

Philip Dallmann: Hello inclusion believers. And welcome to the Access Champions podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann, for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity and inclusion. A bit of an extra special episode, uh, for me this week. Um, we have Sarah Aziz, um, from the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, um, on, uh, this week, and Sarah has been a friend of mine for a- a while now and really has been my ... what was my first and, um, possibly not to discredit anybody else, but possibly most impactful mentor, um, when it comes to- to this field in this work. Um, uh, we had an interview, she's the one hired me, um, at TDF or- or it was part of the team that hired me and, uh, really guided me, uh, through my first couple of years there.

Philip Dallmann: Um, you know, you, when you dive into, um, you know, this kind of work when it deals with advocacy and, like, human rights, um, you- you don't always know how to keep running through that brick wall, um, or how to turn a no into a yes or how to realize when a no is a no and you need to re-strategize, and- and- and things like that. And- and I think Sarah is a great example. Um, similar to the other Sarah that we had on a few weeks ago, Sarah Hom of- of ... kind of figuring out how to navigate those logistics, um, and those sort of interpersonal dynamics that exist in this world, um, which I didn't know, obviously, when I, when I started, um, and- and you know, there were many moments where, you know, she sat me down and was like, you know, "I know you're frustrated. This is, this is not easy. This is, you know, this is not fun, this moment in time, but if you look at it this way, maybe you can attack it from this angle or we can attack it from this angle as a team.".

Philip Dallmann: Um, so I- I say I had two really great teammates at TDF. One was Sarah Aziz and the other was Leah Diaz. Um, and, uh, I don't know if everybody gets that, uh, in their time of the arts. I don't know if they get two, um, but I- I was very lucky to have two that- that were willing to- to, you know, ride or die. Right? Um, uh, access or bust, um, you know, is how it, how it happens. So, um, it's was just really exciting to, honestly, chat with my friend and also and- and just learn a lot more. Uh, I realized that we, you know, I didn't know her entire journey and I also didn't know everything that was happening, not only just at the Trust, but in Pittsburgh in general. So, really excited to share that, uh, with you all, um, this week.

Philip Dallmann: A reminder, uh, as we announced last week and a slight correction. Um, uh, I will be in Chicago February 19th to the 21st, um, on the podcast last week I said 22nd. Nope. There until, like, the evening of the 21st, uh, but it was right in the copy of the social media, so. Um, but I will be there. I will be, uh, I believe the Chicago Cultural Access Consortium is having, um, a meetup, social situation. I will be at that. Um, and I'm looking to schedule things and you know, uh- uh, throughout the- the 19th and- and- and the 21st as well. And- and- and on the 20th, um, in ... during the day.

Philip Dallmann: Um, so if you're in Chicago and you want to chat, reach out. Um, you can hit us up on social media at Access Champion, um, or shoot us an email, accesschampion@gmail.com, and we'll get something on the books. Uh, I really want to chat with as many people as possible because, um, like Pittsburgh, I think Chicago is an amazing city of incredible inclusion work happening and just so many people I- I- I love and respect are- are out there hustling and hustling in subzero temperatures, so I'm really, really excited about that.

Philip Dallmann: I- I want to take just, uh, a brief second, um, to, uh, share, um, something that- that was kind of, uh, on my heart yesterday. Um, I had an interesting sort of set of- of experiences. Um, so, like many of you, uh, I'm tired, uh, I get tired. Um, and sometimes in- in this world of access inclusion or if you're dealing with social justice or- or anything where you, kind of, in that nonprofit world where you're hustling and you know that you're trying to help people, being tired and- and exhausted at times, um, you can feel guilty about it. And you can feel guilty when you don't do every little thing to help everyone. Um, you know, you're trying to save the world 24/7, um, and- and maybe trying to do it solo.

Philip Dallmann: So yesterday I was tired. Yesterday ... The day before I had gotten a little bit beat up by the news cycle. Had, um, some not great interactions and, um, was just not feeling, uh, humanity as a whole. Um, so yesterday I- I was still in that brain space and I- I was walking down the street and, as is often the case in New York, some ... there's a lot people there handing out pamphlets, trying to get you to sign petitions and things like that. Um, and I'll say, I- I do try, if- if I have time, to stop and talk to somebody, um, or I will sign a petition for something I believe in. Um, oftentimes it's the ASPCA and I'm like, "I already support you guys. We're good.", but in this case it was someone, um, a young woman, um, yelling or speaking loudly. I don't want to say yelling. She was u- using her diaphragm well, um, and asking for help, supporting, uh, Roe v Wade and- and supporting abortion rights and- and just the right, the right to make their own decision.

Philip Dallmann: Um, and I kept walking. I walked right by it. I was feeling tired. I knew I had to get back to the office. Um, and I just ... I felt incredibly, um, just exhausted. So I walked by and probably went another block before I started feeling that ... I was like, "Man, I just drove home a stereotype to that woman, um, that I am a, uh- uh- uh, a straight white male who- who doesn't care. Um, 'cause she doesn't know me and she doesn't know that I have a podcast, uh, about inclusion and equal rights and accessibility. Um, she doesn't know what I do, uh, in my life or have done in my life. She just knows I walked by her, um, and I was just another, uh, straight white man who- who doesn't care to support.

Philip Dallmann: And I didn't turn around. I didn't walk back. Um, I could have, but I didn't. Um, I just walked with my guilt, um, and guilt of not- not using my privilege in that moment, not- not breaking a stereotype. I- I just kept walking with it. And I got back to the office and- and it was still sitting with me and- and, um, but I- I was

tired. Um, and, uh, I ended up having to run, uh, to Duane Reade to grab something, and as I was going there, um, uh, the- the police had- had stopped somebody, a person of color, um, and were just ... you know, it wasn't an aggressive situation, um, from- from what I could see, and, uh, you know, they were just, they were chatting. I couldn't hear about what, um, and ... but what I- I thought in that moment was, "Okay, you need to use your privilege now." Um, and it wasn't necessarily in an active way or- or, uh, overly active, we'll say.

Philip Dallmann: Um, I just hung out. Just hung out all my phone, kind of staying near the situation. I didn't- didn't speak to anybody. I just was present, um, until the officers and, uh- uh, the person, um, went their separate ways, and I didn't speak to- to the person, I didn't speak to the officers, um, but I- I realized that while, you know, after the situation and past or, um, and I went into Duane Reed to get- get my seltzer water, um, that it was okay that I walked by that petition, and it would have been okay if I had, if I had chosen not to- to stand there.

Philip Dallmann: Um, I- I- I can try, and I can try to be an ally 24/7, and I can try to, uh, make sure that I'm using my- my- my privilege in a, uh, productive way, in an impactful way, um, but there are going to be moments and they're going to be times where I'm human and I am tired and I need a moment of- of- of rest, um, or I make a mistake, um, or I don't see the opportunity when it was ... when it's there. Um, and what I can do and what I will do when I clock those moments, is I'm gonna, I'm gonna open my eyes a little bit wider and pay attention and find the next moment where I can be helpful, where I can make an impact. Whether it's in an incredibly vocal way, whether it's standing there on my phone, pretending to be on Twitter/actually being on Twitter and following the NBA trade deadline, uh, or if it's signing a petition or what have you. Um, and that, and that's gotta be okay.

Philip Dallmann: And- and I share that because I think this is a common experience, um, for- for many of you out there doing this work and working so hard. So, um, uh, I'm with you. I believe in you, um, and I support you in your, in your moments of advocacy, in your moments of work, and I support you in your moments of rest and your moments of being overwhelmed and your moments of guilt. I support you, we support you. This community supports you, and together we will continue making change happen. We will make this a more inclusive society and we will find the common humanity. So, with that being said, uh, making- making up for last weeks, short intro, this is an extra long one. Very excited to dive into this interview, um, and, uh, so without further ado, access champion, Sarah Aziz.

Philip Dallmann: Alright. And we are here with Sarah Aziz who is the director of festival management at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and longtime mentor and friend of me personally. Um, thanks for joining Sarah.

Sarah Aziz: Thanks for having me Phil.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. It's, uh, it's overdue. Um-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: I believe, uh, I texted you about potentially, like, coordinating this and then dropped the ball, you know, maybe, like, within the first month of this podcast launching.

Sarah Aziz: I think we both had a lot going on-

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. Different things.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: ... so, you know. We're here now.

Philip Dallmann: Complete career transitions, you're having a baby. No big deal.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Right.

Philip Dallmann: Um, um, but I, uh, I- I'm really excited to have you on, because I always ... Whenever I'm doing, like, a seminar or anything or even talking to like, uh, students, I'm- I'm advising a student, um, on their thesis right now, um, and they ... everybody, you know, is like, "What's your journey on access?", and while there were, like, a few steps along the way, my journey really began, um, at TDF with you. Um-

Sarah Aziz: Thanks.

Philip Dallmann: ... and, uh, I- I always tell the moment of when I was interviewing for the job and, uh- uh, for just the autism friendly coor- coordinator, uh, position, and, um, uh, there was ... I got there way too early, um, because I still didn't understand the New York City subways, and, uh, so I was there. I actually got there before the guy that was interviewing before me, um, and he came in and, um, I think he was a friend of yours, um, and, uh, you walked up and you just stared at me. You're like, "You know you're early right?", and I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I know.", and then you guys hugged and I immediately texted my mom. I was like, "I didn't get the job. It's fine.", uh, and she was like, "Well, then just, you know, use it as practice.", and then, you know, of course, I- I- I did eventually, um, get the job.

Sarah Aziz: You did.

Philip Dallmann: I think you guys offered it, like, a day later, um, which was great, um, but, uh, that first interaction, uh, from you set the tone right off, right off the bat that you were, you were no nonsense and- and gonna tell it like it is, um, and I, you know, I always have respected that approach to access. Um, I'd love to hear ... 'cause I, you know, I don't know that we've talked about this a lot. Um, even just, uh, as friends. Um, what- what has your journey kind of been into this world of- of overall kind of inclusion work?

Sarah Aziz: Yeah, my- my journey ... I have been in the right place at the right time so many times in my life, which, um, is ... I think it combination of luck and hard work and, you know, all those things together, but I was working ... I was teaching a summer program in Dobbs Ferry, New York. It was a ESL SAT prep program for kids at The Masters School, and the kids would do ESL or SAT prep in the morning and then a recreational activity in the afternoon, and one of their choices was theater. So I was teaching theater and the afternoon because he high school students, many of whom were international, um, mostly from South Asia. A lot of Korean kids, a lot of Chinese kids. Um, so I was teaching them in the afternoon and I was still in college and I made a connection with one of the other teachers there who happened to be good friends with Ronni Claypool, who was the former managing director at TDF and then interim executive director for a period of time.

Sarah Aziz: And so, I needed to take a semester off of college and my colleague Kimberly, um, put me in touch with Ronni, and so Ronni hired me at TDF. They said ... She said the access department could use some help, could you use, like, a, you know, a contractor or, you know, a few months to kind of get things in order. They're expanding. It was, um, shortly after open captioning on Broadway, I had really kind of taken off-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... and, um, and so I started working in the access department, um, just for that fall that I was taking off, um, from college and I didn't really know much about access. Um, my grandmother was legally blind. I have a cousin whose deaf that was, like, pretty much my, you know, experience in terms of access, but I was raised, you know, very much to include everyone and to be kind and you know, that-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... the whole thing that's kind of, you know, hot and all the kids have tee shirts now that say kindness is the new cool and-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: ... all that kind of stuff. Um, you know, my parents were on that boat in the 80s. So, um, you know, of course I fell right into it and thought, you know, this- this is such a, such an interesting little niche world, um, of being an advocate and also getting my theater fix, and, you know, I had no idea that that was, that was a job that was possible. And so I had a great time that fall and kind of, you know, learned a lot and then went back to college and graduated and moved to New York and 9/11 happened, and TDF hired me back as like a random temp, and I worked for everyone.

Sarah Aziz: I worked for, like ... It was the craziest job ever. I worked for, like, Lisa two days, Julian two days, um, and then, like, general, whatever anybody at TDF needed. So I would like sit in for Howard, who was Tori's old assistant, and I would sit in for Julie Williams answering phones. I mean it was like ... I just did every- ... whatever people needed.

Philip Dallmann: You're a little swiss army knife.

Sarah Aziz: [crosstalk 00:17:29] in the arts nonprofit.

Philip Dallmann: Oh yeah, yeah.

Sarah Aziz: Um-

Philip Dallmann: It's the only way that things keep moving.

Sarah Aziz: ... and ... Yeah, exactly. I just, you know, all- all hands on deck, boots on the ground, you know. Do what needs to be done. Um, and so while I was doing that, I really, um, started paying attention more to the access and the programs and the guest experience, and, um, you know, how people who were kind of on the outside, um, were treated by a lot of different people. And, um, it was really eye opening, and, you know, so I, you know, kept in touch with TDF as I went on my journey and worked as an actor and got my equity card and did a lot of other stuff, and landed back at TDF when the programs were really, really expanding and the access department really needed to hire another full time person. They called me and said, "Look, would- would you be interested in doing this.", and I was at a point where I could use a steady income and some health insurance and some paid time off. All sound really good.

Philip Dallmann: Those are really nice things.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Right. And, you know, when you're a working actor you don't always have those things, and so I said, "Yes. Um, I will, I will come and I will work full time.". And so that's when I started working really in the access field and we launched our audio description program, and as we were launching the audio description

program, I was sending out letters to all the teachers in New York City public schools, special ed program called District 75. So I sent letters to all of the- the schools and said, "We have this audio description program. We would love for your students who have vision loss to attend these Wednesday matinees. The tickets are free. Blah, blah, blah.", exp- explaining the program.

Sarah Aziz: And the overwhelming response was, "This is wonderful and we would love to, you know, share this with the handful of teachers who work with students with vision loss. What are you doing for students with cognitive disabilities, specifically students on the autism spectrum?", and, you know, I said, "We're- we're not. We deal with physical disabilities. That's what our department does. Um, we're- we're not ... We don't do anything for- for them.". And then I was at a young professionals events and I got to talking to a mom who had a child on the spectrum, and, you know, it's funny how when you look at programs from the outside and you think, "Wow, this, you know, autism theater initiative is such a big program, I could never do that in my town or in, you know, in- in my world. I don't even know how to start that."

Sarah Aziz: And it's funny how when, you know, you're a young person and you're like, I can do this. And so I just went into TDF and said, you know, "Between the teachers and this mom, like, we really need to do something. And I think Disney would be really on board.". And, um, Tom Schumacher, um, was really involved with TDF at the time, with their education program and the director of education, uh, at the time-

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. They- they honored him at their gala, uh, two years ago, I think.

Sarah Aziz: I think they did.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Um, because, you know, Marianna was the education director at the time and she was really supportive and, um, you know, everyone was like, yeah, you know, we should, we should definitely do this. And- and so we put together a plan and I said, "I think, you know, we need to just buy out a house of the Lion King at half price and then resell the tickets.". Everyone. Was like, "Are you crazy? Disney's never gonna sell us out a whole house of the Lion King and let us, you know, let alone ... No, like-"

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: "... and change the show, and redu- ... Like, who are you crazy lady? Like, that's- that's- that's not a thing.". I was like, "Are you sure? I think we should just ask Tom and Tori ... [inaudible 00:21:41] Bailey said, "Okay, ask Tom Schumacher.", and Tom Schumacher said, "Yes, let's do it. Let's figure it out.", and so it's just, it's just funny, um, looking back on it that, you know, I was confident enough to

just send an email off to Tom Schumacher and ask him for this really big ask,  
Um-

Philip Dallmann: Well-

Sarah Aziz: ... and sometimes I think it just takes that, um-

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. Well, I often ... With those kinds of things, I often think, uh, what's the worst thing that happened here? They just say no or they ignore me?

Sarah Aziz: Right. Right.

Philip Dallmann: You know, and the best possible is what happened, which is, uh, the birth of a- a really high impact program.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Um, so that was really exciting, and- and that program has grown in it's ... I'm- I'm so proud of it. I'm proud of TDF for continuing it, and they started the autism theater initiative nationwide, and, um, I know you and I both traveled to different cities and different theaters and, um, advised, you know, folks around the country on best practice and how to kind of launch a program like this, and I'm happy to say here in Pittsburgh, I was the advisor when they did the second autism friendly performance of the Lion King tour-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... back in 2013, and when the tour of Wicked came through-

Philip Dallmann: Right. Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: ... um, Pittsburgh did the first, um, autism friendly performance of the national tour of Wicked and they were great to work with, and that production on Broadway has been nothing but supportive. Um, their so, so wonderful, and the tour was just as wonderful. Um-

Philip Dallmann: Oh my goodness. That ... Susan ... Shout out to Susan Sampliner over there-

Sarah Aziz: Oh. Susan Sampliner-

Philip Dallmann: ... who is just, um, an angel sent-

Sarah Aziz: Yes.

Philip Dallmann: ... sent down. Uh, besides it just being all about inclusion, but also, like, her work with, um, the- the Green AI-, the Broadway Green Alliance. Um-

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: ... just like an amazing human. Um-

Sarah Aziz: She is an amazing human. And Mary Beth.

Philip Dallmann: Oh yeah, the- their sound.

Sarah Aziz: Their- their stage manager, yeah. Um, happens to be a Pittsburgh native, so I think that-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: ... that helps a little.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. Oh, I'm sure.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Um, us Pittsburghers stick together, but she also ... just so wonderful, so open. Invited our whole team. Susan and Mary Beth met with everybody. Um, the cast, connecting us to the road crew. Um, so, you know, we're really proud to continue that here in Pittsburgh. And then my job here in Pittsburgh, another, like, right place, right time. Um, I'm from here, my husband's from here. Um, when we had our second child, Ryan and I went out on a date when Andy was about six months old and hired a babysitter and we went to a show that we got comps for through TDF. I can't even remember what it was, but we went to, like, a moderate dinner and to this free show, and we paid the babysitter and, like, had to pay for her Uber or whatever, back and forth from our house and it was, like, 300 bucks. And we're like, "Oh, we can go out on dates never."

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Um-

Sarah Aziz: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: That is not ... We have to eat ramen the rest of the month. Shoot. Um, so we started thinking about ... Ryan works from home so he could, he could work anywhere. So we started, you know, thinking about moving back to Pittsburgh and, um, an opportunity presented itself at the Trust, and so now I'm programming a giant arts festival and a fairly large New Year's Eve, um, festival, and ultimately it's project management, which is what I've- I've always done. Um, but, you know, it's- it's very different than- than what I was doing in New York. But I brought ... I think once you work in access, you can't let it go, and I think-

Philip Dallmann: No. No you can't. It- it lives on your heart.

Sarah Aziz: It really does. Like, my business cards are in Braille, so people are like, "Are these braille? These are super cool. Why do you have these?". I'm like, "'cause it's important.". Um, and you know, we do ASL interpreting at every main stage show at the festival. We've added captioning, we have tactile maps.

Philip Dallmann: Oh, awesome.

Sarah Aziz: Um, we use included ... We have gender neutral restrooms. We've ... We added a, um, an artistic nursing mothers area to the festival called, the anthropology of motherhood, um, which gives us space for moms and dads, parents, to feed and change their children. Um-

Philip Dallmann: You mean, not in a restroom?

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Not in a restroom, no. Um, and it's evolved. It started out as kind of a fancy tent-

Philip Dallmann: Uh-huh.

Sarah Aziz: ... um, and now it is ... The- the festival takes place in a state park in downtown Pittsburgh and there's a hotel that, um, overlooks the park. Um, it's a Wyndham and so I- last year we were able to move it into the Wyndham, into one of their, um, conference rooms, which was really great-

Philip Dallmann: Oh. Great.

Sarah Aziz: ... and we work with a wonderful local artist named Fran Flaherty. Shout out to Fran. Look up her work. She is amazing. She also happens to be deaf, um, but she's a beautiful artist that works on lots of inclusive artwork. Um, so she, um, she programs that space for us. She curates it. She works with other local artists who are also parents. She made a doll house last year for the space that reflected some local spots in Pittsburgh-

Philip Dallmann: Oh. Very cool.

Sarah Aziz: ... and outfitted it with wheelchair ramps and lots of the- the dolls are all, you know, different colors and different gender representations and some have wheelchairs and crutches and, um, you know, just to give kids time to play and kind of take a break and, um, you know. We just feel like if- if you start that at a really young age, um, it just becomes part of your vocabulary and-

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: ... part of how you, how you think about things. Um, so yeah, I think, you know, you never ... and this is, this is a big festival. This is half a million people come down over the course of the 10 days.

Philip Dallmann: Oh wow.

Sarah Aziz: Um, so we're getting a lot of impressions as the marketing folks-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: ... like to say. Um, and we had, uh, an installation last year called, single mom defined, which highlighted single moms, and, uh, it was a really cool project that another local artists, Heather Hopson is her name, was doing in Pittsburgh, where she talked to the children of single moms and ask them, you know, what they thought about their moms, and they use words like amazing and strong and kind and generous and you know, really positive words. And then she would ask, you know, random people on the street, "Hey, what do you think about single moms and ... Single parents and single moms specifically?", and, um, they've got ... The- the words that the general public use to describe single parents were not complimentary at all.

Sarah Aziz: They were words like lazy and irresponsible, and they were, they were really unkind, and it was, it was interesting in, you know, her ... the- the purpose of her art and her installation, was to change the perception and to say, look, these, you know, these parents are not lazy or irresponsible or you know, any of, any of these- these things that you might stereotypically think, um, you know, they're- they're-

Philip Dallmann: In fact, it's the opposite.

Sarah Aziz: ... working really hard. Yeah. They're- they're

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. They're working harder than most of us.

Sarah Aziz: Yes. Yes. For sure. Um, so to just, you know, change the perception of a lot of marginalized groups, has really become a mission of mine and of the festivals and, um, you know, we're- we're working hard to represent, um, women and, uh, minorities in- in all of our programming to, you know, bring those voices to the forefront, because, um, you know, if you're not seeing yourself positively in ... or on TV, on stage, on, you know, um, it's really hard to kind of envision a- a positive future that- that I want for all of us and for my kids. And-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... um, so I'm sort of like, yeah man, we gotta, we gotta put these people up on ... and they're doing great work, you know. I mean, it's not ... I'm not compromising any art by, you know, employing people who have disabilities.

Philip Dallmann: Great artists come from every background. You know?

Sarah Aziz: Yeah, for sure.

Philip Dallmann: Um, we- we talk a lot about, on the podcast, of getting to the point where we're- we're just seeing humans, um, and- and we embrace all humans. Um, and, uh, it sounds like you're really working towards that and- and making-making progress.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: That's ... I mean, that's amazing. You guys-

Sarah Aziz: I feel- feel like I am, and I've- I've got an amazing team here in Pittsburgh. I'm so lucky to have landed in a place where everyone values that and, you know, it's part of my job description to be more inclusive and to increase diverse programming. I mean, that's- that's like a dream. Like who-

Philip Dallmann: That's the dream right there. Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: I mean, like-

Philip Dallmann: With a budget. Whoo!

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. With- with-

Philip Dallmann: Not just what you don't-

Sarah Aziz: The money people ... people give me some money for programs and brown people, [crosstalk 00:32:22].

Philip Dallmann: (laughs) I love it.

Sarah Aziz: What a world, right?

Philip Dallmann: What world. I'm thinking about just doing it on the corner.

Sarah Aziz: Right? What a day to be alive.

Philip Dallmann: It's great.

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Sarah Aziz: No. No.

Philip Dallmann: And walking the streets of New York being like, "Let's be inclusive.", but you get to do it with some money. That's great.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Right? Pittsburgh.

Philip Dallmann: Alright.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, it ... yeah. It also is, I will say, amazing. You know, uh, we don't talk about it much in this podcast, but, um, uh, the fact that- that you and I could become friends, uh, with your- your Steelers allegiances and you're Yankees allegiance, uh, as a, as a diehard Jets fan, raised in a Raiders household. Uh-

Sarah Aziz: Oh. Oh, it hurts my heart.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, Franco Harris is- is enemy number one in my home. Uh-

Sarah Aziz: Franco Harris is a very nice man.

Philip Dallmann: The immaculate reception my ass.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Uh-

Sarah Aziz: We're not going to go down ... I can't go down that-

Philip Dallmann: But, uh-

Sarah Aziz: ... road right now.

Philip Dallmann: Oh.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Uh, but, um, yeah. So, um, I- I do love ... I'll say, the- the- the Kennedy Center Lead Conference was in Pittsburgh a few years back, and, um, I think I had been to the city once before then, but definitely, I hadn't been, um, since, uh, I was working in this field. Um, and the- the sheer volume of folks in that city that are working in- in- in similar- similar fashions to what- what you just described, um-

Sarah Aziz: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip Dallmann: ... within the Trust and with some other organizations there. Um, uh, I was thinking of the, um, oh- oh goodness. Uh, the museum, um-

Sarah Aziz: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Carnegie Museum, yep.

Philip Dallmann: Nope, not- not that one.

Sarah Aziz: Nope.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, but yes that- that one, yes. Um, what is ... uh, the one with ... named after the specific artist.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Andy Warhol?

Philip Dallmann: Andy Warhol. There it is. Uh-huh.

Sarah Aziz: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Andy Warhol ... The Andy Warhol is part of the ... [inaudible 00:34:19] under the Carnegie umbrella.

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Sarah Aziz: Um, but yeah, they- they have a really wonderful program, and Leah, who I think you met-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... who was working at the Warhol at the time when Leah was here, she has moved to ... She now works for Carnegie, but you know-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... kind of corporate. Um, so a lot of those programs have now spread to the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Natural History and the Science Center as well. Um, they had a big Lego art installation at the Science Center for all of last year and they brought all these, um, kids from the school for the blind. They did lots of outreach, um, early hours for people with sensory disabilities. Um, same with ... Uh, the Children's Museum does early hours, um, for people on the autism spectrum or other, um, other sensory stuff. So yeah, it's- it's definitely a city that I think ... Pittsburgh, you know, was a- a great industrial hub, um, throughout the fifties and sixties and seventies, and then when steel left, it really took a dip in the eighties and nineties, and everybody kind of grew up and left, you know. Nobody wanted to stay.

Sarah Aziz: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: And I was right on that boat. I was like, peace out, you know. Like I'll go home for holidays, but, like, I'm not coming back to this place. And then it really, um, has seen a- a resurgence, and- and shout out to Carol Brown, who was the founder of the Cultural Trust in 1985, when the downtown was a red light district, basically, and- and chock full of, you know, porn shops and adult movie theaters. And she had the vision to say the arts can lead us to economic stability, and if we renovate these theaters and bring the arts to the people, the rest will follow. The cool restaurants and the shops and, um, and the people will come and, you know, 30 some years later, she was right.

Sarah Aziz: I mean, we- we're seeing, we're seeing that- that resurgence. We just opened a new magic venue last night, a parlor magic venue. Um-

Philip Dallmann: That's amazing.

Sarah Aziz: ... with Eric Jones. Yeah, Eric Jones, who was on, um, America's Got Talent, um, opened it and is doing a six week residency here, and it was sold out last night for opening night, and- and ticket sales are great and, you know, it's- it's just doing really, really well. And um, so I think-

Philip Dallmann: You know you're thriving if you have a- a- a magic parlor that is a ... it's sustainable.

Sarah Aziz: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Right. Right.

Philip Dallmann: 'Cause I- I don't know of another one. Like ...

Sarah Aziz: Chicago has a really good model-

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: ... um, and that's- that's who we- we, um, we worked with, but yeah. I mean-

Philip Dallmann: I'm headed up there in a couple of weeks. I'll have to, uh, check that out.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah, check it out. The House Theater of Chicago-

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Sarah Aziz: ... um, has a good, a good magic model, but, um, it is really interesting because, um, accessibility is, you know ... Even at the, at the magic venue, there's two restrooms and they're both completely, um, you know, ADA accessible and all gender restrooms.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... and, you know, these are just things that happen, you know. Like, uh, it's not, it's not that big of a deal. Um-

Philip Dallmann: It's not a giant debate.

Sarah Aziz: Not a giant debate. It was just like ... The biggest debate was, you know, with the art department and what the signage was going to look like, and I'm going to go over there and take a picture and show it to you because it's, um, it's a very cool space and they made the signage ... Um, they played off a deck of playing cards and so it has like a king and a jack and a queen, and the cards has circles on it, and so one, the one in the front ... I can't remember. I think it's the queen, almost looks like she's in a wheelchair, so you can tell that it's all genders. And, um, but so, you know, everyone's- everyone's having fun with-

Philip Dallmann: That's awesome.

Sarah Aziz: It's pretty good. Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: I mean, that's gotta be the ... almost the pinnacle of- of inclusion and access, where you're getting to actually be creative about it. You're no longer just-

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: ... trying to make sure that things are functional.

Sarah Aziz: Right.

Philip Dallmann: Um, like that- that's the dream. I'm so happy to hear that. That- that's so cool.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Yeah. Um-

Philip Dallmann: Um, well that's fantastic. So, uh, we talked about it a little bit, um, but, um ... Well actually I'll- I'll- I'll- I'll move to the left for a second and come back. You know, I love to make sure that this podcast is a- a- a place where people can dream.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Uh, what would you love to see in- in the future for- for the art, or for sort of, I guess, culture in general, in the realm of inclusion, in Pittsburgh or- or elsewhere?

Sarah Aziz: Just everywhere?

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: Um-

Philip Dallmann: If you want it. Whichever- whichever your heart decides to- to dream on.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. I think, just in general, I think we're- we're moving in the right direction, but, you know, there's definitely still a lot of racial bias. There's a lot of, um, under represent- ... You know, when you look at programming at most, uh, performing arts centers, it's still mostly white, mostly cisgender, mostly, you know, um, able bodied people and I would, I would love for that to ... shift to continue. To see more people with different abilities on stage, um, in front of people just, you know, talking about their stories or not, or just, you know, doing- doing shows that are written by, you know, not old white men all this time. Um, you know, a lot, a lot of-

Philip Dallmann: You don't like plays by old white man with four white people in the kitchen?

Sarah Aziz: I do.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: I ... you know, I love Neil Simon just as much as the next guy, and Eugene O'Neill, and, um, I also really like, you know, um, August Wilson, and, um, you know, plenty of women playwrights. Um, I ... and- and we're, we are starting to see that ... We have a production right now of The Tempest at Pittsburgh Public Theater, which is a re-imagined version that's all women-

Philip Dallmann: Oh cool.

Sarah Aziz: ... which is ... Yeah, super cool, and, um, and- and a pretty diverse casts. I do believe they are all cisgender women, although I- I am not sure of that.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: Um, but racially diverse. Age ... There's an age diversity, which is exciting. Um, I believe they're all, um, you know, in terms of physical, there's nobody who uses a wheelchair or, um, anything like that, but, um, you know, we're moving, we're moving in the right direction and I just really would love to see more of that. And just more discussions, more forums, more, you know. I- I don't think that

people, you know, those art centers that might be programming a lot of plays by old white guys with four white able bodied cisgender people in the kitchen, I don't think they're doing it out of malice or exclusion.

Philip Dallmann: No. No, no.

Sarah Aziz: I think, I think they are just uneducated.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: And so I think just getting out there and you know, talking to people about it and about representation and underrepresentation and ... You know, it's funny, like, you don't even think about it. I never thought about growing up, not really seeing anyone who looked like me on TV or, you know, in the doll aisle-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... um, for a long, long, long time. Um, and I remember when Nora Jones made a breakout in the early 2000s. I was like, "Oh my God, she looks like me.", and that was, that was a big deal, um, which I didn't, I didn't even realize that I wanted until I had it, and I was like, "Oh, that's cool-", um, "... that there's someone who- who looks like me, who's being acknowledged for their art.", and, um, it gave me a new confidence that, you know, I didn't have before, and didn't even know that I didn't have.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: And so I think just being a good advocate, and, um, not speaking for people and, you know, getting, you know, just telling your story and letting other people tell their story and sharing that spotlight is really important. I think sometimes advocates get a little overzealous and their hearts are in the right place, but it's like, girl, please just invite your transgender friend to speak about being trans, and please do not talk about what it's like to be trans if you are not trans.

Sarah Aziz: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Sarah Aziz: Um, I know you mean well and I know you're doing your best, um, but really giving- giving those people voices, I think, is really, really important.

Philip Dallmann: Absolutely. Um, and I'll- I'll- I'll get you out of here on this. Um, we, uh, we touched on quite a few, so if you have any left in your pocket, or if you're- you're, if you're out rather, I- I understand, um, but are there any people or organizations who you look at and think, "Man, they're doing incredible work.", or- or you look up to, um, that you'd love to- to give a little love too?

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. City Theater here in Pittsburgh. Kristin Link and Reg Douglas are killing it over there and. They're- they're doing all the things. Like go look up ... Look- look up city theater. Look up their education programs. Just look at what Rag is putting on the stage. Um-

Philip Dallmann: Yeah, I met Kristen this summer, uh- uh, down in Atlanta at Lead, and it seemed like she- she's killing the game.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. She ... I mean they've- they've been doing open captioning here in Pittsburgh since the early 2000. Um, they, you know, they've really been a leader. They're- they're doing great stuff. And then, um, this is, this is not performance related-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... necessarily or- or theater related, but my friend Thomas Page McBee, uh, put out his second book called, Amateur, um, and it's ... I think the subtitle is something about, like, what it, what it means to be a man or what- what it means to make a man or-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Aziz: ... something to that effect. Um, it's a wonderful book. It's getting a lot of accolades. It's, um, his second book, talking about his trans experience. He's the first trans man to box in Madison Square Garden. And that's not giving anything away. It's on the, it's on the sleeve.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Sarah Aziz: Um, but it's- it's his story, and we grew up together. We were very close in high school and, um, everyone should read it. It's really beautiful.

Philip Dallmann: Well, we'll definitely link to it.

Sarah Aziz: It's, like, 200 pages.

Philip Dallmann: Oh, great.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Easy read.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. It's like-

Philip Dallmann: Uh, love it.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Oh, fantastic. Well, uh, thank you again, Sarah for- for taking the time to- to call, and- and thank you for sharing. Just I, um, I knew there was a lot going on and I'll say, when I was there, I was very impressed, um, by all ... Just all the humans that I met, um, and what they were doing. But, uh, just chatting with you today, uh, gave even more, um, context and detail to the, to the depth and breadth the ... of the access and inclusion work that's happening, um, in- in Pittsburgh.

Sarah Aziz: Yeah. And we all know that there's a lot more work to do. Um-

Philip Dallmann: Oh, uh, the work never stops, but-

Sarah Aziz: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: ... I, um, I- I always think it's worth noting when- when things are going well, um, and when, uh, folks are- are leading the way, and I think for those of you out here, uh, listening, who are looking to either get in this field or looking to, um, looking for good models, uh, of- of programs to start, I think, um, you know, Pittsburgh is a great place to look. So, um, thank you Sarah. Thank you so much for, uh, hiring me so many years ago.

Sarah Aziz: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Uh-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: Uh, thank you for being my friend, uh, for- for being, uh, such a- a kind, um, even if it's- it's no nonsense, mentor. Uh, um, and- and obviously most of all, thank you for being an access champion.

Sarah Aziz: Thank you man for all those things too. Back at ya.

Philip Dallmann: Thank you Sarah so much again for taking the time to chat. Um, after we got off air, uh, Sarah just rattled off a bunch of people, uh, that we are hopefully going to have on the podcast, uh, really soon, um, and some incredibly good ... from all different backgrounds, doing all different kinds of work. So, really diverse group. Made me think that maybe after Chicago I need to go to Pittsburgh and set up camp for a couple of days. Um, and then maybe DC. We'll see. Um, so yeah, again, thank you Sarah. Um, and in that vein, reminder, I will be in Chicago February 19th through the 21st.

Philip Dallmann:

Um, let's get after it Chicago. We're going to do some great interviews then to do some fun stuff. Really excited about it. Um, as always, thank you to our producer, Matt Kerstetter. As always very, very grateful, um, for all the work you do for this podcast. Um, you make it sound better than it has any business sounding. So, um, thank you Matt. Um, also thank you to Miss Kelsey Rose Brown is always. Our champion intern who just continues to kill the game. Uh, if you aren't following us on social media, you need to, 'cause she's putting out great stuff. Um, we're @AccessChampion on Twitter and Instagram and The Access Champion Podcast on Facebook. You know, give us a follow, connect with us, chat with us, and if you have anybody you'd like us to talk to, if you have any thoughts on the show, any ideas for segments, um, we're an open-open book, open door. Not open book, we're open door. We're an open book too, but mostly an open door. So, shoot us an email [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). I'd love to chat. Alright, and we'll be back again next week, and remember inclusion believers, never stopped running through that brick wall.