

Agallamh le Artair Donald, Actair

Interview with Arthur Donald, Actor

Presenter: Angela Mackay



ANGELA

Welcome, Arthur.

ARTAIR

Hello.

ANGELA

First of all, can you tell me when you realised that you wanted to be involved in drama and what inspired your interest?

ARTAIR

Well, I remember it clearly. I was fifteen years old, and I was in our house on Tìree, and I turned to my parents and said to them, "I'm interested in getting involved in drama." They didn't say anything to me for a week afterwards, and I remember my old man coming up to me, and saying, "If you're interested in drama, listen to this man," and it was Caithris na h-Oidhche on Radio nan Gàidheal, and poor Simon, the late Simon MacKenzie, the actor, was talking on the radio.

ANGELA

You come from Tìree. Would you say it's important to you that you're from Tìree, in terms of your dialect and upbringing?

ANGELA

Fàilte ort, Artair.

ARTAIR

Halò.

ANGELA

An innis thu dhomh an toiseach cuin a bha fios agad gur e dràma an rud a bha thu ag iarraidh a dhèanamh agus dè a thòisich d' ùidh ann?

ARTAIR

Uill, tha deagh chuimhne agam air sin. Bha mi còig bliadhna deug a dh' aois, agus bha mi anns an taigh againn ann an Tìriodh, agus thionndaidh mu ri mo phàrantan 's thuir mi riutha, "Tha ùidh agam a bhith an sàs ann an dràma." Cha d' thuir iad guth thugam fad seachdain an uairsin, agus tha cuimhn' agam am bodach agam a' tighinn thugam, 's ag ràdha, "Ma tha ùidh agad ann an dràma, èist ris an fhear seo," agus 's e Caithris na h-Oidhche a bh' ann air Radio nan Gàidheal, agus 's e Sìm bochd nach maireann, Sìm MacCoinnich, am fear-cleasachd, a bha air an rèidio, a' bruidhinn.

ANGELA

'S ann à Tìriodh a tha thu. An canadh tu gu bheil e air a bhith cudromach dhut gur e Tìristeach a th' annad na do dhual-chainnt 's na do thogail?

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ARTAIR

Absolutely, and looking back, I wasn't aware when I was younger just how important it would be to come from Tiree, to be a Tiree man, but I'm very pleased that that's where I'm from, and very proud of it too, and Tiree has had a great influence on my life, and I'd say, that without Gaelic, I wouldn't have had, or have taken as many opportunities as I have, so it's important that I am a Gaelic speaker, and that's given me great riches, I believe, in terms of my work.

ANGELA

You left home when you were seventeen years old and went to Glasgow to study different forms of drama. Can you tell me what you did?

ARTAIR

Well, my excuse for leaving the island so I could do drama was to go to baking college, and I learnt how to bake bread and so on, but at the same time, I attended various drama workshops, all over Glasgow, in the city centre, at the Old Athenaeum, and then I also went to the Scottish Youth Theatre, and also, eventually, I went to the Actors' Lab at Glasgow Arts Centre and I received a lot of encouragement there to go in during the day, to go to auditions and then, eventually, I began to get parts in shows for Mayfest and the Edinburgh Festival. That was a great confidence boost for me.

ARTAIR

Gu dearbha, a' coimhead air ais, cha robh fios agam nuair a bha mi òg cho cudromach 's a' bhitheadh e a bhith a' tighinn à Tiriodh, no a bhith nam Thiristeach, ach tha mi gu math moiteil gur ann às a sin a tha mi, agus gu math pròiseil mu dheidhinn siud cuideachd, agus tha buaidh mhòr aig Tiriodh air a bhith agam na mo bheatha, agus chanainn, gun Ghàidhlig a bhith agam, cha robh mi air an uiread cothroman idir fhaighinn no leantainn, so tha e gu math cudromach gu bheil Gàidhlig agam agus 's e sin a thug dhomh am beartas, tha mi a' smaointinn, a-thaobh an obair agam.

ANGELA

Dh' fhàg thu an taigh 'nuair a bha thu seachd bliadhna-deug agus chaidh thu a Ghlaschu airson dràma a dhèanamh ann an diofar dhòighean. An innis thu dhomh dè a bha thu ris?

ARTAIR

Uill, an leisgeul a bh' agam faighinn air falbh bhon an eilein airson dràma a dhèanamh, 's e gu rachamaid gu colaiste bèicearachd, 's bha mi ag ionnsachadh mar a dhèanainn aran 's rudan, ach aig an aon àm, bha mi a' dol gu diofar bùithtean-obrach dràma, a h-uile h-àite ann an Glaschu, meadhan a' bhaile, aig an Seann Athenaeum, agus an uairsin, bhitheamaid a' dol gu Scottish Youth Theatre, agus, cuideachd, mu dheireadh, chaidh mi chun an Actors' Lab aig Glasgow Arts Centre agus sin far an d' fhuair mi deagh bhrosnachadh a bhith a' dol a-staigh troimh an latha a bhith a' dèanamh auditions agus, an uairsin, mu dheireadh thall, a' faighinn pàirtean anns na shows airson Mayfest agus Fèis Dhùn-Èidinn. Bha sin fìor mhisneachail dhomh.

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ANGELA

And then you went to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to improve your Gaelic.

ARTAIR

Indeed. As I said, I was following the route of drama, but in English at that time, because that was the only way to get the skills, so my Gaelic was getting quite rusty, and when I was twenty years old, I came to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and that brought out the words at the back of my mind, and it gave me a lot of confidence in Gaelic, and then I began to get more opportunities, especially in drama.

ANGELA

And you got the opportunity to play a Gaelic-speaking part in the Gaelic soap, Machair, afterwards.

ARTAIR

Indeed. I got the opportunity to play a little rascal who was called Coinneach, and who was always trying to scam people and always doing "deals", I think. I didn't think he was anything like me, but the best thing about Machair was that not everyone who was involved came from Lewis. They weren't all from Uist or from Tiree. It brought in accents from different islands and different areas, and that was extremely important, and also, it wasn't clear, or rather easy, in those days, to find twenty people from one place who were competent actors. It was hard enough to assemble a cast as it was. There was a lot of talent in the show, and everyone improved over the years too.

ANGELA

Agus chaidh thu an uairsin gu Sabhal Mòr Ostaig gus piseach a thoirt air do chuid Ghàidhlig.

ARTAIR

Gu dearbha. Mar a thuirt mi, bha mi a' leantainn slighe dràma, ach taobh Beurla aig an àm sin, oir sin far an robh na sgilean ri fhaighinn, so, bha a' Ghàidhlig agam a' fàs gu math meirgeach, agus nuair a bha mi fichead bliadhna a dh' aois, thàinig mi gu Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, agus bha sin a' toirt air ais na faclan cùl mo chinn, agus thug sin dhomh misneachd mhòr a-thaobh a' Ghàidhlig, agus an uairsin lean na cothroman ann an dràma gu h-àraid.

ANGELA

Agus fhuair thu cothrom pàirt Ghàidhlig a chluich anns an siabann Gàidhlig, Machair, às dèidh sin.

ARTAIR

Gu dearbha fhèin. Fhuair mi cothrom a bhith a' cluiche bleigeard beag air an robh an ainm Coinneach, can a' feuchainn ri toirt a' char a-mach à feadhainn agus daonnan a' dèanamh "deals", tha mi a' smaointinn. Char robh e idir coltach rium fhìn na mo bheachd, ach an rud a bha math mu dheidhinn Machair, chan e a h-uile duine à Leòdhas a bha an sàs ann. Cha robh a h-uile duine à Uibhist no à Tìriodh. Bha blas bho diofar eileanan agus diofar àiteanan a' tighinn a-staigh ann, agus bha sin gu math cudromach, agus cuideachd, cha robh e follaiseach no furasta anns na làithean sin a bhith a' lorg fichead daoine a bhiodh math gu leòr air cleasachd a dhèanamh às an aon àite. Bha e doirbh gu leòr buidheann a chruinneachadh leis na bh' againn. Bha tòrr tàlainn an lùib a' show, agus dh' fhàs a h-uile duine nas làidir thairis na bliadhnaichean cuideachd.

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ANGELA

You then went to London to learn more skills and later to New York for a while too.

ARTAIR

I had a dream of attending the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute in London and then going to the real school in New York, and then to the one in Los Angeles. Well, early in the nineties, I attended the one in London, and that was great. Then, I enjoyed it so much that, two years later, I went to the one in New York and I was tutored most of the time by their most famous actor, Irma Sandrey, who had been taught by Lee Strasberg himself, so the techniques were very close to his own, which was good, very good for me.

ANGELA

What sorts of things did you learn while you were there?

ARTAIR

You would spend two hours on warm-ups alone, working on your voice, your body and exercising your muscles to warm you up, in the same way as footballers and sportspeople warm up, and then you'd do vocal exercises, specifically geared towards the character you were playing, because there are different types of voices, such as "high female" as it's called, and you talk like this, and then there's a normal female voice and then high male voice and then low male voice too. There are different voices, and you have to do a little training to use your voice in different ways.

ANGELA

Chaidh thu an uairsin a Lunnainn gus barrachd sgilean ionnsachadh agus às dèidh sin, a New York cuideachd airson treiseag.

ARTAIR

Bha bruadar agam gu rachamaid gu Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute ann an Lunnainn agus an uairsin a sgoil cheart ann an New York, agus an uairsin fear ann an Los Angeles. Uill, tràth anns na naochadan, chaidh mi chun am fear ann an Lunnainn, 's bha sin fìor mhath. 'S an uairsin, chòrd e rium cho mòr, dà bhliadhna às dèidh sin, chaidh mi chur am fear ann an New York agus chaidh mo theagasg a' mhòr chuid bhon an tè as ainmeile an sin, Irma Sandrey, agus chaidh ise a theagasg i fhèin, bho Lee Strasberg fhèin, so bha e gu math dìreach bho na dòighean aige fhèin, agus bha e math, fìor mhath dhomhsa.

ANGELA

Dè na seòrsa rudan a dh'ionnsaich thu fhad's a bha thu ann?

ARTAIR

Bhiodh tu a' cur seachad dà uair a thìde dìreach a' dèanamh warm-ups, le do ghuth, le do bhodhaig, a' dèanamh eacarsaichean le na fèithean agad 's gum bi thu a' blàthachadh an àirde, dìreach mar footballers no daoine-spòrs a' blàthachadh an àirde, agus an uairsin, bhiodh tu a' dèanamh eacarsaichean le do ghuth, gu h-àraid a-rèir de an caractar a tha thu a' cluiche cuideachd, oir tha diofar seòrsa guthan ann, mar "high female" mar a tha iad ag ràdh, 's bidh thu a' bruidhinn suas a-seo, agus an uairsin boireannach caran àbhaisteach 's an uairsin fir àrd agus an uairsin fir ìosal cuideachd. Tha diofar guthan ann, agus feumaidh tu rud beag trèanadh a dhèanamh gus an cleachd thu do ghuth ann an diofar dòighean.

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The skills you learnt there help you now in your day-to-day work as you teach drama to other people. What different skills do you have that you now teach?

ARTAIR

When I'm working with young people and children, I often use games that involve movement and running to use up energy, and then, with adults, you don't have to use as many games or exercises to get to the heart of the matter and the topic you are debating or dealing with, so there are different techniques and different ways of communicating with them, and... It's interesting to work with the three groups.

ANGELA

It's obvious that you enjoy your work.

ARTAIR

I'm very lucky. I am, as I say to people, I've been involved in a lot of projects that I've enjoyed, and I'm very lucky. Yeah, I really enjoy my job, and it will give me an opportunity to encourage others in the future, hopefully.

ANGELA

Thank you, Arthur.

ANGELA

Bidh na sgilean sin a dh' ionnsaich thu a-siud ga do chuideachadh a-nise na d' obair làitheil, 's tu a' teagasg dràma do dhaoine eile. Dè na diofar sgilean a th' agad a tha thu a' toirt seachad a-nise?

ARTAIR

Nuair a tha mi ag obair le òigridh agus clann, gu math tric, tha geamaichean gluasad agus ruith ann airson spionnadh a chleachdadh, 's an uairsin, le inbhich, chan fheum thu an uiread seòrsa de gheamaichean no eacarsaichean airson faighinn a-staigh gu cnap na cùise agus an cuspair a tha thu a' deasbad no a' dèiligeadh ris, so tha diofar dòighean ann, 's diofar dòighean a bhith a' bruidhinn riutha cuideachd, agus... Ach tha e inntinneach a bhith ag obair leis an triùir aca.

ANGELA

Tha e follaiseach gu bheil d' obair a' còrdadh riut.

ARTAIR

Tha mi gu math fortanach. Tha mi, mar a chanas mi ri daoine, tha mi air a bhith a' dèanamh tòrr phròiseactan a tha air còrdadh rium, agus tha mi uabhasach fortanach. Yeah, tha an obair agam a' còrdadh rium gu mòr, 's a' toirt cothrom dhomh a bhith a' brosnachadh dhaoine eile san àm ri teachd, tha min dòchas.

ANGELA

Ceud taing, Artair.