

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. Uh, we have our second episode from our popup studio at the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference in Denver for you guys this week, uh, but we have our first ever, uh, guest who is deaf. Um, we are, are joined by Aaron Kubey, um, who is a director of artistic sign language for, uh, First Chair, uh, Interpretive Productions as well as the Kennedy Center and, and around the country really.

Philip Dallmann: This was a great, great experience. Aaron was so kind. Um, he actually (laughs) came in and, and we were discussing, uh, uh, something else for the future of the podcast, um, and, uh, he thought that was all I wanted to talk about, um, and, in reality, I was like, "No, let's do an interview." Um, so there were some logistics in, uh, in setting it up and, uh, with this episode, we'll, we'll share a picture of what our set up was, but, um, this was, uh, our first time having a guest with any type of hearing loss, um, and it was so fantastic.

Philip Dallmann: Um, you know, our, our basic setup, uh, was, uh, Aaron was sat across from, uh, a, uh, vocal voice interpreter, uh, was next to me on the mic, and, behind me, was, uh, another interpreter. Um, and, uh, I thought it went incredibly, incredibly well, especially for our first time out, um, and we, and we definitely evaluated some best practices in this kind of situation. Um, and, and typically with something like this, um, uh, or, or what was discussed is, is whether some, some interpretation would've happened in post and, and all that, uh, but we wanted to do it live, uh, and we did.

Philip Dallmann: Um, and at one moment, you're going to hear the interpreter say, uh, "Interpreter correction," and what that is is that, uh, the interpreter, uh, misunderstood, uh, one of the things that Aaron was saying and just took the time to note that it wasn't that Aaron was correcting himself, it was that the interpreter was correcting himself, uh, on what Aaron was saying. He was so kind, the in-, the, the, the vo-, voice interpreter and he, he, he wanted to (laughs) go back and edit and I said, "No, no, no. I think this is a wonderful educational opportunity, um, to show what this is and show how hard, um, interpreting is." He, uh, at the end, he said, "It's not a, it's not a science, it's an art," and I was like, "Absolutely."

Philip Dallmann: Uh, and we were live and, and obviously, uh, that allows a lot of room for, for error, um, or, you know, it doesn't leave room for error, but, um, we are an understanding, uh, consumer and, and want to learn and, and I think that moment was really, really, um, perfect, uh, an imperfect perfect moment, you know, um, for not only, uh, the interview and, and what Aaron, a lot of what Aaron was trying to say, um, in his work, um, but also in mission with the podcast. You know, we want to share information and, and for those of you who have not interacted with someone who uses an interpreter, um, this was really a great experience and, and I hope you'll enjoy listening, uh, to it.



Philip Dallmann: As always, well, with this episode, that image will be shared on social media, so you can see our setup. And where are we on social media? Oh, we're at Access Champion on Twitter and Instagram and The Access Champion Podcast on Facebook. Um, follow us there for a lot of great content. As I always say, we are quality over quantity. Um, we are well curated, uh, by Savannah Cooper, uh, our champion intern. She does, uh, uh, an outstanding job, um, and we're, we're incredibly appreciative of the work that she is doing.

Philip Dallmann: You can also get access to exclusive content on Patreon. What is Patreon? Well, (laughs) Patreon is a platform that allows you, the listener, to support us, the free educational podcast. Uh, for as little a \$1 a month, you get access to exclusive content, uh, as well as a sticker. So \$1 a month plus a sticker, pretty good deal in supporting, uh, an educational, uh, podcast on accessibility, diversity, and inclusion, in my opinion (laughs). Uh, we also have additional, uh, other levels, uh, with additional swag and, and, and, uh, different bonuses and things of that nature. So, uh, check us out, Patreon.com/accesschampions, or you can just click the link wherever you are listening to this podcast.

Philip Dallmann: We are still expanding our board, uh, which, as I've mentioned on previous podcasts, uh, more closely resembles a steering committee. Uh, so, uh, if you work in the large fields of accessibility, diversity, and/or inclusion, uh, and you're interested in helping guide this pod, podcast, uh, and there's no fundraising requirement, uh, really just asking to share experiences, resources, uh, opinions, thoughts, and, and, and guidance, um, as this podcast continues to grow and continues, uh, to try and reach as many people as possible. Uh, if you are interested, reach out to us at AccessChampion@gmail.com. Again, that's AccessChampion@gmail.com.

Philip Dallmann: And I think that's that, so without further ado, Access Champion Aaron Kubey.

Philip Dallmann: All right. And we are here at our LEAD popup studio in Denver, Colorado, and we're so excited to be sitting down with Aaron Kubey, uh, Kubey, sorry (laughs), director of artistic, uh, a director of artistic sign language, who works with First Chair and the Kennedy Center. Uh, thank you for taking the time to chat, Aaron.

Aaron Kubey: Thank you for inviting me here.

Philip Dallmann: Um, so we got thrown together (laughs) today-

Aaron Kubey: We did.

Philip Dallmann: ... uh, but I was so excited. Of course, I, I love the app because then you can, uh, read bios so quickly, and I really dig all of the work that you're doing, um, and the sessions you're presenting this week. Um-

Aaron Kubey: Thank you.



Philip Dallmann: ... but I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey, um-

Aaron Kubey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip Dallmann: ... uh, into this field.

Aaron Kubey: Sure. So I've been in theater all my life, since I was a kid. I came from a deaf family and I have two sisters. Uh, both of my parents are deaf. Uh, both of my siblings are deaf. And my first exposure to any type of deaf theater was when I was watching the TV. There was a Hallmark show, some sort of Hallmark movie, uh, Love Never, Love Is Never Silent, and it had a number of famous deaf actors in that production. I think I was maybe four, maybe five at the time, and I was spellbound. You know, they were signing on this television program. They were deaf. I was deaf.

Aaron Kubey: I looked at my parents, you know, and I said, you know, "I absolutely know what I'm going to do when I grow up," and (laughs) they looked each other and kind of laughed, and they said, "Okay, what's it going to be?" And I said, "I'm going to be an actor just like them. I'm going to be just like those folks on the TV." They looked at each other and kind of giggled, didn't take it seriously because I was just four or five at the time, and they said, "Oh, yeah, sure you are, very good."

Philip Dallmann: (laughs).

Aaron Kubey: And, in fact, uh, I ended up being in a number of different school productions. Uh, I went then to high school in Washington, D.C., um, at an all-deaf campus, and they had a theater program called the Road Show, and we were a traveling road show. We went throughout the country and, in fact, throughout Europe. Um, we went to Puerto Rico and performed a number of different productions, um, some musicals, as well as some dance productions, some mime. Uh, we also did ABC stories, which are, uh, using the manual alphabet-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... in American Sign Language along with aspects of mime to produce stories. So, for example, I might do the A hand shape, where I would also show the gesture of putting on a jacket using the A hand shape.

Philip Dallmann: Oh.

Aaron Kubey: And then would ch-, change to the B hand shape, where I would use it to show that I'm looking around at the landscape. I would then switch to the C hand shape to bring binoculars up to my eyes and show that I'm using binoculars. I then would use the D hand shape to point at something out in the landscape. And we create a story using the shapes of the manual alphabet, um, so-



Philip Dallmann: I love that.

Aaron Kubey: ... I took part in those productions and, after I graduated, I was invited to the National Theater of the Deaf. Uh, they're a profe-, it's a professional theater school, a summer school, in fact, an internship for five weeks. Um, and the actors that I saw on TV when I was four or five were my teachers then. Uh, they were, became my mentors in that experience and so that was thrilling and inspiring, of course. And at the end of that five week experience, the National Theater of the Deaf invited me to become one of their actors, uh, for the Little Theater of the Deaf, and that is in LA, so I moved. Again, I was 18 at the time, so I ended up moving, and then I fell into the Deaf West Theatre-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... uh, production company, there in Equus, Equus, pardon me, interpreter correction-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... Equus. So then, from there, I started being in films and some TV productions and I kind of went about the place, you know, a number of different places when I was young, kind of exploring the country. And I'd have to say, gosh, what year was this? I think it was the year 2000, or maybe 2002, uh, I finally decided, okay, it's time for me to grow up (laughs) and I went back to college. Uh, so I applied at DePaul-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... University in their theater school.

Philip Dallmann: That's a great school (laughs).

Aaron Kubey: Yes, it is, and, at that time, I, I was the first deaf student in that program.

Philip Dallmann: Wow.

Aaron Kubey: So I went in to the theater program as an actor, and I got cut the second year, but they invited me back, uh, in the theater arts program, and so I graduated in 2006 from the theater arts program. I then moved to New York to do a show with the New York Deaf Theater and-

Philip Dallmann: I know them well. JW is a good friend of mind.

Aaron Kubey: Ah, sure. So after that show-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Aaron Kubey: ... I became the artistic director-

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Aaron Kubey: ... for that theater company, uh, for just a real brief one year. And then I was advised to audition for, or to, pardon me, I was advised to apply for the executive director position and president, presidential position of the National Theater of the Deaf. So I sent in my information, uh, got, had an interview and then was hired and I became their youngest president in history and the first deaf president in their 40 year history at that time.

Philip Dallmann: Just to stop you, 40 years of the National Theater, National Deaf Theater-

Aaron Kubey: Right, the National Theater of the Deaf.

Philip Dallmann: ... Theater of the Deaf, and they had not had a deaf president?

Aaron Kubey: Never.

Philip Dallmann: Well, I mean-

Aaron Kubey: I know, I know it (laughs).

Philip Dallmann: Ama-

Aaron Kubey: I know.

Philip Dallmann: I'm so happy though, I'm so happy that's past tense in that now they have had one, uh, but I, I obviously can't hide my shock and amazement at that, uh, of, of, you know, representation (laughs).

Aaron Kubey: I know it (laughs).

Philip Dallmann: But, sorry, go on (laughs).

Aaron Kubey: Right? No, no problem. So I was the president there for about three and a half years-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... and I decided it was time for me to step down from that position, um, and I ended up going down an entirely different path. I moved then to D.C. and became a certified deaf interpreter-

Philip Dallmann: Oh.



Aaron Kubey: ... a completely different path entirely from my work with the National Theater of, of the Deaf. Um, I have missed theater. After stepping down from that po-, position, I started to miss theater because theater was my first love, and I knew I needed to reconnect to the theater in some way, um, so I started to become a DASL, um, a director of artistic sign language, uh, with a number of different theater companies, starting with the Kennedy Center-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... and then First Chair. And then, you know, I've been working with them, advising in terms of interpretation for different shows, advising those teams, mentoring other DASLs in their positions, and providing theater workshops and professional development and the like, and so that's how I got to where I am now.

Philip Dallmann: That's amazing. Uh, that is ... I mean, I've, I've heard a lot of winding journeys on this show, uh, you may have taken the most turns in there (laughs) indeed, uh, but there ... it, it is a bit, uh, circuitous, um, to end up still involved in the theater and, obviously, one of, you know, with the Kennedy Center, um, a staple of American theater really-

Aaron Kubey: Sure.

Philip Dallmann: ... um, so, in a lot of ways, the pinnacle, uh, uh, you know, and being able ... what I'm so-

Aaron Kubey: [crosstalk 00:13:26].

Philip Dallmann: ... excited to hear is that the journey also includes you helping other, uh, certified deaf interpreters and, and I think that's amazing, um, because you're, you're not only-

Aaron Kubey: Well-

Philip Dallmann: Oh, go-

Aaron Kubey: ... and just to clarify and to correct you, I'm not necessarily helping other certified deaf interpreters-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... I'm help, I'm assisting other DASLs.

Philip Dallmann: Okay.



Aaron Kubey: Certified deaf interpreters, um, you know, they're deaf individuals who serve in an interpreting role. Um, they may have a theater background. They may love theater. Um, individuals who, um, are proficient and fluent in English-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... who are very familiar with theater-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... um, are able to, uh, in a DASL position, mentor, uh, deaf interpreters-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... or, or any other individual who is not a deaf interpreter to become a DASL.

Philip Dallmann: Fantastic. I just love that you're helping people (laughs).

Aaron Kubey: That's right.

Philip Dallmann: Your experiences, uh-

Aaron Kubey: I love helping people.

Philip Dallmann: I, I can tell, uh, and that's why you're at LEAD. Um, so-

Aaron Kubey: Right.

Philip Dallmann: ... I, I'd love to hear a little bit more about your, your, I mean, you hinted at it a little bit, um, in your role, uh, assisting the Kennedy Center, but I'd love to hear a little bit about what you're working on right now.

Aaron Kubey: Really, I'm educating different arts organizations and theater organizations on a number of things. Um, it's a benefit, uh, to work as a DASL, um, because it's not just for interpreters that are working, I'm not working just for the deaf community, uh, but I'm trying to benefit the entire organization, everyone in an organization, the theater organization itself, um, the theater owners, the, the theater patrons, the theater itself-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... I'm working on behalf of. And in a DASL position, I'm working with interpreting teams, uh, to provide an enriched or enhanced visual, uh, inspiring experience-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Aaron Kubey: ... for our patrons and hearing individuals then benefit as well, I think, because when they're taking part in, you know, hearing the auditory production, they also get to take part in a quality, watching a quality, uh, interpretation as well and we are, they're experiencing that through their eyes, they're the seeing the artistic sign language, and I think it ha-, can have a very powerful impact and gives them even more of a profound impact. You know, the drama, whether it's comedy or tragedy, can be enhanced. Um, whether it's horror or something's puzzling or, you know, something's frightful, um, that's being produced on a stage, it really can enhance any nu-, any individual's experience and it benefits everyone in the end.

Philip Dallmann: Absolutely. It's, uh, it's almost a cross-cultural experience, um.

Aaron Kubey: Right.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. And, and the educational aspect of it, um, we, we spoke, we had Beth Prevor on, um, from Hands On, a couple weeks ago.

Aaron Kubey: Sure.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah.

Aaron Kubey: Yeah, she's a good friend of mine.

Philip Dallmann: Um, and, and we were talking about specifically at Roundabout, how now Roundabout has subscribers who are not, uh, deaf or do not have hearing loss, but prefer the sign interpreted performances, um, because of-

Aaron Kubey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip Dallmann: ... not only that as-, aspect, but the, sort of the feeling of community in the room, um, which is so interesting to me, uh, because then like accessibility is moving into, uh, community engagement, uh, which is like-

Aaron Kubey: Right.

Philip Dallmann: ... as we move to inclusion, right, we want to get to that role, what, what that's ha-, you know, that's the, those are those steps, right? Um-

Aaron Kubey: Yeah. And if I could add to that-

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: ... we want to educate as well.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Aaron Kubey: Because we have an interpreter on board doesn't mean that access is happening. It's, you know, not necessarily, because that particular interpreter may not be the properly qualified interpreter for that particular show. Uh, they may be a qualified interpreter, but not for theater, performance interpreting. They may be less qualified for that, and the deaf community may not even understand what's taking place in the production. So in terms of the placement of interpreters, it isn't just the placement of interpreters that provides access, what this access actually means.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: Uh, there's a number of layers to that and we need to unpack what access means so that the bottom line, people are given a comprehensively accessible experience.

Philip Dallmann: And I, and I've even, um, been hearing the, uh, discussions of appropriate interpreters for certain productions, like you don't want three white women for Au-, an August Wilson play, uh, interpreting that show (laughs). It's not necessarily the appropriate cultural representation, um.

Aaron Kubey: Right, exactly.

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. So, uh, and it, it feels like we're now evolving the standards of theatrical interpreting, and that's really exciting when that bar gets raised in any access.

Aaron Kubey: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh, absolutely. I'm excited to see the path that we're on too.

Philip Dallmann: And that's a natural segue because I'd love ... one of the things I love to do, because in the nonprofit service industry, we don't get to dream our dreams too often, we get, uh, budgets thrown at us and, and things like that-

Aaron Kubey: Right.

Philip Dallmann: ... uh, I'd love to hear a little bit about what you hope for, uh, in the future of theatrical interpreting.

Aaron Kubey: I would love to see theater companies, and funders of theater companies, have a line item in the budget, not something that's last minute, not something that's reactive, but be a, have it be a part of, a key element, of a theater, theatrical budget, for years down the road, that it's built into the budget. Uh, put it into your grant-seeking, your grant-writing, so that those who are donating money recognize the importance of access and they actually will provide for the sake of full access provision. And the community may never experience that, or never have the opportunity to do so without that forethought, without knowing ... they may never know that we've even had access to interpreting and they're longing for it.



Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Kubey: Uh, art is life, right, and theater is art, so when we combine the two, theater is life, and so we make, we need to make certain that everyone is able to experience that, uh, because it really can enhance people's lives, improve people's lives. My goal for the future is that I'd love to see everyone on an equal playing field of being able to have that tremendously impactful experience of art and theater, however they would like to, and they have that opportunity then.

Philip Dallmann: That's amazing, and I'm 100% on board with that, and in the like cumulative 30 minutes that we've known each other, uh, I feel like you are-

Aaron Kubey: (laughs).

Philip Dallmann: ... uh, definitely well on your way to helping, along with many of the other wonderful advocates that are here at this conference, uh, well on their way to, to making that happen.

Aaron Kubey: Thank you.

Philip Dallmann: So, uh, thank you for taking the time to chat. Thank you for-

Aaron Kubey: Uh, it's a pleasure.

Philip Dallmann: Thank you for all the work you're doing and thank you for being an Access Champion.

Aaron Kubey: Thank you.

Philip Dallmann: Thank you to Aaron, uh, for taking the time to chat. We really appreciated it. Uh, thank you to the, uh, two interpreters who worked with us, uh, during that interview. Um, it, overall, just a really wonderful experience, really great conversation, um, and we appreciate having our first experience, um, utilizing interpreters, uh, to have been, one, gone so well and be done in a such a, a warm and supportive environment, so, uh, really appreciative, uh, to all involved, and that includes the, the Kennedy Center, who plans the LEAD conference and, and obviously hires, uh, the interpreters at the event, so, um, thank you to all involved.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, as always, thank you to your executive producer, Matt Kerstetter, for making us sound great each and every single week, uh, our associate producer, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown, for all that she does, especially, uh, while we were at the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference in Denver. Uh, she was all over the place and, and really made it, uh, the successful experience that it was. Uh, thank you to Savannah Cooper, our champion intern. You can see her impact all across social media. Uh, thank you to Tommy Karr, uh, for our outstanding logos. Uh, if



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you haven't checked out all the different symbols that we have, you can find them on social medial. Um, they are all designed exclusively by Tommy Karr. Uh, and thank you to Eric Walton for that dope theme song. It never gets old.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, we will be back again next week and, remember, inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.

