

## Black Theatre Workshop's La Parole

### Episode 4 – Bakes and Bannock

Exploring the Connection Between Black and Indigenous Communities with Émilie Monnet

Featuring Dian Marie Bridge (Dian), Lydie Dubuisson (Lydie), and Émilie Monnet (Émilie)

**[00:00:00]** – [Theme music: "Cocktail Music" by Francesco Biondi]

**[00:00:02]** – **Dian:** Welcome to La Parole, BTW's podcast series. Black Theatre Workshop is launching a new podcast series to reach all of the artists and storytellers across Montreal, into Quebec, and into Canada. We are bringing you conversations with some of Canada's most exciting theatre artists, musicians, and storytellers, and we're so happy to have you join us.

**[00:00:41]** – **Lydie:** Before we start, we would like to recognize that the province we call Quebec is a fusion of traditional territories of the Innu and Inuit Nations, of the Algonquin Nations, as well as Mohawk Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Kanienkehaka and Anishnabeg ne sont que deux des langues originales de ce territoire. Kanienkehaka and Anishnabeg are two of the many original languages of this territory. L'Atikamekw, le Cree, L'Inuktitut, et L'Innu-aimun, font également parti des nombreuses langues autochtones parler à travers le Québec comme langues majoritaires all long before French and English. We, therefore, recognize the important work accomplished by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, to revive the traditional languages of these territories and the advocacy for the official status of Indigenous languages. Nous exprimons notre plus profond respect aux aînés de ces communautés et à tous les peuples autochtones. Yes, we express our deepest respect to the elders of these communities and all Indigenous people who tell the story of the land and waters of Tiótiá'ke, who take care of Turtle Island, and who are here at home. We see you. We support you. We are honoured to share our stories on these lands. And now, time for La Parole.

**[00:02:07]** – **Dian:** Uh, hello and welcome everyone to another episode of La Parole. I am Dian Marie Bridge, Artistic Director at Black Theatre Workshop, and my partner in crime, who is with me. (Lydie laughing)

**[00:02:19]** – **Lydie:** Hello, Lydie Dubuisson in the house. Bonjour, hi!

**[00:02:24]** – **Dian:** And we have the absolute pleasure of welcoming the most amazing, most talented, Émilie Monnet, with us today. I'm just going to read a little bit of her bio just for folks who are, um, are just joining in with us today. Émilie Monnet is an Indigenous and multidisciplinary artist of Anishinaabe and French descent. Her work brings together video, theatre, performance, and media arts to question the notions of identity, memory, heritage, and language.

**[00:02:54]** – **Lydie:** Mmhmm!

**[00:02:56]** – **Dian:** In 20—, 2011, she founded Onishka Productions, a multidisciplinary artistic institution based in Montreal, which aims to create links between indigenous communities in Quebec and

throughout the world. And you are a playwright, you are a performer, um you are a musician, like, amazing, amazing, amazing...

[00:03:17] – **Lydie**: Icon. Inspiration.

[00:03:19] – **Dian**: Welcome, welcome.

[00:03:20] – **Lydie**: Muse.

[00:03:20] – **Émilie**: Hello, hello! Kuei! So happy to be here with you two.

[00:03:24] – **Lydie**: Thank you for being here.

[00:03:26] – **Dian**: Um, I was super excited because, um, even before I met I saw two of your works, and one was on a complete whim because I was visiting Montreal, um, for two days, and I decided to go out that night, and I saw *Marguerite : le feu*, and was like, "Oh, my gosh, I need to like start working, and I need to start researching, and I need to bring stories to life." And then I had the pleasure of seeing Okinum last year as well. And I'm just so excited to have you here and have this conversation with you as well.

[00:03:56] – **Émilie**: Mmhmm.

[00:03:57] – **Dian**: Um, and Lydie and I have been fangirling I can't get you in the office. (Émilie laughing)

[00:04:01] – **Lydie**: Literally, yes. When you grow up in Montreal and you study the arts from Montreal, whenever we walk into the classroom and the Concordia University is like, "Do you know about..." You are one of the names that come right away to like our list of people of diversity who want to know what is the face of art in Quebec, Émilie Monnet, always. (Émilie laughing) So been following you for a very long time. It's really an honour to be at the same table.

[00:04:25] – **Émilie**: Well, likewise. I'm really happy to be here, too.

[00:04:28] – **Dian**: Fantastic. One of the things that when we were planning these episodes, I was trying to come up with names of different episodes, and this one was about, um, for me, the core of it is about the parallels and um the use of, the function of arts and community um in both of our communities. And the, the title I came up with is "Bakes and Bannock".

[00:04:52] – **Émilie**: Oh, wow! (Émilie laughing)

[00:04:53] – **Dian**: Which I thought was like, "Yeah, they're both flat breads." Yes, they are. (Émilie laughing)

[00:04:57] – **Émilie**: That's great! It would make a good title for a show, actually.

[00:05:02] – **Dian**: And a good brunch, too! (Émilie laughing)

[00:05:03] – **Lydie**: And it happened here.

[00:05:06] – **Dian**: And it happened...

[00:05:06] – **Émilie**: Yeah, I should, I should have brought some bannock this morning.

[00:05:10] – **Dian**: That would have been amazing. So I wanted to, to um, start off by just asking you, how did you start working on and writing *Marguerite : le feu*?

**[00:05:20]** – **Émilie:** Hmm, Okay. Well, first, I think it, it started with my encounter with Marguerite Duplessis. And at the time, I had just moved to Montreal, and my good friend Pohanna was um doing a lot of uh sound walks all over the city.

**[00:05:37]** – **Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:05:38]** – **Émilie:** And she invited me to the sound walk with this company called The Other Montreal, and they were doing a sou—, uh a walk, a tour guide— tour walk, about native Montreal or the Indigenous history or presence in Montreal. So I was curious. I had just moved here and I went into the bus and we stopped at different places in the city. And then at one point, we were on the Saint-Paul Street in Old Montreal, and we stopped there, and the guides started talking about Marguerite Duplessis. And so Marguerite Duplessis, in a nutshell, she was an Indigenous woman living in Old Montreal, and she was an enslaved person. And in 1740, um she had a big trial, which was the biggest trial at the time,

**[00:06:24]** – **Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:06:25]** – **Émilie:** Even bigger than Angélique.

**[00:06:26]** – **Dian:** (overlapping) Angélique.

**[00:06:26]** – **Émilie:** That was like six years before that. And, uh, and the trial was important because it was the first time that an Indigenous person in North America was challenging the colonial justice system. And what she was saying is, "I am a free woman. I am born here. I am born from a free Indigenous woman and a White man, father. And therefore, I don't, I don't have to be deported." Because at the time, this is a hidden history, the French had a trade where some Indigenous folks were then deported to the Caribbeans.

**[00:07:04]** – **Dian:** Oh my god!

**[00:07:04]** – **Émilie:** So, in the French colonies. So she was going to be deported to Martinique, and she didn't want to, and that's when she started the trial. So when I came across her story, already I knew, but it was a long time ago, it was maybe 15 years ago. I knew there had been slavery in Canada, but not to that extent. I didn't know it was 200 years of slavery. And I didn't know that most of the enslaved persons were Indigenous people. So that was like so appalling. And then to think that this woman in her 20s, in a system that's not made for her, was able to find allies and convince people to represent her was incredible, and that she was able to bring it to the highest justice system, uh instance at the time, it was called La Cour Supérieure de la Nouvelle-France, was pretty exceptional. So I became, kind of, obsessed about her story, (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) just trying to imagine what was her character, her spirit. And there's a lot of things written about her because it was an important court case. And then from then, yeah, then a few years later, then, uh, I was invited at Concordia with the ACC. So it's the Indigenous Curatorial Collective. At the time, it was called the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective, and they had their gathering around the archive. So there was an exhibit at the FOFA Gallery around performing or exhibiting the archive. So when Dayna Danger was the curator at the time, um

invited me to do something. Right away, I was like, "Oh, I want to do something about Marguerite Duplessis." And that was in 2014.

**[00:08:53] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:08:54] – Émilie:** And at the time of the research, that's when Tina Fontaine's body was found in the river in Winnipeg. And the government at the time, Stephen Harper, was not recognizing that this was a systemic reality. And it was a very, criminal act, very isolated from any kind of a bigger, bigger picture. So then for me, it was also, um I started thinking about the resonances of her story today,

**[00:09:27] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:09:28] – Émilie:** And, okay, we don't talk about slavery today. Well, tomorrow we'll talk about the epidemic of missing and—

**[00:09:35] – Dian:** (overlapping) Murdered.

**[00:09:35] – Émilie:** Murdered indigenous folks—

**[00:09:37] – Lydie:** Mmhmm.

**[00:09:37] – Émilie:** Which started at the time of Marguerite as well—

**[00:09:39] – Dian:** Absolutely.

**[00:09:40] – Émilie:** The trafficking of Indigenous women and girls. So I was starting to see a lot of parallels: she was put on a boat to go to Martinique. We don't know what happened to her because she lost her trial. And after that, we don't know anything about her. So, you know, I even went to Martinique to kind of find some traces her. And then my quest transformed. But uh, yeah, so for me, what was really, what stood out from Margaret's story is really the resonance with today. It helps us understand the reality today and question, how come there's such a collective amnesia here in Quebec around this collective story—

**[00:10:24] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:10:24] – Émilie:** which is the one of slavery? And then I, um, also wanted to uh create resonance between Indigenous and Black histories of uh, of oppression, but also solidarity, because Marguerite lived in the house right next to Angélique. They were neighbours. So sometimes I even wonder, "Well, was it, you know, the trial of Mar— Angélique that inspired Marguerite to fight?" She probably saw Marguerite, uh Angélique being, being—

**[00:10:56] – Dian:** Persecuted.

**[00:10:56] – Émilie:** Persecuted!

**[00:10:56] – Lydie:** You cannot ignore the impact—

**[00:10:58] – Émilie:** No, that's it!

**[00:10:58] – Lydie:** Of your neighbour being executed.

**[00:11:01] – Émilie:** Yeah. And they shared a similar condition. Of course, there's a lot of differences, too, but there are a lot of similarities. So I started thinking a lot about that. And, uh, and also, well, maybe the stem of all of that was during the *Kanata* and uh *SLĀV*, um...

[00:11:22] – Dian: Oh, I missed that.

[00:11:24] – Lydie: (unintelligible) It's okay, it's okay!

[00:11:26] – Dian: I wasn't in the province at the time. (laughing)

[00:11:29] – Émilie: But I remember, um, we had a meeting with Robert Lepage and Ariane Mnouchkine, and they came to Montreal. They wanted to meet with some Indigenous artist in the city. And uh, right away, Robert Lepage said, "We're not talking about *SLĀV* here. It's just *Kanata*. It's two different, completely different stories." And in my head, I was like, "It's absolutely not! It's exactly the same." And you know we always talk about the divide to better conquer. (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) So it really, it really was similar, I thought. So when I left that meeting, and I was already thinking of doing a show about Marguerite Duplessis, that's when walking home, I said, "I'm going to have some Black performers on stage as well," to create a resonance into, because we, we don't talk enough about these relationships that have always existed, right?

[00:12:24] – Dian: Yeah. I remember, um, and not through my school or not through formal history lessons, but hearing stories of how, um, how especially down east in Nova Scotia, how the, the uh Indigenous communities, the Mi'kmaq and the Jamaican population that was brought up to help build the citadel, actually worked together. And, um, when all of the folks went back to Sierra Leone, just the, the relationship that was established to actually empower people to actually make that move, um, was through the coming together of those two communities. And uh, I think it's a really deliberate act to try and keep those communities separate, try to divide those politics as well. Um, and, uh, I think if we keep on focusing on the idea that they're separate or like almost like oppression Olympics? You know, where you have to fight for resources or fight for attention, but rather come in full support of each other. I think we're on the precipice of that kind of conversation.

[00:13:26] – Émilie: Yeah. And I think it started with uh Black Lives Matter I think there was a lot of Indigenous solidarities.

[00:13:31] – Dian: Yup.

[00:13:32] – Émilie: Robyn Maynard and Leanne Simpson wrote a wonderful book together as well that, that—

[00:13:39] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:13:39] – Émilie: bridges the struggles in a critical way.

[00:13:43] – Dian: Yup.

[00:13:44] – Émilie: Um, so there, there are, there are many things, but it needs to be more visible and, uh, and celebrated.

[00:13:52] – Lydie: I find a lot of my hope into the cloud. I live on TikTok land a lot. (Émilie laughing) I love, I love the solidarity between, um, First Nations TikTok and Black TikTok! (Dian and Émilie laughing) That is, it's uh— it's entertaining, it's empowering! It's amazing to see like within one hour, say, oh, something has started on one side, and to just try to calculate, "How many minutes... and they've

arrived. The alliance have arrived." Like, on both sides, one thing happens, the conversation gets like deep very quickly, and then it's like, okay, this is the situation. And we all move usually, usually into a direction that is so... It's encouraging to see that there is a conversation that is happening. People are not— are not maybe interested in just understanding how many different conversations are happening. But I find that those two communities have found a way of not panicking, seizing the conversation right away at the nip it, as soon as it happens, nip it in the bud and all stand together in that same direction.

[00:14:52] – **Émilie:** Mmm.

[00:14:53] – **Lydie:** I've had wonderful Saturdays just looking at scandals happening within hours. I was like, "Wow! And it happened, that was beautiful." Sorry. I just... oop, solidarity.

[00:15:04] – **Dian:** One of the things that I really love about *Margeurite : le feu* was the fact that it was through art that that coming together happened. And while, yes, it's a statement and it's— it's political, but I want to see more opportunities of people coming together through art, through music, through shared creative experiences that is more about celebrating who we are and about our experience and like filtering our experiences through our joy and the, the things that celebrate us as opposed to just what we're fighting.

[00:15:38] – **Émilie:** Mmhmm.

[00:15:38] – **Dian:** Those are opportunities I think we need to start carving out for ourselves as well.

[00:15:43] – **Émilie:** Mmhmm.

[00:15:44] – **Dian:** Yeah.

[00:15:44] – **Émilie:** Well, I mean, it's for sure, it's a difficult topic. It can bring up a lot of things, too. Uh, trauma, a lot of, uh...

[00:15:54] – **Dian:** Mmm.

[00:15:54] – **Émilie:** It's not an easy conversation. So it was also about finding spaces where we would uh, we would feel safe. We would feel, uh you know, happy to be spending time together. We would find some sort of um solace. So it was also trying to find ways to not stay in, in that, (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) but also find some sort of, uh, healing maybe in the process and in what we were sharing with the audience.

[00:16:23] – **Lydie:** This is taking me to when we had the conversation with ahdri and about, um, installing through ritual so we can talk about and create in a state that we can feel safe and supported together. And I'm wondering, if it wasn't for the arts, do you think that you would have the support system to actually dive into the topics that you dive in?

[00:16:48] – **Émilie:** Wow, that's a good question. I don't know. Well, I mean, this is who I am. I'm an artist, but, um, I try to use my voice uh, in a responsible way and in a way that can well already, you know, make an impact on me and the people that I work with—

[00:17:08] – **Dian:** Mm.

[00:17:08] – **Émilie:** and if we can have an impact—

[00:17:09] – Lydie: Mmhmm.

[00:17:09] – Émilie: on an audience, then that's even better. But yeah, I mean, it's through art that I am making these relationships. It's through, through this project that I was able to make new friends and new collaborators and, and dwell in those topics. So art becomes really a mean for uh, for that.

[00:17:31] – Lydie: Mm.

[00:17:32] – Émilie: And that's the medium I've chosen to do my activism.

[00:17:36] – Lydie: I wasn't lucky enough to see *Marguerite : le feu* like Dian. I, I went through the story via the podcast. Uh and I must say, again, what an amazing work, uh, as of, exactly as you were saying, like, to not only bring up that story that is so important, like feminist-wise, historically, how she was, she literally went like, "This, well this is- These are the different reasons why your, your laws are wrong to consid— like, to treat me that way." She really challenged the laws, and that story is incredibly important. Why was I not taught this at school? I don't understand.

[00:18:13] – Émilie: Mmhmm.

[00:18:13] – Lydie: I was born and raised here. This is a story I should have visited. I should have heard about that story. And women, we need to talk about that story. I love how this... Well, I love. It was hard to listen to a lot of those episodes, but that you go there, you talk about, like, "Where is consent when you are in a world that is not going to even consider you as a human?"

[00:18:35] – Émilie: Mmhmm

[00:18:35] – Dian: Mm.

[00:18:35] – Lydie: So these women, you talk about the violence, you talk about you exchange with Rito Joseph—

[00:18:43] – Émilie: Yup.

[00:18:43] – Lydie: who like brings up different spaces. So you really, you really do a beautiful job as to bringing those two communities side by side—

[00:18:53] – Émilie: Mmhm.

[00:18:54] – Lydie: through time, through history, that link between Angélique, I had never made. Um, and I really love how on the last one, I think you say something like um, you decided that the best way to move forward is to honour—

[00:19:07] – Émilie: Yup.

[00:19:08] – Lydie: Marguerite. And it's like, yeah, you've collected all of the pieces that you could. You do all of the story. You, you give us all of these pieces. And now it's like, you even give us it. And then I get to honour, and it's giving us also directions. Okay, what do you do with the little pieces that you found?

[00:19:23] – Émilie: Yeah, because there's a lot of missing pieces, like a lot of those stories, right? Even those historical stories of solidarity

[00:19:29] – Lydie: Mmhm!

**[00:19:30] – Émilie:** Between the communities, Black and Indigenous, we don't have easily access to them because it's all oral history, and often—

**[00:19:38] – Dian:** Mmhm.

**[00:19:38] – Émilie:** it hasn't been passed down or just in fragments. Um so, so what do you do when you have so many holes in your history? And we will never know where human remains are. And that's important, you know!

**[00:19:53] – Dian:** Absolutely!

**[00:19:54] – Émilie:** In terms of grieving and all that. So then it became, well, maybe the quest is different. We'll never know. But she left us something. And when I was in Martinique, I was looking everywhere for some traces. And at one point, I was, um, sitting at Saint-Pierre on the volcanic rock, and this song came to me. So I recorded it on my iPhone, but then it became our honour song for Marguerite.

**[00:20:17] – [Dian and Lydie simultaneously]:** Mm.

**[00:20:18] – Émilie:** And that's why we sing at the end of the show. So then it became kind of— it's more about there's so many Marguerite around us, you know. I know so many today that are fighting and relentlessly, and that's such an inspiration. That fire is still ongoing, and it's been passed down from generation of women to another.

**[00:20:39] – Lydie:** Absolutely.

**[00:20:40] – Dian:** Absolutely. Oh, my goodness. I literally just had an image of you on the beach (Lydie coughing) and just the notion of her going missing. And that people are looking for her. And with the conversations that, um... I used to live in Vancouver a number of years ago, but I remember when I left Vancouver and um the, uh, the number of women who went missing and that it was just a very palpable thing that nobody was... Like, beyond your friend group, nobody was talking about. But you are always very conscious of the fact that this is almost like a, um not even like a serial killer, but like multiple, like multiple people.

**[00:21:27] – Émilie:** Mmhmm.

**[00:21:28] – Dian:** Um, ugh, my god.

**[00:21:30] – Émilie:** Yeah. And there's something to say, too, about, "Okay, so we have a national inquiry into the situation." And there's been a lot of sharing from the families of the deceased and the victims and all that. But so it's... There's many recommendations or calls for justice, and I think only two have been put into action. So uh, so I mean, it's like, I don't think uh, the situation will not uh change if we don't really take action.

**[00:22:05] – Dian:** Take action.

**[00:22:06] – Lydie:** Keep going, can— There's no break in that sort of fight. It feels like. It's uh, it's an ongoing? And then you look at it, how long it sta— To me, when I'm listening to stories like Marguerite, this is like this, "Okay, so that means that that's when the start fight- the fight actually started."



[00:22:26] – **Dian:** From the first ship, that's when the fight started.

[00:22:28] – **Lydie:** Like we've always been fighting to be recognized and to have freedom and to be whole as human beings. That's, uh, not new.

[00:22:39] – [“Secret Lover” by Ansley Simpson]

[00:23:45] – **Lydie:** But there's also like, and, and that's why I'm saying it's really wonderful work, um, lots of tools and lots of learning that through like listening to the podcast, such as um fabul— critical fabulation?

[00:24:00] – **Émilie:** Yup.

[00:24:01] – **Lydie:** Which I, I wasn't aware. I'm actually working on this, but it, it's true, we have no choice but to revisit those stories and to actually, um, open up our minds to the timeline, the, the concept, the actual situation that that person is, um, living in. And is this for you like a way of walking the journey with them? Is this a question of, uh, collecting information and see what are you allowed to create with that?

[00:24:31] – **Émilie:** Mmhmm.

[00:24:31] – **Lydie:** How do you approach that?

[00:24:33] – **Émilie:** Yeah. So critical fabulation is a term that was brought up by Saidiya V Hartman in the United States. And it's really to look at all these histories that have a lot of holes in them,

[00:24:49] – **Dian:** Mm.

[00:24:49] – **Émilie:** Which for enslaved people, that's the reality. So how do you make up a story out of just fragments and, or, or archival? When usually, those are, you know, well you know, an act of sale. (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) So there's not much. How do you make people three-dimensional and not just what's being created on paper by somebody in power. And so, and you can kind of, like, yes, we don't know if she's been deported to Martinique, for example, talking about Marguerite, but everything points out to it in the trial, right?

[00:25:32] – **Dian:** Mm.

[00:25:32] – **Émilie:** She has to get on the last ship that's leaving from Martinique, and there's an urgency from the master who owns her at the end to— for the, the judge, the intendant, to give a verdict. So once the verdict is done, there's no need to tell the story because the story, the trial is boop! It's done. But there's everything to think that she left on that ship, right? (sounds of agreement from Dian) But we don't know. So it's— that's critical fabulation, where you kind of imagine what it would be, and it's more, it's probable that it happened that way, but you don't have the proof or the yeah, so.

[00:26:13] – **Dian:** Is it, is it kind of like the— I think about the Sorplusi Method, which d'bi.young anitafrika goes into, which is about personal mythmaking and, and the idea of taking parts of stories, historical documentation, but um putting them through a process where you are, um, you are putting yourself into and humanizing the experience. So it's not just about what was done to the character. It's more about how it impacted them, changed them, the choices that came up, that kind of thing.

[00:26:44] – **Émilie:** Yeah.

[00:26:44] – **Dian:** Yeah.

[00:26:46] – **Émilie:** Yeah, I think, yeah. I think it's another way of seeing it, for sure. And I think as artists or theatre people, that's what we do. We tell stories. So then we have that, uh, gift of our imagination to kind of imagine what that could be. But I wanted to be rigorous as well because she lived—

[00:27:07] – **Dian:** Mmhm.

[00:27:08] – **Émilie:** she existed. So I didn't want to just say anything I wanted, or you know, I wanted to be as true as possible to who she really was.

[00:27:19] – **Dian:** Did this process, um, change the way that you make theatre?

[00:27:27] – **Émile:** Yeah, well, yeah, probably, it changed me. I've evolved. I mean, I'm still a newbie in theatre, I would say. *Marguerite : le feu* is my (laughing) second play. So I learned a lot in the process. And this summer we had uh, yeah, we had the privilege of being invited to Festival d'Avignon in, uh, in France.

[00:27:51] – **Lydie:** Go and tell them that story.

[00:27:52] – **Émilie:** Yeah, so that was very interesting to do that? Because, well, I mean, France is uh—

[00:28:00] – **Lydie:** Mmhm!

[00:28:00] – **Émilie:** cradle of the colonization in North America. But even the term New France was something that they're not very familiar with.

[00:28:08] – **Dian:** Oh, really!

[00:28:10] – **Émilie:** It was like okay. Here it's so fundamental in our history, but over there, no. And that's when I started—

[00:28:15] – **Lydie:** La France ne sait pas qui a eu la Nouvelle-France.

[00:28:19] – **Émilie:** Yeah, but in a way that for them, their colonial history is more with Africa or maybe the Caribbean. But Quebec? North America? Louisiana? That for them is like, okay.

[00:28:31] – **Lydie:** That's so strange.

[00:28:33] – **Émilie:** Yeah, it was interesting. So then it clicked. "Oh, okay. When French people say, 'Oh mes cousins, mes cousins Québécois, mes cousins Canadiens'." You know, it's like cousins, not descendants, not like slavery was, um, was made legal by you! By the king of France! It's by you, your country, your government. North America, Quebec, and even, you know, the United States and everything before it passed, uh, to the English, it was French!

[00:29:04] – **Lydie:** That same French!

[00:29:05] – **Dian:** I did not know that. I did not know that. That's interesting.

[00:29:11] – **Émilie:** Yeah, Mississippi, all that. It was like a French colony, yeah.

[00:29:15] – **Dian:** (simultaneously with Émilie) Colony, yeah.

[00:29:16] – **Dian:** How was the show received in France versus here?

**[00:29:19] – Émilie:** Um, yeah, it was... No, we, we had some really amazing comments and love, but we also had difficult conversations. But I think we were ready for that because it's like, okay, it's challenging as well. And people are not as, uh, informed as here, when I feel like we could be more informed here. But in comparison to France, it was like, okay, okay. But overall, it was a really great experience to be there and to be able to share our voices in the colonizer's country. And I'm also half French, right? My father is from France. So it was... Yeah, it was uh, it stirred a lot of emotions, but it was an important experience, I would say.

**[00:30:09] – Dian:** Oh, wow.

**[00:30:10] – Lydie:** Can I ask, what are your needs when your art is about giving so much to that level that sometimes you even have to go to certain places that are at the root of what you're talking about, and you're still exposing yourself and exposing that story. What is your need from, from people who just reach out like, "Oh, my god!" Like, love, yes, but you've been giving a lot. Like, you've been giving like through the research, you've been giving through the embodiment, the, the creation of it. If there's anything that, that we should consider about, when we think about our artists that are giving so much, what would be the need?

**[00:30:52] – Émilie:** Well, I think it's just, uh, I mean, you give and you receive so much in return, so it's the, the receiving afterwards is, uh, is quite amazing and, and so fulfilling in many, many ways. So to feel that people react to what you've been offering and that, you're, um, it creates an impact is probably the best gift. Yeah, yeah.

**[00:31:23] – Lydie:** And I hope you get a lot of those waves (Émilie laughing) because we receive a lot.

**[00:31:27] – Émilie:** Yeah. But then you find ways to take care of yourself as well and to surround yourself with uh good, positive, um loving, you know, environments because, yeah, it demands a lot, especially when you're doing it over and over—

**[00:31:45] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:31:46] – Émilie:** every night for three weeks.

**[00:31:48] – Dian:** Yeah. And when it's, the emotion of it is so high, you have to recharge. Absolutely.

**[00:31:54] – Émilie:** Mhm.

**[00:31:55] – Dian:** Can I ask, so when you involved the- you said you needed to put a Black character on stage. What was the process for weaving those two stories together for you?

**[00:32:08] – Émilie:** Well, I wrote a collective Marguerite. So for me, Marguerite could be Marguerite Duplessis in 1740, but she could be a Margi, a young Anishinaabe woman in Thunder Bay being taken and put on the, on the boats, on the ships uh crossing the, the Great Lakes. Or she could have been a Marie-Marguerite from Senegal, put on a boat to, to Martinique. So I wanted to blur those kind of uh, identity bubbles and also through time and generations. So I wrote it in a way that could be said by, "We were all Marguerite on stage, different Marguerites." And uh, and uh yeah, I think it was just being able

to be in a same room and having these conversations. I was also, um, assisted by a dramaturge, Marilou Craft.

[00:33:10] – **Lydie:** Marilou!

[00:33:11] – **Émilie:** Marilou, yes, who's really amazing and studied law too. So she had a really uh thorough understanding of the trial because it's all written French from the 18th century—

[00:33:24] – **Dian:** Oh god.

[00:33:24] – **Émilie:** you know, so it was quite a, "Okay, okay!" But then the work was to use this material as it is as a— and make a musical score out of the— like, to really bring out the words as they are to hear the violence—

[00:33:40] – **Lydie:** Mmhm.

[00:33:40] – **Émilie:** of back in the times and see how, how it can be so present to date.

[00:33:46] – **Lydie:** We didn't mention this, but the judge, if I remember well, that condemns, that she loses her case in front of a judge that is a slave owner?

[00:33:55] – **Émilie:** Yeah, yeah they're all slave owners.

[00:33:58] – **Lydie:** Like, the judge is a slave owner and you're trying to explain it to that person, that you're not a slave.

[00:34:03] – **Émilie:** Yeah. So I think it was just to have as, you know, as many perspectives in the room. And I mean, we all have different perspectives. Marilou with her background or with Haiti and Quebec, and one of the performers, her background was from, more from Senegal. So it's very different, right?

[00:34:32] – **Dian:** Absolutely.

[00:34:32] – **Émilie:** And there's, there's very, it's the same for the Indigenous experience as well. So we talked about that. And one of the performers in the initial version, Aïcha Bastien N'diaye is half-half.

[00:34:47] – **Lydie:** Yes.

[00:34:47] – **Émilie:** So she's from Wendake, but her dad is from Guinea.

[00:34:52] – **Lydie:** Wonderful dancer.

[00:34:53] – **Émilie:** Yes. Wonderful.

[00:34:55] – **Dian:** That's an artist I have to meet!

[00:34:56] – **Lydie:** And her brother also, like, the whole family is in art, it's beautiful.

[00:35:00] – **Émilie:** Yeah, pretty phenomenal.

[00:35:02] – **Dian:** Fantastic. Um, moving ahead in time a little bit, can you tell us about Okinum?

[00:35:09] – **Émilie:** Okinum?

[00:35:10] – **Dian:** Yeah!

[00:35:11] – **Émilie:** Okinum, well, Okinum was my first play. We've been— but we're still presenting it. We still have invitations. So, yeah, this was a more personal autobiographical story about myself and this uh recurrent dream that I've had of a giant beaver the size of a bear that gives me a little medicine bag in my hand and tells me uh some magical words. I call them magical because they've been so

important and guiding uh in my process. And I wanted to make a play to decipher the words of the beaver. And I made uh, I made this dream three times, exactly, exactly the same dream. So I always knew it was an important dream. And then from there, I started interweaving my family's story on my mom's side, on my Anishinaabe side, and then uh this diagnosis that I had of a cancer in my throat, which became kind of a metaphor for the dam. Okinum means dam. And so this voice, the voices of women in my family that we've tried to shut down from my great, great grandmother, her name was Mani Pizandawatch, and she was born at the time of uh the Indian Act when it was implemented. So looking at with each generation, something is removed and how, you know, then it's blocking my voice, basically, and making me sick. So then I was weaving, uh, these three kind of narratives. And there's also, I've been recording myself with my Anishinaabemowin uh professor, and so I'm also sharing a bit my process about learning the language and interweaving that in the piece. Yeah.

**[00:37:09] – Dian:** Amazing.

**[00:37:10] – Émilie:** Yeah. But I find that a lot of artists start with that, eh? They start with a very personal autobiographical piece. And then for the second time, I, then I opened it up to something more like Marguerite.

**[00:37:23] – Dian:** Yup.

**[00:37:24] – Émilie:** Yup, and now it will be different in the next piece.

**[00:37:28] – Lydie:** I had a lot of trauma, so I needed two personal plays before moving to the historical figure. (Lydie and Émilie laughing) Lots of trauma, too.

**[00:37:37] – Dian:** Yeah, I, I saw that and the, the physicality of it and the vulnerability of it just being in the centre of the room like that. Um, yeah, it was a striking, striking piece of theatre. And as you said, I feel like um it's something that um a lot of writers will do is go deep into that personal story? Um, and also just it becomes less about explaining yourself to the, the broader community and more just about telling your truth.

**[00:38:13] – Émilie:** Mmhm.

**[00:38:13] – Dian:** And showing up as a complete person with all of your scars, all of your pain, all of your joy, all of that. And I think that's something that I really want to see more people start to do, um, even when it is not a personal story, you know just bringing the truth of those characters to the stage.

**[00:38:32] – Émilie:** Yeah. I think for me, it was like giving birth to myself as an artist. (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) It was with Okinum, I learned how to write. I learned how to direct. I mean, I had two wonderful co-directors, Emma Tibaldo and Sarah Williams.

**[00:38:47] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:38:47] – Émilie:** But it was a very circular, collective way of working, and I learned how to be a performer.

**[00:38:56] – Dian:** Mmm!

**[00:38:56] – Émilie:** I learned the craft of theatre through, through Okinum, yeah.

**[00:39:01] – Lydie:** Although she was quite wonderful already in 2017 in Wild West Show. (Émilie Monnet) But... Sure. But you were raising in that one, I remember. It was really a lot of, uh, information that I was appalled of not knowing. And I could not, I could not believe I had to go to the theatre to figure that out and to find out about that information. That is very strange. But that was a good show. And I think that you've been an amazing artist from your birth. Um, the work that you deliver to the city is necessary to, it's vital, it's... Otherwise, we fall into a complete lie, I feel. Like, if we lose the voice of Émilie Monnet, then that "What do we have left?" (Émilie laughing) No! But I mean, as, as women, as women of colour, as that narrative that it's not just like, what the paintings are showing us is that we're at the back and we're quiet and we're resilient and we're fine with it, and you bring them back to the front, and you're bringing all the life and all the realities of all of that silence. So to me, it's, it's that gave me a lot of uh hope that what I'm doing is not for nothing.

**[00:40:16] – Dian:** Mm.

**[00:40:16] – Lydie:** And I love that when I listen to your work, and when I listen to your interviews, and when I listen to your podcast, it confirms where I'm at in my own process, in my own journey of accepting that what we have left are pieces, but what we have, it is still ours and we- it's still valid. And if that's what we have to talk about, even if it's uncomfortable?

**[00:40:40] – Émilie:** Mmhm.

**[00:40:41] – Lydie:** Take your space, because otherwise it disappears. And Okinum was a powerful reminder of taking the risk of telling those stories and exposing yourself to tell those stories. And that's why I wanted to know like, "what can we do for you?" When we take everything from you from watching a show like this, because, yes, it was, it's an amazing work.

**[00:41:04] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:41:05] – Lydie:** Thank you for existing, bye!

**[00:41:05] – Émilie:** (laughing) Yeah, well, I mean, there's been a lot of Indigenous youth that came to see the show, Okinum, and that's always so incredible for me to be performing for them and then to be in conversation with them afterwards. That's where it makes the most sense, actually.

**[00:41:26] – Dian:** One of the things that was, um, really striking was the, the animal imagery and the use of dream, dreamscape.

**[00:41:33] – Émilie:** Mmhm.

**[00:41:34] – Dian:** And because I grew up in English Canada and I come from a very dramatic literature, beginning, middle, end kind of structure of theatre and way to present theatre, um and movement theatre and more experimental theatre was something that I've always really wanted to participate in and dive into but haven't had as much opportunity in English Canada. Um, so coming here and seeing a piece like that with that kind of perception and that support behind it was, um, really telling of where we could go with story. And I think it's a really nice alternative for um people who don't necessarily want to go to theatre school or who don't necessarily (clears throat), follow that beginning, middle, and end

path to creating story or even find it necessary. The fusing of music, the fusing of the different media aspects, the, the projection, all of that. Um, tell me about how you, how you blended those together?

**[00:42:30] – Émilie:** I think it's intuition (Dian coughs) because I don't have training (chuckles)

**[00:42:37] – Lydie:** Actually?

**[00:42:37] – Émilie:** So in uh, you know in, in uh how to write a story. So I just went in a very intuitive way. And I um, I also like how in the dream world, you know you- it's like a puzzle sometimes. So that's always a structure. Even in Marguerite, I think that's, uh, maybe a common thing that I share for both uh, both shows is that it's not a linear structure to—

**[00:43:05] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:43:05] – Émilie:** to the works that I do, and maybe, yeah, I like doing it like that because I like making associations. I find that dreams, they enable us to really open our psyche to other things, and sometimes it's strange. But somehow, if you put one element of your dream with something very real and political, then it opens up something very different. Like beavers, beavers now became uh an analogy for colonization and for just finding out that you know "femme castor" is a term that we use in French to say "sex worker" in France in the 19th century or "beaver", beaver—

**[00:43:52] – Dian:** Yeah, yeah.

**[00:43:53] – Émilie:** using it as to name uh the feminine sexual organ. So it's like, yeah, but then you start, you start making connections—

**[00:44:02] – Lydie:** Mmhm.

**[00:44:03] – Émilie:** And that's very exciting or you know—

**[00:44:06] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:44:07] – Émilie:** or finding out about that giant beavers really existed! I didn't know that before my dream. So I find that dreams are like gifts from the invisible, and they, they feed my art practice so much.

**[00:44:22] – Dian:** Absolutely.

**[00:44:22] – Émilie:** Yeah.

**[00:44:23] – Dian:** Yeah. And, and I love the idea of it not being about explaining yourself,

**[00:44:28] – Émilie:** Mm.

**[00:44:29] – Dian:** That it's about exploring and inviting people to explore with you.

**[00:44:31] – Émilie:** Mmhm.

**[00:44:32] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:44:33] – Émilie:** Mmhm. Mhmm

**[00:44:33] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:44:34] – Émilie:** And I mean, I do theatre, but often I find theatre, there's too much talking.

(laughing)

**[00:44:39] – Lydie:** Really!

[00:44:42] – **Émilie**: Yeah! I mean, sometimes it's great, but for me, it's not the kind of theatre that I want to do. So I, I always think about sound in a dramaturgical way, too. So that's when my, my plays are published, I find there's always, "Oh, how is it going to translate into a book?" because—

[00:45:00] – **Lydie**: We love the books. I got the books. The books are fun. The beautiful, great way of exploring the work and the poetry. Go for the books.

[00:45:07] – **Émilie**: Yeah. So there's a lot of... How do you call that? Stage directions? (sounds of affirmation from Dian and Lydie) We make them very uh—

[00:45:12] – **Lydie**: Yeah!

[00:45:13] – **Émilie**: thorough because it's part of, it's uh, I like it when it's immersive and multisensory.

[00:45:21] – **Dian**: Yeah.

[00:45:21] – **Lydie**: And we love to hear you sing also. So yay.

[00:45:28] – ["The Fix" - Ansley Simpson]

[00:46:55] – **Dian**: (music fades out) Um, one of the things I remember uh during COVID, and everybody stopped theatre, um and there was this idea that, "where's all that creative energy going to go," right? And the idea, too, of an idea- when something comes to you and you know you have to tell it or you know you have to put it out into the world, you have to be that conduit. Is there an idea that's come to you that um you are not sure what medium you're going to put it into? Like, is there—

[00:47:27] – **Émilie**: Mmhm.

[00:47:28] – **Dian**: Yeah. I think sometimes like, sometimes I feel something and it turns into a meal.

[00:47:31] – **Émilie**: Mmhmm!

[00:47:32] – **Dian**: It turns into a beautiful meal. And then sometimes it turns into a painting,

[00:47:36] – **Émilie**: Mmhmm!

[00:47:37] – **Dian**: And sometimes it's a song, you know? But it's really just about being a filter.

[00:47:42] – **Émilie**: Absolutely.

[00:47:42] – **Dian**: Yeah.

[00:47:42] – **Émilie**: I totally feel that, definitely.

[00:47:45] – **Dian**: Yeah.

[00:47:46] – **Émilie**: And sometimes the form is imposed from the start, but that also gives you freedom to- because that parameter is already fixed, and then you kind of have to—

[00:47:57] – **Dian**: Mmhmm.

[00:47:57] – **Émilie**: fit into it, and, and you find solutions, and so I like it all. (laughing)

[00:48:04] – **Lydie**: Although, just by your question, you're very brave. You're like, "which one?" Me, I'm just like, "no, these are the three safe mediums (laughing)..."

[00:48:11] – **Dian**: No no!

[00:48:12] – **Lydie**: ...that I express myself."



[00:48:13] – Dian: No, because sometimes it's like you don't have access or you don't have enough money or you don't have, um, enough time—

[00:48:20] – Lydie: Mmhm!

[00:48:20] – Dian: to do it. But when it presents itself, like it's almost like a knocking like (makes knocking sound), you're obligated to do that thing, you know. I have paintings that I've started, and it was this mad rush to get it done because I know it had to be done! It just had to, it had to exist. And uh yeah, I just find it really interesting how certain things come. Sometimes it's a story, like I've written plays in 45 minutes—

[00:48:47] – Émilie: Wow!

[00:48:48] – Dian: you know, complete plays, and then um you don't write for four years, you know.

[00:48:53] – Émilie: Yeah, well, sometimes you're full of it, the story is already in you—

[00:48:56] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:48:57] – Émilie: and it just comes out.

[00:48:59] – Dian: You're just a conduit, yeah.

[00:49:01] – Émilie: (simultaneously) Yeah.

[00:49:02] – Dian: I'm wondering if there's anything that you're currently working on that um might not be theatre, but might be another...

[00:49:09] – Émilie: Yes, um, hm! Well, now I'm starting a new cycle on love.

[00:49:16] – Lydie: Yay!

[00:49:17] – Émilie: Yes! Very inspired by bell hooks.

[00:49:19] – Dian: Oh, yes. (Lydie gasping)

[00:49:20] – Émilie: Yes. One of my, my inspiration forever. Um, yeah, I want to talk about love more. I want to be in processes that generate more love.

[00:49:32] – Dian: Mmm.

[00:49:32] – Émilie: And uh so I did a, a show, so it's still theatre, but I invited some women that I admire very, very much last January, and we did a show called Neecheemus which means "my honey", (chuckles) "my lover", non-gendered. And so it was to talk about love and pleasure—

[00:49:55] – Dian: Mm.

[00:49:56] – Émilie: and erotica. So intergenerational—

[00:50:00] – Dian: Mmm!

[00:50:01] – Émilie: uh elders talking about it, presenting a performance. It was wonderful.

[00:50:05] – Lydie: I missed it.

[00:50:06] – Émilie: And then, uh, the second, I'm doing the second show right now, and it's about friendship. And uh, so it's with my best friend from the Amazon in Colombia. And uh, in her territory, it's all Canadian mining companies that are coming. And right now, they're extracting copper because there's such a high demand in the north for copper, for electric cars—

[00:50:33] – Dian: And homes and—

[00:50:35] – Émilie: and wind energy.

[00:50:37] – Lydie: (whispers) Electronics.

[00:50:37] – Émilie: So it raises a lot of questions as well. And over there, um human rights are non-existent. So her two brothers were murdered uh for defending the land, and her own life is at stakes often. So it's, you know it's really looking at friendship as solidarity and how to be a, an ally, really, and what does it mean to be an ally? And in this case, it's about being a friend. And what does it mean to be a friend, uh, from two different territories, from the north and the south, and what is the role of love in terms of solidarity. So big, big parenthesis to say that this piece is not really theatre. It's more like an installation—

[00:51:30] – Dian: Mm.

[00:51:30] – Émilie: performance, and we invite the audience to sit among real trees—

[00:51:35] – Dian: Mmhmm.

[00:51:35] – Émilie: and then uh we invite them to listen in a different way. And when you're able to listen in a deeper way, then you're able to hear better um what our environmental leaders and spiritual leaders have always said about carrying and protecting the land and the water.

[00:51:59] – Dian: Fantastic.

[00:52:00] – Émilie: Mmhmm!

[00:52:00] – Dian: I'm just wondering about any other things that are kind of cooking right now. Do you have any...?

[00:52:07] – Émilie: Well, this is the big one. I'm also um directing uh Elisapie's new show. She has a new album, all covers that she um translated into Inuktitut. And so I'm helping her make a theatrical show out of all her songs.

[00:52:26] – Dian: Oh, fantastic.

[00:52:26] – Émilie: Do you know Elisapie?

[00:52:29] – Dian: No, but I know—

[00:52:30] – Lydie: You have to.

[00:52:32] – Dian: Usine?

[00:52:33] – Lydie: Usine C, that's the venue.

[00:52:34] – Dian: Yeah, the venue.

[00:52:35] – Lydie: The venue. But Elisapie, you need to... Yeah.

[00:52:37] – Dian: Okay!

[00:52:38] – Lydie: You gone dive into that one.

[00:52:40] – Émilie: Yeah, you will like it.

[00:52:44] – Lydie: I... Inuktituk musical?

[00:52:47] – Émilie: Yeah! Yeah, but it's all like Def Leppard and Queen and Blondie and uh...

[00:52:56] – **Lydie**: Anything that brings back those languages to life, I feel for some reason, usually it just makes my blood so excited and so happy.

[00:53:06] – **Dian**: I... (clears throat)

[00:53:07] – **Émilie**: Freddie Mercury.

[00:53:08] – **Dian**: Yeah.

[00:53:09] – **Émilie**: It's really nice.

[00:53:09] – **Dian**: Like late 8—, late '70s or the '80s kind of influence?

[00:53:13] – **Émilie**: Yeah, or songs that were important for her—

[00:53:15] – **Dian**: Mmhm.

[00:53:15] – **Émilie**: growing up in the north—

[00:53:16] – **Dian**: Yeah.

[00:53:17] – **Émilie**: and uh, and then she translated those songs in Inuktitut and made her own version of those songs—

[00:53:24] – **Dian**: Amazing.

[00:53:24] – **Émilie**: So Metallica.

[00:53:24] – **Dian**: Amazing.

[00:53:26] – **Émilie**: It's so—

[00:53:26] – **Dian**: Oh my god!

[00:53:27] – **Émilie**: It's really quite striking. Yeah.

[00:53:29] – **Dian**: Beautiful. I don't know, I know we're getting close on time, but I just feel like at least my— I think I'm a little bit older than, than you, but when I was growing up and MuchMusic was just starting um and because there was this demand for Canadian content, I—, I feel like we had much more access to not only in English Canada, but not only the French music scene, but also different Indigenous artists as well. And I feel like, um, the generation after me didn't get that as much And I'm just wondering like if that's going to change with the internet or with social media, and if that's going to become... the access is going to increase with streaming services.

[00:54:11] – **Émilie**: (overlapping) I feel there is more than when I was growing up, right now.

[00:54:13] – **Dian**: (overlapping) No, there's definitely more. But in terms of being mainstream, in terms of being like radio play.

[00:54:18] – **Émilie**: Yeah, that's true, that's true.

[00:54:20] – **Lydie**: I feel like mainstream dropped the ball and no, like 'cause there's such an amazing pool of like, mu- like, I listen to a lot of hip hop, and I find that Indigenous hip hop is so...

[00:54:32] – **Émilie**: Fire.

[00:54:32] – **Lydie**: It's fire.

[00:54:34] – **Émilie**: Yeah.

[00:54:34] – **Lydie**: But I don't think that the radio is going to even try—

[00:54:38] – **Émilie:** Mhmm, mhmm.

[00:54:38] – **Lydie:** to try to discover them. And yet they should because it's, it's really... There are great names out there.

[00:54:45] – **Dian:** I remember seeing last summer at Luminato, Tribe Called Red was playing, and they had Gaitry Prasad as their ASL interpreter. And the whole time, it was just cameras on Gaitry because she was just like completely animated. She was giving a better show than the actual performers themselves. (Émilie laughing) And uh just, just the solidarity, like the amount of people that came out to support it was amazing.

[00:55:11] – **Émilie:** Mmhmm.

[00:55:11] – **Dian:** It was amazing. Yeah.

[00:55:14] – **Lydie:** Well, hopefully we will inspire more people to bring all of that energy into the m—, well, I don't know if I want it to be mainstream? But I just want it to be... It has to become more normalized. Like I feel like for me to be able to say, "Oh, we have enough First Nations rappers." Like no, we have so much catching up to do. There will never be enough. Never going to be enough artists. Never be enough of the narrative so that it can feel like we've, we're all being heard. That's what I'm waiting for.

[00:55:42] – **Dian:** Well, I wanted to thank you hugely for being with us today.

[00:55:46] – **Émilie:** Oh, this was fun.

[00:55:47] – **Dian:** This was fun. This was a lot of fun. (Dian and Émilie laughing) And congratulations on everything, and I'm really excited to see like more of your work this year coming up. Um, and um thank you all out there for listening again to another episode of La Parole.

[00:56:01] – **Lydie:** La Parole. I was here. That was so great.

[00:56:04] – **Émilie:** Goodbye!

[00:56:05] – **Dian:** Bye. (Lydie clacking her nails)

[00:56:08] – [Theme music: "Cocktail Music" by Francesco Biondi]