the work of other artists, it was the companies who are making their own work. Companies making their own work, companies that are somehow existing without an executive director, for example, companies more built to create work based on the directors of the company. And so that field does feel to be the major theme. Something I've been thinking about is that a lot of the companies that were funded, or had their funding renewed, actually present a fraction of the work that we do. If you were to look at the amount of action we're talking about, if you look at the amount of performances that we've done over the past year or two years or the cities that we've gone to,

my feeling is the work is it...With this type of work, the work is in the work. Work is in the delivering work to an audience, like at the end of the day, that's what it is. It's not in the workshop models or this program or that program with this program, education program. There's no board retreat, there's no reading series, and there's no training programs, you know, these kinds of things. It's really just the work. And so we don't have an executive or even staff. It just seems like the companies that were defunded all have that trait. Another way of talking about it is that the feedback we got was "Your mission, your artistic statement doesn't mean like a mission statement." It reads philosophically or maybe too artistic. If you read the proposal, it reads like it's written by artists who have a company leading mindset. But it certainly doesn't read as an executive director: here's our mission. Does the work guide the mission, as opposed to making sure that your work is...Does this align with our mission? If not, let's cut it. It's like, "No, it follows the interests of the artists."