



## KELCEY ANYA'

### Transcript: Working Without a Net

#### **Sarah Greenman:**

I'm Sarah Greenman, and this is Collaborative Alchemy.

I first met Kelcey Anya' at a gender equity conference in 2018. I noticed her the moment she walked in the space because she was wearing a pair of fabulous leopard print pants and a t-shirt that said black, bold, and bougie. I was like, "I have to know who this glorious human is." She exuded creative confidence, something that so many of us struggle with. My own relationship with creative confidence, ebbs and flows. It usually comes from a voice in my head that says, "Who do you think you are?" I know that many of us have spent our entire lives dealing with feelings of worth and worthlessness, but here was Kelcey Anya' with her gorgeous loud ass pants and her smiling, amazing, ecstatic energy and everything about her seemed to say, "Join me. Who are you saving it for? Let's dance this dance baby."

#### **Kelcey Anya':**

I stand in a lot of intersections. By default, my presence in certain spaces is radical, which blows my mind, but it is. I had to realize that me walking into certain rooms, is an act of rebellion, which for better or for worse, here I am. I'm like, "Well, I'm here. I may as well shake some shit up."

#### **Sarah Greenman:**

Kelcey Anya' is a multidisciplinary performing artist originally from the bayous of south Louisiana. She began her performance career at the age of two as a dancer and fell in love with all things performance. Her motto, she says, became, "As long as I can touch the stage, I'm happy." Kelcey received her master of arts and theater performance and practice with certificates in both teaching and women's gender and sexuality studies from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. In 2019, she merged her love for education and the arts when she began her career as a teaching artist in New York City. Since then, she has done gold serving as the director of Colt Coeur theater company's annual education initiative as a teaching artist and dance instructor with the Joffrey Ballet and as a teaching artist with Pegasus Theater. Now she's in Chicago and she's the managing director of Artemisia Theater and is also the founder and director of Kelcey Anya' Performing Arts Academy, an organization geared towards amplifying the voices of young black and brown storytellers through the arts.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh, Kelcey Anya', I'm so excited that you're here with me. Thank you for spending this hour with us.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yes. Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah, let's get into it. Tell us what should we know about you? What drives you?

**Kelcey Anya':**

Oh my gosh.

**Sarah Greenman:**

We're jumping right in.

**Kelcey Anya':**

That's a great question. Wow. Okay. Yeah, we're diving right into the deep end. Glad I can swim. I will say this, and this is what's been on my heart and mind most recently, as a creative person, that is just who I am as a being. I won't say I fought it for a long time, but I tried to put it as a hobby. I tried to tuck it away for a little bit. It was very much like, "Oh, I need to have the particular job, so I need this be on the side," and not really embracing who I am. Being told things, ways in which I needed to mute myself to be received in these other environments and things like that, and I tried and it just didn't work. I busted that box wide open and was like, "All right, well, this is who I am. I'm going to have to figure out how to embrace her because I can't, I'm loud."

Even when I'm quiet, I'm loud. I walk into a room and I don't have to say a word and I know I'm making a lot of noise. That is just who I am as a being and having to learn to accept the at. Also, I'm an arts educator and these kids light a fire under my butt like nobody's business.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Not just to teach them the things, whatever it is, but to show them that, especially I work with a lot of black and brown youth, and showing them that someone who looks like them, does these things and is attainable for them to make it accessible for them, to make it real for them. That was something that was important for me and I can't say it was done intentionally by the people that I was around, I just saw it. I was really blessed to have black women who had PhDs, black women who were on stage, black

women who were doing these things. I just so happened to be blessed to be around so many. None of those things felt unattainable for me.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Sure.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I recognize that that is a privilege. With intention, I walk into spaces and I create spaces and I open doors with intention to create access and give. If I can give one child a glimmer of hope that that is something that they can do or an escape from whatever environment that they are in, then I want to do it and that's what drives me. That's what motivates me. That's why I stick around kids as much as I hate the US education system. I won't ever be on a school's payroll, but I would love to drop in and teach and do the things at all times.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I think that's where you and I have a lot of crossover. I mean, we have crossover in lots of places, but I'm in the same situation out here in rural Oregon. I love going in and working with the kids, but I don't want to teach there.

**Kelcey Anya':**

No, I love dropping in once a week-

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yep.

**Kelcey Anya':**

... for an extended several week period of time.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Then I'm outta there. I feel like I touch more kids that way too, because I get to be in multiple schools and I cross pollinate there.

**Sarah Greenman:**

When I think about your background with Girl Be Heard and then your own work with the Kelcey Anya' Arts academy is just, I mean, I see you lacing this into the fabric of everything that you do. You just

mentioned multidisciplinary, right? Let's talk about what that is for you, because I love that you move so spherically and in all these different directions. That's something that those kids see as well and note like, "Oh, I can do more than one or two or three things. In fact, that sort of multitude makes me a better artist, better person." I would love to hear your understanding of what a multidisciplinary artist is.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I don't know any other way to be. I've never been one who just did one thing. Never. I will say the most consistent thing that I've done and still do is dancing. I started dancing when I was two years old and now I teach dance with a Joffrey Ballet, talk about a full circle moment. I still dance with my church and things like that. I've never stopped dancing. That has been a consistent thing. Then I was introduced to acting and was like, "Okay, I got bit by that bug," then singing, someone realized that I can actually sing. It was like, "Oh, here's a mic. Go do that up there." That turned into, I wrote for myself for so long, I was a journal kid. I had a box of journals.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yay, a journaler.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I was a journaling kid. Sometimes that came in the form of poetry. Sometimes that came in the form of short stories. Other times that was just a diary with no intention of doing anything with it or so I thought. Then fast forward to grad school and I wrote my first play. Now I've been commissioned to write a play that's premiering in Chicago, workshopping in Chicago this summer. It's, again, full circle moment. I've never been one who did one thing. I've always been like, "I'll try it."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

"I'll try it." I have a pretty good gauge of things that I think I'll be good at. I tell people they're like, "You're so good at everything." I was like, "I'm good at the things that I do, because I know what I'm good at." Being a disciplinary artist, I think what differentiates me from a lot of other disciplinary artists, is that I've encountered artists who will hit multiple disciplines within the arts and I'll jump out of the arts and tie it back into it. I have a deep, deep love for psychology. I have a deep love and passion for the ways in which psychology and the arts intertwine and the ways in which they should intertwine. I'm into mental health opportunities and access for artists. If nobody goes deep into our crap, we do, deep into their world that we do. We are still human and there is a need for uplifting and making sure that we're still safe while we're entertaining people. I have a deep passion about mental health access for artists, namely actors. Like I said, I'm an educator so one master's was not enough. This will be the first public announcement, but I'm actually back in school.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yay.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I'm getting a second master's degree in education.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh my gosh, Kelcey. That's fantastic. Congratulations.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Thank you. My intent with that, is I have the artistic background. I have quite a bit of an educational background as well or experience I should say, but one of the things I've noticed working with other teaching artists is that we know our craft, but we're not trained educators.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I don't know many of us who would be willing to go sit through a traditional education program like I am, to get the knowledge that they need. A goal of mine is to be able to take what I've learned in the education sphere, shift it back to the education sphere, and present it in a way that our teaching artist can digest and apply, as well as I think there are multitude of theaters and other arts organizations that education funding is strong. Everyone wants an education program.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Sure.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Everyone is not *equipped* to have an education program or to run education program because there aren't educators who are leading them.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

There's gaps and again, the kids are my motivation. They're the last ones I want to experience a gap in education and knowledge. It impacts them ultimately, when we're not properly equipped and trained in

that way. Being multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, it's really, I don't see a world for me where the arts don't touch everything that I do.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh. That's why I wanted to talk to you because this kind of interweaving that you do is so, at least it seems seamless, but I know that takes great skill and some serious inner wisdom about how to make that happen. The other thing I hear you really pointing at here, and I think this is for a lot of people who love to go back to school. I love that you're getting another master's degree. I mean, I remember asking my partner, I was like, "Could I just be a professional student? Is that a thing?" That's why I went into the arts because I saw a lot of crossover there, but I see you as having a radical sense of inquiry about people and about experience. Can you talk to me about that curiosity? Where does that come from?

**Kelcey Anya':**

That's a great question. I don't know.

**Sarah Greenman:**

That is a totally fair answer.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I don't know a time where I wasn't like this which is so funny. As inquisitive as I am, I'm not a question asker. I don't ask questions.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Huh.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I'm really observant, but I don't ask questions because I operate from the place of, "You're going to tell me what you want me to know and I don't want you to feel necessarily obligated to share something you're not ready to share."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh, interesting.

**Kelcey Anya':**

One, two, I'm just very observant. Even things you don't say, I'll probably pick up one just by watching and engaging with you long enough.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I'm very discerning of people's spirits, energy, just who they are. I can read a room very, very, very well. I think that's why people feel safe around me.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. The gift.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I'm not going to push unless I feel led to. I want to push you to challenge you, but I don't want to push you to hurt you.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah, of course.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I always wondered why, I guess this was the one question I had and I think that's how I frame interactions with people, why people do the things that they do or, why people act the way that they act. I think that's what sparked my interest in psychology and I'm just a naturally empathetic person. I think the two of those merge as well, if I could understand why you're, I don't have to agree with it, but if I could understand why you operate the way you operate, it allows for me to extend a deeper level of empathy.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

For better or for worse, sometimes it's to a fault. Sometimes I have to work through not invalidating how I feel just because I can understand why someone did what they did, and not invalidating the impact it had on me, despite me understanding why you did what you did or said what you said or whatever. That has been this cosmic balance of ensuring that I'm taking care of myself, the way I take care of other people as well.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. Talk to me about how activism sort of laces its way into your work. I mean, I see you as somebody who's moving in a lot of activist directions. I also just saw that you were brought in as Managing Director

of Artemisia Theater in Chicago, which is a feminist theater organization. Also, just your work as a black woman and as an educator, I see there being a lot of crossroads at which you sort of stand at, a lot of intersections.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. I think that that's it, I stand at a lot of intersections. By default, my presence in certain spaces is radical, which blows my mind, but it is. I had to realize that me walking into certain rooms, is an act of rebellion.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Just by existing. For better or for worse, here I am, but I'm like, "Well, I'm here. I may as well shake some shit up."

**Sarah Greenman:**

I'm so happy that you're here to shake shit up.

**Kelcey Anya':**

If I'm here, I may as well ruffle little feathers on my way out the door. I think if your feathers are ruffled, then you are open to considering a perspective outside of your room.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yes.

**Kelcey Anya':**

If my presence in certain spaces and my presence does not do anything to you, we have much deeper stuff that we need to uncover and unpack here because I recognize what that does in certain spaces. Those who are unimpacted by it, we got some digging to do here. We got a little more work to do. I prefer your feathers to be ruffled because at least at that point you're acutely aware of the shift in the dynamics that need to happen in this place. I think standing at the crossroads of, I grew up in the south too, I grew up outside of New Orleans, deep south in the country, 40 minutes from the Gulf of Mexico.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.



**Kelcey Anya':**

Deep, deep south. There are a lot of interesting experiences that I had, a lot of racism that I encountered. I recognized that the racism that I encountered, pales in comparison to a lot. I recognized that I came from a good family and I came from an educated family. A lot of the things that I experienced were more micro than macro, not to negate the experiences, but understanding that it could have been worse-

**Sarah Greenman:**

I see.

**Kelcey Anya':**

... growing up. That informs a lot of the race based work that I do. Aside just from being a black woman and seeing the state of the country and this world, but personal experiences. I'm really big on having those experiences come forth in a way that is not how they have been traditionally done in the past. I am so over trauma porn, I am so over. I don't need to see another slave movie ever again.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Ever.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I don't. I don't need to see another one. I don't need to quite frankly see another civil rights movie either again, because my grandparents lived through it.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

What I do want to see though, is the inner workings and the nuances of how we're still facing Jim Crow in 2022.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Sure.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I want to show how these experiences impact us in the workplace that is desegregated. In your mind you think that there is nothing happening and there are, talk about how the Crown Act is still being passed all over this country.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yes. Oh my gosh, yes.

**Kelcey Anya':**

How out of the way I'm literally wearing my hair right now is illegal in some states.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Those are the things. I grew it extremely matriarchal family. My great-grandfather passed along before I was born. My great-grandmother was the matriarch and she had five girls and two boys. While my immediate family has a lot of boys, I'm the only girl, the extended family had a lot of girls. I have a lot of girl cousins. We were really close knit. I was just around a lot of girls, all the time. Then in my immediate family, there were certain things that were male-dominant that I did not necessarily agree with. It would be things like, "Come help me cook." "Okay, cool. That's fine. I'd love to help you cook," but the boys get to sit and watch TV and I was like, "No. We're all cleaning these greens. Are y'all not eating?" I don't know where that came from. I just was always like that. It challenged my family quite a bit because everyone just went with the status quo and I never did. Out of the womb I was like, "Eh." I didn't have the language for feminism. I didn't have a language for womanism. I didn't know what it was. I just knew I didn't like it and it was unequal.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Sure. Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I just knew that wasn't fair and I did not like it. Wanting to learn to cut the grass and I couldn't because it was a boy thing.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I was like, "I don't want to do it all the time. I just want to know how." I refuse to be a damsel. Teach me how to cut my grass, teach me how to change my tire. If my tire blows on the side of the road and I'm by myself, I at least want to know how to change it. Would I prefer to call a man to come change it? Absolutely. I'm still a Southern belle. Do I want to be able to if none is available? Yes.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I love how you make the distinction between *damsel* and *Southern belle*.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yes. Yes. I am a Southern belle. I don't like to get dirty, but I just need you to know that I can.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I can get dirty.

**Kelcey Anya':**

That's all. That has poured into my work. I had a saying I used to say all the time is that people don't want to talk about, especially a nation's trauma, but they'd be willing to watch, which is why we have the copious amount of movies that we do.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh my gosh. I totally agree.

**Kelcey Anya':**

No one wants to talk about how egregious the Holocaust is that we've talked about it at length compared to slavery, but they'll watch *Schindler's List*. They'll watch *Boy in the Stripe Pajamas*.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. As you were talking about that, I was thinking about the conversation I had last fall with Torie Wiggins about this tendency from American media and entertainment to capitalize on black trauma in terms of the stories we tell. She was pointing out in our interview, "I want to tell stories about black thriving and about black joy at its essence."

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yes. I want to talk about joy.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I'm ready.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I want to talk about the things that make us laugh. I want to talk about the fact that you could pull black people from all over this country and say one thing and we all get it, despite not being a monolith. I want to be able to explain that while there are so many shared experiences, we are still not the same. We are still not the same. My sister that I am here in Chicago with, is a sister by love, not by blood. She grew up in the Midwest. I grew up in the south. It's so interesting the differences when we talk about certain things, but also the similarities that we have. It's like, "Why do we have the same exact childhood?" We also had a very, very, very different childhood at the same time. I think that's a nuance that a lot of people don't understand. I would love to be able to stage something like that, those things where the audience laughs together at certain parts, and then you hear like trickles of laughter because it only hit a certain type.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Right, only affects a few folks.

**Kelcey Anya':**

It only affects a few. That is who I am. I'm big on storytelling and want the stories to come alive. If we're going to tell the trauma, let it be from our mouth and not-

**Sarah Greenman:**

Oh yes.

**Kelcey Anya':**

... someone else's. Particularly thinking about an up and coming opera that is happening right now, that is told from a fictional white woman's perspective about a very real individual who was killed. I don't know if you know anything about it, but the Emmett Till opera.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. I have heard.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. She wrote it about a white woman in college who was hearing about what was happening. It's centering not only a white woman, but a white woman who didn't even exist, was not-

**Sarah Greenman:**

Wasn't real.

**Kelcey Anya':**

... involved in any way, shape, or form with what happened. I'm like, "Emmett Till is still very much alive."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Right.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Emmett would very much still be alive and thriving right now at this age. The fact that our stories, oftentimes get told out of someone else's mouth and experience, it's just-

**Sarah Greenman:**

It's egregious.

**Kelcey Anya':**

... Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

It's violence, I think.

**Kelcey Anya':**

It is.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I think it's not a very nuanced and new kind of violence, but it is a kind of violence.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I would love to hear from you, what is the most important story to be telling in this moment?

**Kelcey Anya':**

Oh wow. I think it's a story that's most important to you. I don't know if I can say that there is an overarching important story, because they're all important and they're all differently important. I think it's what is driving you? What is pushing you? What is fueling you? What pissed you off? What makes you cry? What makes you laugh? That is the story that needs to be told. That's actually how I ended up birthing Roe V US with Artemisia. I was having a conversation about all of the attempts to overturn Roe V Wade happening around the country and what I was intentional about and having that conversation, it started to become a morality conversation of what was right and what was wrong. I was like, "Quite frankly, my opinions on what is right and what is wrong, does not matter here." The fact of the matter is they're doing this without taking to account the stories of the actual individuals who had to make these decisions. That is what Roe V US is. It's the stories of the people who actually had to make the decision. Shocking right?

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

What a concept, that we actually care about uplifting the stories of the individuals that we're amplifying real people. I think that's the story. Amplify the actual individuals whose story is about. Rather than in inserting your own opinions, perspectives, morality clause, whatever.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I think this thing gets to the heart of white supremacy structure, which is that white folk think they own, or have agency over the stories of black folk, disabled folk, queer folk, just the kind of hubris is overwhelming.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. When I made the decision to go back full throttle as an artist, the first thing that I did was a summer program with Stella Adler in New York. I remember being in classes and being like, "What makes you think you can write that?" People would be like... and I'm like, "This is not an attack on your ability to create good work." To write that content though.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

"Well, I like it. I'm passionate about it." "Okay. How about you kick your funds or join a writing team of other individuals that are actually representative of this topic? What makes you think that you single handedly, anyone?" I'm not going to write an Asian American story. I know nothing about it. I'm not going to write an atheist or agnostic story. I know nothing about it. I can't. I recognize that I can't. What makes people think that they can't, that just blows my mind.

**Sarah Greenman:**

And that there's a structure around it that will publish it, and or produce it, and or say, "Oh yeah," like the Emmett Till opera that you're speaking about. There's a structure around that story that gives it a pathway to the ears, hearts, and minds of the people around us. It's problematic through and through.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Right. I think people need to understand that it's the structures. It's the systems that need to be dismantled because they thought because they were hiring black opera singers and crew, that it was feeding into the diversity, except you're now putting these creators in a tough position, because do they take the job?

**Sarah Greenman:**

In a position of harm too.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. In a position of harm, but then they're also like, "Do they take the job?"

**Sarah Greenman:**

Right.

**Kelcey Anya':**

They need the money.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Sure.

**Kelcey Anya':**

It's going to blow up, unfortunately, because of the systems around it or, do they stand on a moral high ground? When's the next time they'll be cast in a lead in an opera as a black opera singer?

**Sarah Greenman:**

This is the reason I love your work as a multidisciplinary artist, because I see you sort of approaching the arts at all levels, at the structural level, at the leadership level, at the education level, at the actual creation and ideation level. To have not only a skillset that supports that, but a mind that is that expansive, is so exciting.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I've had this conversation with quite a few friends, especially in New York, who are like, "We should just create our own shit. F the system. F the man. We're trying create our own stuff," blah blah. I'm like, "I mean, yeah. If you want me to direct something, act in something, cool. I'm down for it. We don't have the capital for that." That's where my mind goes immediately because I'm a part of several stalled projects right now in New York City, because of funding. They're like, "Well, I just don't want to deal with it. We'll just do." I'm like, "So this passion project, which is great, is now going to take you years to put up, that a single grant can probably get it up in less than a year, but you don't want to deal with the system? I, on the other hand, love entering into rooms and then just flipping tables. That is who I am. I will help you build from the ground up too." I'm going in, I'm going to play the game. I play the long game.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Then I'm going to flip a table. At this point, I don't hide that. I used to hide that. I used to be very safe and very cute and coy, and then I'd get in and they'd be like, "What the heck?"

**Sarah Greenman:**

"Wait, what are we doing?"

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah, no, I tell you up front. I don't know why they still choose to hire me. Then when I flip a table, I'm like, "Are you shocked? I told you this in my interview."

**Sarah Greenman:**

I said, I was going to do this, right? You think that's the special medicine you offer? I was going to ask you, what do you think the medicine is that you offer? I think that might be a clue to some of it.

**Kelcey Anya':**

That might be it. I think that that is a bit of it. I approach everything that I do in love. I think that is my biggest medicine. Even if I don't agree, even when I'm going to challenge you, even when I know that I am likely about to piss you TF off, I do it in love and I do it intentionally. I think that is my medicine



because I'm methodical and intentional in all that I do. I think that is why I've had the success that I have had.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I have some great individuals that I know. We can chop it up or whatever. If we get on a particular topic, we're going to go toe to toe. I think because of the respect and love that we both bring to the situation, we know we can do this and then still go have a drink later and it not be a problem. We know that when I'm flipping a table, it's because that table is defunct and we need a new one. I brought the supplies to build another one. I mean, I didn't just destroy your table and leave it there. I'm helping rebuild it. I come in with this love and then is intent to make the space safe for all. And the willingness to put in the work to help build better systems, I had to realize that I am not one to be in many places for the long haul. I'm very much a, "I'm going to come in, I'm going to destroy shit. I'm going to help you begin to rebuild it. I'm going to give you the tools to finish, and I'm out."

**Sarah Greenman:**

You're a catalyst.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. I see that as catalytic energy, which is so beautiful, because we really need that. We need the courage. I think part of being a catalyst, is having the kind of heart. That's that love you talk about. The courage to believe in a future and also communicate the beauty of that future, to who you're working with, which is part of your storytelling gift.

**Sarah Greenman:**

We'll be right back with my guest, Kelcey Anya'.

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**Sarah Greenman:**

My guest today is multidisciplinary artist, educator, and disruptor, Kelcey Anya'. We're talking about what it means to play the role of catalyst within our current structures. I keep thinking of how so many activists and change makers, turn to the arts as a way to communicate the power and importance of their work for right relationship in the world. The great late playwright, Lorraine Hansberry once said, "I care. I care about it all. It takes too much energy not to care. The why of why we are here, is an intrigue for adolescence. The how, is what must command the living, which is why I have lately become an insurgent again."

Why do you think stories, I mean, I see you in dance and theater and storytelling, you have such an expansive understanding of what needs to happen. Why are you putting your eggs in the arts basket?

**Kelcey Anya':**

I think it's just because I'm an artist. I saw this Facebook post a long time ago and I wish I would've saved it. It was kind of adorable, but also hit me in the feels. This mom took a picture of a note that her daughter had written and it was sitting on her nightstand. I think her daughter was asleep and she came in and she saw it. It was like, "For better or for worse, I am an artist whether I like it or not." The little girl scribbled in pencil color. I was like, "Mood. Mood." Whether I like it or not, for better or for worse, this is who I am. I have the educational background, the know-how, the skillset to run corporate America if I wanted to.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I know you do.

**Kelcey Anya':**

My mom is a very business, corporate woman and she's like, "You could flip corporate America on its head. You could run." I was like, "I could, I don't want to." I could, I tried it. It was cute. The money was cool. I liked the structure of the day to day. I am structural, and so the artist in me and the structure loving type A person in me, clash a lot. I appreciated those things. I was unhappy.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I was unfulfilled. I was like, "Why am I doing this?" I put all my eggs in the arts basket, simply because I'm an artist and accepting that, was the best thing that I could have done. Accepting that is why I was able to move to Chicago on a whim and be working for one of the most prestigious ballet companies in the world. It's why, within six months, I'm the Managing Director of a theater company and within a year, a show of mine is being produced because I made the decision to be like, "You are an artist. Full stop."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

"Through and through." Yes, I put in the work and I hit the ground. I hit the pavement, but things also just come to me, because I accepted that. I allow for those things to come to me and then use my determinant on what to accept.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. What would you say to folks who know in their heart of hearts ,that they are a creative soul, that they are indeed an artist, but have just not gotten to the place where they can accept that that is a reality of their life, or have been told that that is not valued?

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. Well, one, it is insanely valued. I use the pandemic as a marker for that because what did everyone literally turn to?

**Sarah Greenman:**

Art and stories and TV.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Art, stories.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Shows.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Books. Literally, artistic mediums took over for two solid years. Yes, we could not do things live necessarily, but for two solid years, the arts were the thing that everyone touched. If you ever think that it's not valuable, think back to 2020 and 2021.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

The second thing is, I think it's important for people to recognize that there is a difference between having an affinity towards creativity and being a creator.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Mm.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I think it is important for people to reconcile that with themselves first, before they're like, "I'm just going to quit my job and move states," like I did. I literally just quit my job. I had no backup. I had no nothing, but I knew that it was going to happen. I knew as a creative, I was going to figure it out because we're natural hustler. I also recognize that I am a creative. I am a creator. Everything in my life goes along with that. One, I want people to recognize you love to paint, draw, take a dance class, maybe audition for a community show, these are valuable. These are great. Is it something that you are passionate enough about out to let your entire world revolve around it? Or is it a hobby? There's nothing wrong with it being a hobby.

**Sarah Greenman:**

No, that's a huge piece of how we are human and can understand ourselves and find joy in our lives.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Exactly. Know that it's a hobby.

**Sarah Greenman:**

You don't have to commodify everything. That's the other thing I'm so tired of everyone being like, "Oh, you make really nice earrings. You should make that your new job." It's like, "Well."

**Kelcey Anya':**

People ask me all the time why I won't do makeup. I'll do it for a friend. I'll do it for a situation here or there. You can pay me, but I probably won't charge you. That's why I won't be a makeup artist. As great as I am at it, I need something creative that's mine. It's just for me. If you are like, "I know in my heart, not of hearts, my soul, my body and spirit that I'm creator, that this is it," do it. You just got to do it.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I was doing it before I accepted it.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah, me too.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Just do it. You'll soon be able to more easily accept it when you realize, "Oh." I packed up after grad school with a month and a half worth of rent and I moved to New York City. I was like, "All right homegirl, you got a month to figure out how you paying the rest of this rent. Let's go."

**Sarah Greenman:**

I love it. I love that about you.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Artists. Thank you.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I'm telling you, like when I saw it, I was like, "Holy shit, this is going to be great."

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yep. I did it and you know what? Within a month I was performing as a backup dancer. I was taking classes at Alvin Ailey with Ronald K. Brown, EVIDENCE, a dance company. I was interning for an off Broadway theater company because I was like, "This is it." The point in which you realize this is it, no backup, are you willing to grind and to hustle? I have zero qualms. I'm thankful I'm in a place where I don't have to do this anymore. I was telling my sister, "I have zero qualms with going back to Starbucks where I can make sure I have consistent income while I go do the things until that."

**Sarah Greenman:**

I think that's the thing I keep talking with my partner about. I'm like, "If this fails, or if I'm unable to do this higher wire act without a net, I'm a real good bartender. It's going to be okay."

**Kelcey Anya':**

Exactly. We'll be okay. We'll be okay. Education became more of a career for me, but it started off as a consistent check.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Kelcey Anya':**

It was nice that I was doing arts education. It didn't start off as the thing I was going to do. It was like, "Oh, teaching art is a thing? Tell me more. Oh, so I can consistently get paid while I go try to do a show or I go try to do this thing or do that. I like kids."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah. The thing I also hear you pointing at Kelcey, is twofold, is a high capacity for risk.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yes.

**Sarah Greenman:**

And a comfort level with the unknown.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

That's a really interesting duo to add to your life as a multidisciplinary artist.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I've always had a high capacity for risk. Risk I can do. The unknown thing, I have a very strong relationship with God because that is the only way that I personally get through ADF, this unknown BS. I'm in that season where contracts are ending.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

There's a gap between new contracts and I'm like, "All right." For me, my spirituality is how I level set. For me, it's me being able to be like, "Okay, this is what I know to be true. This is who I am. This is what I believe. This is how I know that things going to work out." I also have a track record of things always working out so we're going to squash anxiety. We're going to pray about this. We're going to go about our day.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

You have not, *not* had what you needed, so what makes you think you're not going to have it now?

**Sarah Greenman:**

See, it's so interesting to hear you say that. I love that yours comes in the form of religion and a really God centered world and mine, while I would say I'm not religious, but I'm really deeply rooted in sort of a Celtic eco spirituality. To me, it's like, "Mama Earth has been here. She doesn't need me to make her turn round. I know that this is going to be here for me on the other side."

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah. I'll joke around and be like, "Gotta check my track record. Have you been without anything? No? Chill out." I think that can apply in multiple ways. This is how I have to talk to myself. "Have you been hungry? No. Have you been on the streets? No. You going to be all right kid, chill out."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

It's whatever you need, but yes, understanding that that unknown is just a part of this, in addition to that risk. Sometimes I guilty pleasure watch old shows to fall asleep. I was watching Reba one night and her youngest daughter didn't want to go to college. She wanted be a musician and she's like leaving and Reba's giving her an ultimatum and Kyra's like, "College is my safety net?" She was like, "Yes." She's like, "Well, I don't want a safety net."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Hmm.

**Kelcey Anya':**

"If there's a safety net that I know that I can fall and be caught, I need there not to be a net."

**Sarah Greenman:**

Go without a net.

**Kelcey Anya':**

No other choice, but to make it. Wow, I have strong feelings about people going to some type of school, trade school, college, get some type of education in the thing that you want to do. I do have strong feelings about education, concurrently I respect and understand and I think that's how I've operated, at least the last five to seven years of my life of, what's a safety net?

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah.

**Kelcey Anya':**

I don't know what that is.

**Sarah Greenman:**

No. This idea of working without a net is how Jack, my partner, and I when we left Dallas, Texas, and we were like, "We're going to leave a big job. We're going to leave the university system. I'm going to work as a solo entrepreneur, an artist."

**Kelcey Anya':**

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Sarah Greenman:**

He was like, "I'm going to take care of kids and make sure our house is in order." I mean, it was really a moment where we just cut the net away.

**Kelcey Anya':**

You cut the net.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I feel so much freer because of it and much more connected with my actual gifts too. That point that you made about, I know what I do well, I had to get real clear about that if I was going to work without a net.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Then believe in it.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

That's a huge piece of the puzzle that I think you bring to this work and people see that in you. I want to know what is bringing you unadulterated, abject joy right now.

**Kelcey Anya':**



Oh man. What brings me joy? Honestly, living with my sister.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Yeah?

**Kelcey Anya':**

Living with my best friend, living with the person who knows me better than anyone else and being able to do life with her and do the things. Friday, we had a spa day and we're like "Facials, eyebrows, nails, toes. We're just going to do the whole thing. We're going to go out to eat. We're just going to do and just be sisters in the city." Being able to have those moments together and having that person to talk to, who gets you, and is insanely supportive. She's like, "What does one wear to opening night of a show? I need to go shopping so that I can be there front row." These are the things she's like, "I don't get this world at all, but I am fully engaged with it." I'm like, "You want to go see a show?" "Yes. Tell me more. What's happening here?" She's genuinely asking the questions because she's not the creative one, I am. Just being able to share and do life with her at this juncture, when there is so much unknown to have such a constant in my life right now.

**Sarah Greenman:**

I love it. That grounded companionship so important.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yeah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

So beautiful. When does *Roe vs US* go up and where?

**Kelcey Anya':**

Yes. July 14th through the 17th is a workshop. It is going up at Filament Theater here in Chicago, July 14th through the 17th, 7:30 and three o'clock on Sunday.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Awesome. I'm so excited for you. Congratulations on everything that's happening in Chicago for you and elsewhere. It's just so beautiful to see you bloom in such extraordinary ways.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Thank you. Thank you. I'm truly blessed. It's been great. I'm excited for what's to come.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Kelcey, you're just a fucking national treasure.

**Kelcey Anya':**

Oh, Sarah.

**Sarah Greenman:**

*You are.*

**Kelcey Anya':**

Oh, thank you.

**Sarah Greenman:**

You are.

**Kelcey Anya':**

That means a lot.

**Sarah Greenman:**

Thank you for joining us for this conversation. The Collaborative Alchemy podcast is made possible with monthly micro donations from this community. If you like what you hear, please join us at [www.patreon.com/SarahGreenman](http://www.patreon.com/SarahGreenman).