

# ELON ALUMNI'S PODCAST TAKES A LOOK AT THEATER INDUSTRY



**CHARLIE FREEDMAN '20**



**GRACE BARDSLEY '20**



**MAEVE RILEY '20**

Elon alumni created The Systemic Stage podcast to focus on activism and the theater industry

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Just after Grace Bardsley '20 graduated virtually from Elon University last spring, George Floyd's killing sparked the Black Lives Matter protests that took place throughout the summer of 2020. Inspired by the movement, Bardsley decided to take time to examine her own biases and the biases in the theater industry. She did so by creating a podcast, the Systemic Stage.

"In the BLM uproar, I felt a sort of silence in the theater community," Bardsley said. "So I thought, what better way to educate myself and to educate others than to ... reach out to these scholars, these professors, actors, writers, all of these people who explore these issues within our industry, and ask them about it."

After Bardsley posted in Facebook groups about her idea, co-host Maeve Riley '20 and editor and producer Charlie Freedman '20 joined the team, and the three of them have been working on the podcast since July 2020. All three graduated from Elon in 2020 with degrees in fields of performing arts.

"We recognize that we ourselves are privileged in being cis, white women who are college educated, so we try to have conversations that are difficult," Riley said. "Along with every industry that exists right now, theater has its own very specific issues and topics that we need to combat, and we really just mainly need to talk about because a lot of people just don't hear about it."

Though the idea for the podcast came about because of the Black Lives Matter movement, the trio covers all types of activism on top of anti-racism. Recent episodes focused on theatrical intimacy education, addiction and community based theater. They find guests from around the theater industry to talk about their focus within the industry and how to make it a more equitable place.

"We take theater makers and theater scholars and people that specialize in other realms of the theater and we try to interlace their identity with it," Bardsley said. "What is it like for you in this industry, and how can we make it better for you in this industry?"

Bardsley and Riley have been taking advantage of the network they have through Elon to kickstart the podcast. They've recorded interviews with assistant professor of performing arts Kim Shively and current Elon junior and music theater major Kali Clougherty.

"We are fortunate in that we have had access to lots of theater faculty and students at Elon," Riley said. "We started really with our alma mater."



The logo for The Systemic Stage, a podcast about activism and the theater industry.



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**MAEVE RILEY '20**  
CO-HOST

In their most recent episode on Feb. 12, Bardsley and Riley spoke with Clougherty about gun violence on the stage. Clougherty, an alum of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, was a senior in high school when 17 of her classmates and teachers were killed in a mass shooting.

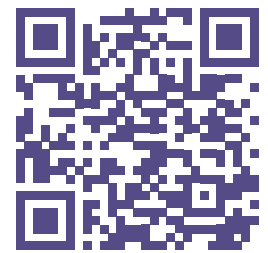
"I knew what we were going to talk about, I just didn't know where the conversation was going to go. But it ended up being really, really fun," Clougherty said. "More fun than I had expected, because I don't necessarily enjoy talking about the situation and just bring back a lot of trauma memories, but it was actually really lighthearted and easy to talk about with them."

Clougherty said going on the podcast was a great experience for her, and she would do it again.

"I didn't even think about it as a podcast, I thought about it as a discussion just about things that we care about," Clougherty said.

As graduates of the class of 2020, it has been difficult for the group to find performing arts work. Since live theater is closed due to the pandemic, they have had to be creative with their involvement in the industry. This

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3. Click the pop-up link

podcast is a way for them to do so.

"That's one of the reasons why we've dedicated so much time and effort into this podcast," Bardsley said. "Because we're like, you know, focusing our efforts and our passions into something when we can't do it in a way that we would like to without the pandemic."

The podcast isn't just something for Bardsley and Riley to do while theaters are closed. The group joked about becoming "podcast famous" but said when it comes down to it, they just want to share the important and educational conversations they've been able to have.

"The ultimate goal for this podcast is to do whatever we can and use our platform to make our industry and our society a more anti-racist, more equitable, more representative place," Bardsley said.

The group also wants to make it clear that the Systemic Stage is not just for theater people. Freedman, whose degree is in music production and recording arts, said even though he's not a "theater nerd," he enjoys and learns a lot from editing the podcast.

"It's been cool for me, and it's been really rewarding to learn about stuff that I really didn't have any knowledge about," Freedman said.

As of now, the co-hosts and their editor live at home in different states due to the pandemic. The podcast is currently being recorded over Zoom.

The first episode of the podcast was posted on Dec. 31, 2020, but the group has been recording episodes since October. They currently have four episodes available to stream on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.