

MIF Originals

Episode 4: A Podcast for All Animals

Kitty [00:00:04] Every animal is equal. No animal is better than the other. The difference between bunnies and pigeons, humans and cows, there is nothing. We're all unique and different but we're all animals living and breathing. And I think we all deserve to be treated the same.

Isaiah Hull [00:00:32] Welcome to MIF Originals, a podcast series where artists developing new work for Manchester International Festival are given a blank audio canvas to fill; a chance to try something new with the podcast form. I'm Isaiah Hull, poet, writer and your podcast host.

[00:00:53] This episode revolves around Animals of Manchester, a live art experience curated by Lois Keidan from the Live Art Development Agency in London and led by artist Sybille Peters from Hamburg's Theatre of Research. For the final weekend of the Festival they wanted to create a city where animals of all kinds, including humans, live together as equals.

[00:01:18] Working together with local children, they created an interspecies zone of equality in Whitworth Park in Manchester to explore how humans can be better animals and ask what can we learn from them?

[00:01:34] This is a podcast for all animals.

Jonas [00:01:48] [Talking about a budgie called Cheeseburger] What's he saying? I can hear he's saying something but I can't really understand it.

[00:01:51] I can understand a few animals. Say Cheeseburger! I think he said Cheeseburger.

Katie Callin [00:01:59] He said 'what are you doing?', why don't you tell him what you doing Jonas?

Jonas [00:02:03] Erm, podcasting. What are you doing?

Amar [00:02:11] This is a podcast for all animals. Tiger, lion, elephant, a giraffe.

Jonas [00:02:19] Budgies, butterflies...

Mustafa [00:02:19] And dinosaurs!

Jonas [00:02:20] Spiders!

Abdullah [00:02:21] Hedgehog, bees, err... squirrels!

Jonas [00:02:24] Crows! And tigers and stingrays!

Amar [00:02:24] The leopard...

Jonas [00:02:24] Wasps!

Amar [00:02:24] Wolf, dogs, cats...

Jonas [00:02:24] Beluga whale, homosapien. Moles!

Mustafa [00:02:33] And the whales...

Sibylle Peters [00:02:42] Hello, I'm Sibylle Peters. I'm an artist from Hamburg. I'm artistic director of the Theatre of Research where we bring artists and children and all kinds of experts together to do research together, mostly on topics which are really interesting to children but also to all of us.

Jonas [00:03:01] Children sometimes understand animal feelings more, and animals more. Some adults think that's just an animal and they've got more important stuff to do like go to work.

Katie Callin [00:03:18] What do you think's more important, going to work or being nice to animals?

Jonas [00:03:21] Being nice to animals.

Sibylle Peters [00:03:24] Animals of Manchester is a big event that we are doing for Manchester International Festival to talk about animal equality. We are here to talk about how animals could live better together here in Manchester, animals of all kinds, including humans! How can we create a different future for all of us in which all animals are equal, do you think that's possible?

Lois Keidan [00:04:00] I'm Lois Keidan from the Live Art Development Agency in London. Sibylle and I've worked on a couple of projects in the last sort of five or so years, particularly looking at some intergenerational relationships. And for kids she works with at the Theatre of Research, their top wish list of anything to do with art or anything to do with anything is working with animals and that just sort of relates to where we're at in the world right now in terms of climate change, in terms of the biodiversity crisis, and we know kids think very very differently about their relationship to the natural world.

[00:04:31] And so this project is really sort of bringing kids and adults and animals together to see if we can find different types of companionship, different types of equality between species and just get humans to take a little bit more responsibility for what we're doing to the natural world and who else lives in it apart from us.

Kitty [00:04:50] Why do we get to do everything when all the little animals just don't get to do as many things as us? We're taking over their land. Imagine if they one day had even more powerful things and we were put in that situation. It would just be really sad and I don't know why we're doing it to them either.

Jonas [00:05:12] Hi I'm Jonas and welcome to Animals of Manchester. First I'm gonna, I'm gonna talk to you around the thing and we can start at the Mouse Palace. Have we got a map and then we can cross off the places we've been to? Well we can just go around and then we'll remember.

[00:05:41] Budgie! I think it was there...

Sibylle Peters [00:05:46] To create this zone of interspecies equality we have to work together with kids because they have this approach towards animals that is very much towards an equal; they approach animals as equals more than we do. And so we really need that guidance and therefore we work together with a group of kids as our ambassador kids, ambassadors of the Animals of Manchester.

Jonas [00:06:12] [Speaking to Petal the cow] Petal, Petal! How does it, how does it feel to be a cow? Do you think it's cruel for you to be kept behind the fence? I think she's saying "a little bit" because she's like, all the way at the edge like. And, okay she's going away.

Emmet [00:06:38] [Two very young children speaking to a spider] Bider, bider, hello! Hello bider, hello, hello bider. Bider! Hello bider. Hello bider!

Katie Callin [00:07:25] Did he say "it's not easy being green"?

Jonas [00:07:27] Yeah!

[00:07:31] Thank you Cheeseburger! At least he replied...

Katie Callin [00:07:31] He did, he's the first one to reply isn't he?

Jonas [00:07:35] Well, the first one to reply in human language.

Sibylle Peters [00:07:39] It started at the Theatre of Research with kids that I work with there who said 'can we not use the stage, can we not use the theatre to meet real animals?' It's still an experiment, you know, I don't know. It's the first time we try. We will approach the whole thing by trying different forms of togetherness which, kind of, transgress this boundary between the animal and the human. So we are looking for ways how humans can experience themselves as a part of the animal spectrum. For example just take a moment and just listen to how many species can you actually perceive in that moment being present.

Tabrez [00:08:26] The cat's noise is 'MEOW!' The snake's all like 'SSSSSSSSSSSS.' The dogs are like 'WOOF WOOF!' The birds are like 'PEW PEW!' And the squirrels are like 'WEEEK WEEEK WEEEK!'

Mustafa [00:08:49] And the mouse like 'EEEEK EEEK!' And the whales do communication under water. A chicken is like 'QUARK QUARK!' And a duck is like 'QUACK QUACK!'

Awais [00:08:49] A chicken is like 'BOCK BOCK!'

[Unknown] [00:09:08] What noise does Lola make?

[Unknown] [00:09:08] Haha I know!

[Unknown] [00:09:08] Go on then...

[Unknown] [00:09:08] 'RUFF RUFF!' [laughs]

Jonas [00:09:10] All I can hear is the cow chewing. And the humans talking! I can't hear any dogs barking.

Katie Callin [00:09:20] What's that noise there?

Jonas [00:09:23] Er, squarking. Rustling, hedgehogs rustling, birds squarking, dogs growling, erm...

Abdullah [00:09:34] What kind of sounds do all animals like?

Lois Keidan [00:09:38] We think our research over this weekend has suggested that a lot of animals are interested in music and a lot of animals also make music of their own kind. So possibly something sort of, some kind of audio work, some kind of soundscape might be something that works for all animals.

Sibylle Peters [00:09:54] What would we actually want them to feel? Maybe it would be nice to give them some ambient of their most loved habitat.

Martha [00:10:04] Probably a tennis ball being bounced on the ground. Or a stick being snapped off from a tree and being thrown.

Diane [00:10:17] She especially likes water so running water, that kind of thing.

Angela Bartram [00:10:24] A high pitched kind of 'YAP' kind of bark which means 'we're gonna have fun, I like you.'

Sibylle Peters [00:10:32] What would actually be the human sound for saying 'it's safe to be together right now'? What would that sound be? I think maybe it would be something about humming, but I'm not a musician.

Jonas [00:11:08] Cheeseburger disco! He's dancing!

Sibylle Peters [00:11:21] I mean, when I was a kid I was taught that humans and animals, that's a totally different thing, you know, that's totally that's a huge difference. And actually what really counts is what happens between humans. That's the important stuff, right, and everything else comes secondary.

[00:11:38] So we are learning that we looked away for a very long time and that things are not in a very good state right now and that we have to re-evaluate our relationship with animals. So the Animals of Manchester tries to create encounters with real animals to kind of learn from them that we are in this together. And that we actually have to start acting as being this huge herd that we are on this planet.

Jonas [00:12:22] That says 'be your dog.' It's like the dog is the owner of the person. Because the dog is the one who goes everywhere and then the owner follows it.

Sibylle Peters [00:12:41] The Human School that was created by Angela Bartram.

Angela Bartram [00:12:47] Human School Be Your Dog is kind of around the traditional puppy school. So you'd go take your dog for training, and they're really ridiculous situations where you're in a small room and you're trying to teach your dog things but it's crazy, crazy situations. And actually it's kind of the wrong way round.

[00:13:06] So I do a lot of work with domestic animals - particularly dogs - around equality and being domestic animals and what makes them domestic animals, and it's emotional

contagion. So when you're sad, they're sad, when you're happy, they're happy; they can kind of understand what's happening and that's to do with emotional contagion.

[00:13:26] And this just asks the humans to flip it. So in there the dogs are dogs and they're allowed to be dogs in every way possible so they're off lead, they are in a pack instantly. And it's really interesting, you take the dogs off a lead and they're instantly familiar with each other because they're running around and they're sniffing and they're getting to know each other. And then I have to kind of say to the humans 'get to know each other.' It's kind of an introduction. And by the end of it they should be as open to that as their dogs are. So by following their dogs they get to understand their own dog a little bit better because they can see what they are looking at, what they're interested in.

Jessica Wilson [00:14:09] [Participant in the Dog School] Like being a dog, literally yeah, literally got to do everything that this dog does yeah.

Spectator [00:14:09] Oh my god, great!

Jessica Wilson [00:14:09] I know, so if she sits down I just get to sit down for half an hour.

Angela Bartram [00:14:17] That's a fundamental thing with humans that introduction that I have to give to people to say 'get to know each other' is about being conscious of the fact that you're in an awkward situation etc. You've signed up to this thing, you're not quite sure what it is, dogs are running around because they have no ego and they just kind of go 'brilliant! I don't know you, and I don't know you' and whatever. And actually by getting rid of some of the human ego you can probably understand each other a bit more and actually understand different species and acknowledge the fact that you're animal and that we all kind of operate in a very particular way, really, beyond being a human with all the trappings that comes with it. So the people leave more dog than they started.

Sami [00:15:00] We were being dogs, you know, so we had to eat like them, walk like them, lie like them. It was a really interesting prospect. Good thought experiment I thought! I was with Archie and he was very good at barking so I had to bark a lot as part of my performance. Maybe Archie is quite good at being aware so maybe I've been more aware. And being good at interacting with other people and humans and animals, I think.

Diane [00:15:42] Dolly has really enjoyed it. That's our dog Dolly. She's been teaching a workshop on how animals behave and how they move and how they react to different things. She spent a lot of time doing ball work, really. She's taught people how to eat and chew carrots from the ground. And so did George, Dolly's brother. She's shown people how to be friendly and approach other people. And how to drink from troughs. Yeah!

Tricia [00:16:22] This is Carly. She's an 8 year old Shih Tzu, she's got quite a personality. And yeah we did the workshop. Quite surprising, I learnt quite a lot about her. So I sort of followed her around and tried to look at things from her perspective. And she's really small so I had to get really low, it was quite hard! I learnt she's more observational than other dogs. And she also likes just looking at nothing. Which is interesting! Isn't it? I'm going to try and be in the moment which is what all dogs do which we should all try and do. It's a really good way to be.

Sibylle Peters [00:17:00] Art has the power to create a temporary autonomous zone, if you want, in which something like a 'what if' is governing practice. So what if all species

were equal? And then you know the challenge really is in the detail because then the council comes and says 'yeah but all dogs have to be on short leashes.' And then you have to say, okay, all dog owners have to be on short leashes too. I think that's interspecies equality at that point right.

[00:17:29] Or for example the cows, they have to come with like really really high fencing that makes you think of the slaughterhouse, like immediately. So there's no way around it. We really really really try, all of us try, it's no way round it so now we have to get a little bit more of the fencing. I have to go into the fencing myself but it is about creating a new imaginary space for how we could live and how wonderful life could be in an interspecies equality world.

Kitty [00:18:06] Every animal is equal. No animal is better than the other. The difference between bunnies and pigeons, humans and cows. There is nothing! We're all unique and different. But we're all animals, living and breathing. And I think we all deserve to be treated the same.

Willem [00:18:27] I think all animals should always stay alive and never die.

Kitty [00:18:35] Imagine if we were the animals being killed and not the cows and sheep. We'd be devastated that our loved had died! We'd be terrified that it might happen to us. That's probably what the animals feel like!

Willem [00:18:49] And nobody would see us ever again! We'd miss our family.

Sibylle Peters [00:18:56] The relationship between cows and humans is incredibly important for human society to speak from our perspective now, but we don't see much of the cows. We see most of them in the supermarket and we really have more like, often a consumer relationship with them, which is fine. We're not suggesting any kind of dietary choices in this project but we still want to question if this is the only relationship that we have with these beings or if we are not connected to them in a more existential way. It's a good thing to just really appreciate all the other challenges which might come out of a decision.

[00:19:41] We learnt today that the cows express a lot of their feelings with their ears. They are really relaxed right now, you can see it in their ears they're fully focussed on eating. They're not listening much to us. Maybe the cow in the back is actually listening to me. Petal, is it you? Petal come over here! We have Golden Calves around here and they would like to greet you. Golden Calves, would you like to take a carrot and say hello to our mayors? And if they accept the carrot from you it will be a sign that they agree with your ideas and suggestions.

Jonas [00:20:25] I've got a carrot. I'm gonna feed it to the mayor! This carrot could literally fit up the nostril! Wait I think she's not finished. You know they vomit their food back up then put it back down?

Katie Callin [00:21:00] That's a bit gross isn't it?

Jonas [00:21:01] Erm, yeah. But that's what cows do!

Sibylle Peters [00:21:12] I think we can learn from animals that we are ourselves animals.

Jonas [00:21:25] We're at the Beauty Parlour where you can get your bandanas and stuff and you can get your claw finger.

Sibylle Peters [00:21:30] The Bestiary Beauty Parlour is created and designed by Katharina Duve.

Katharina Duve [00:21:35] Hair is a material humans and animals share; and it feels like hair is part of a big rule system and gives reference to gender, to religion, to different ways adults actually try to tell children how to behave. Sometimes it feels like humans are kind of scared about hair and shave it off everywhere it grows and so we thought we would like to invite the audience to to experience hair in a new way.

Sibylle Peters [00:22:42] It's not about becoming, or making yourself a costume to be a penguin or something but it's to stress your own animalship. Become a little bit more animal like to give yourself a sign of your own being a part of the animal spectrum. But it's not to turn into an animal but just to give yourself this little bit of fur that you might crave for anyway.

Jonas [00:23:04] And then if we move on here's the animal registration desk where you can get your nose print and claim your animalship. And here is like the place where the artists tell you about the animals and why they're so amazing. I talked about the cuttlefish and that they're capable of changing colour and that also they can change how their body shapes looks like. So a cuttlefish can turn into a hermit crab. So it looks exactly like a hermit crab. It's like a transformer. Literally transforming into a different animal.

Lois Keidan [00:24:10] Just looking at the kids that've been involved in this event, the kids we've worked with, the kids who've been the ambassadors and the kids who've attended this event, I feel really confident about the future. I mean I'm beginning to feel confident about the future because of the whole kind of school strikes movement but listening to these kids over this weekend, how they think about animals, how they respect animals, how they articulate their feelings and how they're taking a stand. I think it's been really really empowering actually.

Grace [00:24:39] I'm Grace and I'm 10. I was in a part of Animals of Manchester that was Voices of the Extinct where we tried to understand what it would be like to be an extinct animal or to be the last of your kind. And we'd really try and get into the point of view of those animals and make people understand that it's so, so important to understand that they were once here and humans destroyed their habitats and caused them to die out.

[00:25:25] We just started with a bunch of words and they kind of knitted together into a poem. So this is about the Barbary lion.

[00:25:35] We were the Lords, the highest, the greatest, the mightiest, the best, the most important and most graceful. Always the hunter, never the prey. But that was long ago. Scared, hunted, hurt, alone, trembling with fear, hungry, thirsty, dry. We are the prey now. We are uncared for. There is nothing to do but stop.

Sibylle Peters [00:26:04] There are lots of species which are extinct already due to human impact. So that relationship has to change in terms of respecting their habitat.

Grace [00:26:13] There's another one here that's not about a particular animal. It's about all the animals that are extinct now. And speaking in the voice of these animals.

[00:26:24] We don't understand why you hate us so much, why you destroy everything. Why do you think us inferior? Why would you do this? Why didn't you help us?

[00:26:37] They would tell us 'look look at yourselves.' There's been millions of animals that have been extinct and you're not doing anything about it. We're still here. You're still here. Why don't you make a difference?

Katie Callin [00:27:02] Do you have a message for all the animals?

Jonas [00:27:05] You mean in human language?

Katie Callin [00:27:08] In any language!

Jonas [00:27:16] That you're all important. All animals. All animals are important. So let's try again, was it rusty? All animals are important.

Abdullah [00:27:29] My message to all animals is if any humans is trying to kill you just try to defend yourself if you can. Try to run away as fast as you can or then your life is gone. Don't be scared of humans, only if they have a gun or like trying to kill you.

Martha [00:27:47] Try and be like, if you're like a bit feisty or something. Just be a little bit calmer and then maybe you'll get a bit more attention. And then you'll be a better animal. Not saying that you aren't, but yeah.

Kitty [00:27:59] How every animal's the same and that all living, breathing creatures - and as I said, cows are no different to humans - and what it would feel like if they suddenly started killing us for food. I think we all deserve happy lives.

Willem [00:28:18] I think animals should live in peace and harmony because they should be happy and they should live long.

Jonas [00:28:46] Cheeseburger what would your message be for all animals?

[00:28:49] Cheeseburger, Cheeseburger, Cheeseburger, cheesecake!

[00:28:49] Wait, did you hear him? He said something. Listen!

[00:28:49] Oh, he's saying Cheeseburger...

Isaiah Hull [00:29:27] That was A Podcast for All Animals. Whether or not you agree in interspecies equality; whether or not you believe it's a thing that can happen, the children do. And I think that's important, we should try. Children in the future and animals are indicators of our planet's future. So if we are getting rid of our future and the children know, then everything is pointing to us. We can make a change.

[00:29:57] I took my sister to Animals of Manchester, my little sister, she's 13. She's really interested in deforestation and the damage it does. She's been to protests. So we did the Memorials of Extinction workshop in Animals of Manchester where you write a poem on planks of wood and then they stick it into the ground or wrap it on the trees. My sister's was 'deforestation needs to stop'.

[00:30:25] And it just made me think about things that I have in my priority of life verses like, when I was younger what I cared about, and it reminded me that as you get older different things take priority. But the planet is always going to be here and it's going to be there after you die, it's there before you've lived. If you can contribute to its growth rather than its detriment ultimately that's a beautiful thing.

[00:30:55] For each of these episodes I'm sharing an original poem in response to what we've heard. This poem is about the selfishness of humanity, consumerism, the dirty claws of greed. It's about the future, our future. From a perspective of me. I'm not telling you to be a vegetarian or anything or a vegan. That's not the point of the poem. This is not a disclaimer, I'm just saying like I eat meat but I eat vegan as well. I'm a flexitarian! So this is not an advert for like veganism or anything, it's just a poem. Jheez!

[00:31:34]

mammal on your menu
animal all enamel for a family feast
oxtail front page handing you feet featuring face thanks to the chef
a sly in my soup, a wine on your left like Dionysus
flies teach us to dance
bees teach us to duck
moths keep me awake
sleep needs me enough
worm first means bird is early
pigeon curls into dove
listening earth you should trust
the ladybird isn't bugged
the amarillo caterpillar damages my chrysalis
says suffocate is butterfly why does he die the prettiest
so blood goodbyes no winging it goes
sugar shy one million
a dozen eyes for couple wings! I covered mine in crinoline

I have a little hunch in camel
that children telling animals to run from adults
means the future is in camouflage
the balaclava a balance
beehives in bathtubs
freeze-dried the antlers like knee-high Alaskas
mammal on your menu meaning venison avenge over-skeletoning venues,
monarchy a swan, forest swallowing me gone green gobbling me up we a colony of one
now.
the year is tomorrow and there is nothing left to reincarnate.

[00:33:16] The next and final episode in this series has been put together by me. I'm going to be looking into the making of Alhabus, a show which I co-wrote with three other writers for MIF19.

[00:33:29] Together with FlexN dance company we created a modern myth that uses both poetry and dance to tell a story about power and weakness, authority and rebellion.

Billie Meredith [00:33:42] Dialogue is brilliant and dance is brilliant but the second that you put them together...

Yandass Ndlovu [00:33:47] It becomes its own art form, I guess. It's not dance, it's not poetry. It's... po-dance.

Isaiah Hull [00:33:56] Thanks for listening to MIF Originals. Special thanks to the artists and curators of Animals of Manchester: Sibylle Peters, Lois Keidan, Angela Bartram and Katharina Duve. And of course to the children and animals of Manchester. Jonas, Amar, Abdullah, Kitty, Willem, Tabrez, Awais, Mustafa, Grace, Emmet, Martha and Dexter, Dolly, George and Diane, Archie and Sammy, Kathy and Tricia, Petal the cow, and Cheeseburger the budgie.

[00:34:33] Thanks to Vicky Clarke and Martin Rack for the music. It was presented by me, Isaiah Hull, and produced by Katie Callen. It's a Reduced Listening and MIF production.

[00:34:45] Until next time my animals... [Isaiah makes an owl noise.]