Disability Deep Dive Episode 104: Interpreting the Beat: Making Music Visible with Amber Galloway

Jodi Beckstine (00:00:13):

What if music wasn't something you heard, but something you could see, feel, and experience with your whole body? What does it take to make live music truly welcoming when language is part of access, not an add-on? And how does interpretation become art in its own right? That's what we're exploring today on Interpreting the Beat, Making Music Visible with Amber Galloway. This is Disability Deep Dive.

Keith Casebonne (00:00:37):

Welcome to Disability Deep Dive. I'm Keith.

Jodi Beckstine (00:00:39):

And I'm Jodi.

Keith Casebonne (00:00:40):

Before we dive in, we wanted to share that this is our final episode of season two. It has been an incredible season full of thoughtful conversations, powerful stories, voices that continue to shape how we understand disability and culture.

Jodi Beckstine (00:00:54):

We couldn't imagine a better way to close out this season than with today's conversation.

Keith Casebonne (00:00:58):

Oh, indeed. Today we're talking about music, language access, and the power of interpretation to open culture in real time.

Jodi Beckstine (00:01:06):

Our guest is Amber Galloway, an ASL interpreter who has become known around the world for making music performances visually expressive, emotionally grounded, and culturally meaningful for deaf and hard of hearing audiences.

Keith Casebonne (00:01:19):

In this conversation, Amber shares how she approaches rhythm and emotion, what meaningful access at concerts really looks like, and how her work is helping shift expectations across the music industry.

Jodi Beckstine (00:01:30):

Let's get into it with Amber Galloway.

Keith Casebonne (00:01:34):

Hi, Amber. Welcome to Disability Deep Dive. You've become known worldwide for making music performances accessible in powerful, creative ways. Can you introduce yourself, share how you first got into ASL interpretation, and what drew you specifically to music?

Amber Galloway (00:01:51):

Sure. Hi, my name is Amber Galloway, and I am a white presenting female that's a plus size female with pink spiky hair and black and white glasses, as well as a black shirt on with lace and my tattoos kind of show through all of it. So I have been a sign language interpreter for over 25 years now, specifically focusing on the entertainment world, music, and interpreting several different festivals and concerts all over the world. And so I got involved really because of what the deaf community told me they wanted. I grew up with deaf people. I had a really interesting story. And it wasn't like I had... I was not a CODA, I'm not a SODA, nothing like that. But I literally had several different meetings throughout my life that has pulled me into the deaf and hard of hearing world. And then also myself, I identify as a hard of hearing/deaf person, working as an interpreter still, where I lost a significant amount of hearing as well as my eyesight. And I have tremors, significant tremors from contracting spinal meningitis on a college campus while I was working as an interpreter. So that kind of shifted also a lot of my way of being as well as how I just operate in the world.

Jodi Beckstine (00:03:25):

Well, many... I had no idea of your backstory. It's very interesting. Most people, when they think of accessibility at concerts, they usually think seats, ramps, the ability to get in and out of a restroom, but they don't understand the access to language, especially at a music concert. So can you explain the importance of language access and your role in that as a music interpreter?

Amber Galloway (00:03:58):

Well, really, a lot of times people have the wrong view and concept of what deafness is. They hear deaf and then they think, well, that person cannot hear a sound, but we're on a spectrum. So we have all different kinds of hearing loss, but at the same time, it still doesn't limit our ability to be a part of the world. And music is the one thing in the world that brings everybody from all races, all backgrounds, all religions, all of that together and all disabilities together. It's the one place that I feel like music doesn't discriminate, but the humans that provide it do.

Keith Casebonne (00:04:36):

Yeah. So true. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (00:04:37):

Yeah.

Amber Galloway (00:04:39):

And so that's kind of where my role has changed a lot in educating the people that are providing these different places, these events, these different situations. And so it's about educating. It's about the importance of not thinking in terms of limitations, because always they're like, why does a deaf person go to a concert? Why do you go to a concert? Why do you as a hearing person go to a concert? It's not just to hear. It's also to see, it's also to feel, to smell, to dance, to move, to feel that energy, because the energy is palpable. No matter what disability you have, you still, it's palpable that you have that energy that flows through in those spaces. And especially when everybody goes to those spaces to have one common goal and it's to enjoy the artist, that musician, the band, what have you. And each person has different journeys to get to those places. But the problem that I often see is that there's so many barriers to get to those places, and it starts months before.

(00:05:50):

So if I want to purchase tickets to a concert, and I don't know the venue, and I haven't gone to that venue before or know about it within our community, because we all talk about which venues provide interpreters and which don't, I know that there's going to be a fight because there's always going to be pushback. And I don't think that we ever have to have pushback because no other person out there has necessarily a lot of pushback like we have with the deaf and hard of hearing world. I know that there's also a lot of mobility pushback in a lot of different spaces, and I've seen it, and I've also advocate a lot for that.

(00:06:25):

But what's interesting is that when I've seen what I have experienced, they often will have the mobility already set up, the mobility thought out, the plan, the seats are already arranged, but they don't really ever think about deafness or where the interpreter needs to be placed or how the deaf person is going to actually see the artist. So there's always these awkward positions and places that they put the deaf and hard of hearing community, us, when we're attending the shows. And it's never a forethought. It's always a last minute add or it's never advertised like, yes, we're going to provide. So if providers, if venues, and if concerts just went ahead and said, "You know what? We're hosting a concert. We have lights, we have mics, we have ramps, we have spaces, we have seats, we have stand-only, and we have interpreters," if it became automatic, then I could freely buy and go to whatever concert I want to, but I don't have that. Neither does a lot of my friends and family and people who I love that love going to music.

(00:07:37):

So it's a missed opportunity for venues as well as all of the different production companies out there that don't automatically provide. And so I consider it proactive interpreting or proactive access. So let's think outside the box bigger than yourself. And because I think that we are in that world where we think just what's affecting us, we can never really see outside of that. We can never experience outside of that. So sometimes I think that it's good if you start talking to people saying, "What kind of access do you want?" Because each person has different ways that they want to be able to access information.

(00:08:18):

And so that's when I'm thinking about like, when you're producing something, it just needs to go on the budget line. It just needs to be a part of what you're doing and make it normal. I want to make it so normal that when there's not an interpreter, people get mad, instead of us getting mad two or three months before because we can't even access the services. And it literally can become a fight or it's just ignored. So sometimes people, some of my friends, I just got a letter from one of my friends that she was trying to get this one venue and she kept emailing and emailing and they just completely ignored her. And she had purchased the tickets. And so finally on the day she shows up and they're like, "Oh, we don't know what you're talking about. We'll just refund you."

Keith Casebonne (00:09:02):

Wow.

Amber Galloway (00:09:03):

So they just gave the money back. And the thing is that, okay, so that one artist she wanted to go see, it was her favorite artist, she couldn't obtain those services, so she couldn't see that artist. And what if that artist passed away? So that experience is lost. And those are the kinds of things that I hope that with me talking in different platforms, educating a lot of people, especially in the production world, letting them know, "Hey, we are an entire community that wants to be welcomed and we're neglected and forgot about." Just as much as all of the other disabilities, they're not ever thought about. It's always at the last minute or, "Oh, this is good enough." And most of the time it's ran from able-bodied people not ever thinking outside of themself or even talking to people with disabilities. And I think that it's so important that we engage with those that have disabilities, that we're constantly thinking outside of the box. I'm always like, "How can we improve these services? What can we do better?" And I often am in rooms where people will tell me how I'm going to access my own language. And so it's really frustrating when I have a whole room of hearing people telling me how I can obtain access where I'm like, "Y'all don't ever do that."

Keith Casebonne (00:10:21):

Right, right, right.

Jodi Beckstine (00:10:22):

Yeah.

Keith Casebonne (00:10:23):

Wow.

Jodi Beckstine (00:10:24):

And I think the general public doesn't even think about it. They just assume it's covered under ADA. If they need, it'll be there. And it's just not even a thought, that they assume that it comes par for the course and it's going to be there if needed.

Amber Galloway (00:10:39):

And the biggest thing is they often assume, just like with the Oscars and the Grammys and all that stuff, they think the artists are bringing their own or the actors are bringing their own, and that's not the case at all. It's very rare that artists actually will make their concerts inclusive. And so that's where I think it really needs to make a change is in the management team and when they're planning the tours to carve that into a part of the tour. And I think that if that changes, that's where we can get it. Because most of the time we get shut down from the managers, and most of the time it's the tour managers that will turn our lights off, will shut us down, those kind of things. And we add a level of communication that makes it even better. It's not taking away from anything.

Jodi Beckstine (00:11:33):

Absolutely not.

Amber Galloway (00:11:33):

It's not taking away any of the attention or anything. It just makes the community love the artists more, and then that makes people buy more tickets. So at the end, there's always an ROI. There's always. And so if you do it from the very beginning, your ROIs are going to increase no matter what, because I've seen it. I've seen it in the production world. I work with one company very close that they, during COVID, we had lots of talks and I said, "Just provide for the headliners proactively. And then if deaf people are there, boom, they have headliners no matter what." And oftentimes the deaf people that are attending these festivals, of course websites are not always that accessible, nor are they easy to find and navigate through, so a lot of times they don't know where to actually request. I have gone on websites to try to request, and it's like you're searching for hours and hours trying to find somebody to contact, and then you contact the ticket people and they don't know. They have no clue at all.

(00:12:38):

So what was really cool about working with this production company, they provide for all of their music festivals now after those talks. And there has not been one festival that didn't have a deaf person in attendance. And either they found out and now they're repeat buyers and they keep going back and now they know how to request. And then on top of that, not only are they requesting and getting those tickets, they're getting their friends, their family, because all of the other people that might not necessarily have the disability are also investing in that company. So the ROI is always going to increase when you welcome us. You just have to welcome us because we're an entire community that wants to partake, but it's literally the people who create these are the ones that are making the barriers.

Jodi Beckstine (00:13:30):

Yeah. Wow.

Keith Casebonne (00:13:32):

Yeah. Wow. That's incredible. It's so true. It's been shown in so many other markets and businesses and whatnot that when you increase accessibility, you increase profits, you increase value, you increase so many things. And it still seems to be so hard for some people to understand that concept, which is very frustrating. Yeah.

Amber Galloway (00:13:53):

Yeah.

Keith Casebonne (00:13:55):

Well, watching you interpret isn't just watching ASL. It feels literally like the music is like you're watching music come alive, come alive visually. How do you approach capturing rhythm, tone, and emotion in your interpretations?

Amber Galloway (00:14:13):

Well, that all, again, started from my strong roots in the deaf community and who I learned from. So because this is, again, even those that are in our community also can disagree. So when I was in the interpreter training program, I would go to class and they would tell me music is not a part of the deaf world. But then I would have parties on Friday night where all my deaf friends and myself, we would all hang out on Friday nights, there would be about 20 of us, and we would all sit around signing music to each other.

Keith Casebonne (00:14:46):

Nice.

Amber Galloway (00:14:47):

And so I'm going to class and they're telling me, "No, it doesn't exist," and then I'm living it and I see it existing. And I'm like, "What is going on here? I don't understand." And so I would talk to my friends and I'm like, "I don't understand." And they're like, "Well, they just don't live and breathe in our community." I'm like, "But they're a part of our community." So it happens. There's going to be disagreements in all different pockets of our society. So that's kind of where it started, where it was this clash of music is not a part of our world, but then I was living and breathing it. And so I'm like, "But that's not true." So then I was like, okay. And I would go to events and I would see interpreters not be as successful as they could have because music is more than words. So if you think of just words, that's just one layer. The musician has thought about every different layer that they're putting upon that song.

(00:15:43):

And also, it was recent, one of my friends sent me this thing about Cynthia from Wicked, how she thinks about how she's going to say each word and the tone that she's going to use and whether it's going to be a specific vibrato and stuff. And so the fact that as an artist, she's thinking about every word and how it's going to come off her mouth, we also have to think about that. And I see that it not happen as successfully as it could because I saw it where my deaf friends and I, we would all go to different concerts and we'd watch these interpreters and they would just sign the words and then put their hands down and sign the words. And I'm like, "What is happening?" And so at the time I was married to a person who was profoundly deaf and I would start to explain, because he would see the guitar and he'd say, "Okay, I see the guitar. I see people screaming and clapping. But what does it mean?" And I'm like, okay. So we would sit there and we would talk about how the different riffs happen. And I started talking about riffs and it wasn't a part of their world, my circle of friends.

(00:16:48):

And the reason why, and actually again, it goes back to the basics of if you're deaf, hearing people don't feel like they need to teach you music. There are a lot of deaf education programs out there that they're like, "Oh, well, we don't need to teach the music. It's not necessarily." Why? Why not? It doesn't discriminate. You can teach music and you can think outside of the box, teaching deaf and hard of hearing people a different approach. It doesn't mean it's going to be exactly the same way that you teach hearing people, but it can be done. So a lot of my friends had never even heard of what a riff was. So we would have talks about it and then I would say, "No, no, no, this is what it looks like." And so I would show them and they were like, "That, that's what we want to see." And so I just started taking parts of those things that they told me.

(00:17:33):

And then I've also seen a lot of deaf performers that at the time they would get on stage and I was blown away because I'm like, "That's what interpreting should look like." But then the problem was is that we had this strict rule of interpreters can't make too much attention to distract from the performer, but at the same time, don't draw too much attention. So you need to minimalize what you're doing. But at the same time, when you do that, it also takes away from that. So there's this fine balance of trying to inhabit and become the artist without stealing from the artist. And there is ways that you can do it. And so it's a lot of tweaking, trying to figure out is that too much or is this not, and what is really important and what's not important. Meaning because we have to make those ethical decisions on what are we going to provide because of whatever we can hear or whatever is being given.

(00:18:28):

So what I often do for me, based off of how my journey and what I have walked through as a person that has hearing loss is that I feel the bases, I feel the deep ones, but the highs I don't hear. And a lot of my cohorts and my friends and all that that are also deaf, they're like, "We don't feel that at all," because it gets erased, you can't really feel that. So whenever there's those higher pitched sounds, I want to make sure that I'm going to show those more and not show all of the bases as much because I can feel them. I can literally feel them along in my body. And so based off of what the deaf community told me they want to see, and based off of what I've experienced and how I have experienced music and the journey I've had, I just kind of collected all that and I started teaching it. I collected it, I started signing and then the deaf people were like, "Oh my gosh, this is what we want. We want more of it. I feel connected for the first time. I've never seen music like that before." And so that's kind of how my style came to be.

(00:19:36):

And then I started teaching it to other people. And each person has their own way of showing instruments, but it all has to do with one of the parameters of ASL, which is our non-manual markers, right? It's NMMs. So whenever I have high sounds and things that are on a certain high frequency, my body scrunches up, my face squeezes up, and I can show those high, high pitches. When it's a deeper, deeper sound, my body opens up. I kind of look like a bass guitar person, and then I get this really soft face, but then I do this puffiness on my cheeks, my cheeks puff out to show how the bass is doing, but then I still am showing the flow. So it's like boom, boom, boom, boom. And my hand kind of moves with that flow to show the frequency of that sound coming off the guitar.

(00:20:27):

I don't know how to play any instruments at all. My bucket list is the drums, but I've never had time to actually practice. But I have watched how sounds look like, if that makes sense. I have watched the sounds come off and I can see how the sound comes off the guitar and I can hear it and I can correlate that with the movements that I make. But at the same time, in the deaf community, one of the parameters is the non-manual markers, but also how they also handle sound. I watched deaf storytellers tell all of these stories. So I would pick apart the ASL that had been always existing. So I didn't invent anything. People would say, "She invented a new way." No, I didn't. I took what was already there and applied it to the different sounds based off of all the deaf storytellers out there that I could find, and then worked on how to make that more visually clear. And that's what I still try to do and try to perfect it all the time.

Keith Casebonne (00:21:29):

Wow. That's just so brilliant. That's just so brilliant. I loved every word of that answer. That's so cool. That's so cool.

Jodi Beckstine (00:21:39):

I enjoy watching you when the artists will come up right next to you because the artist is so enamored by what you're doing and you're just playing off each other and it's amazing to watch.

Amber Galloway (00:21:51):

And oftentimes it's funny because I don't always give them the eye contact because I want to stay as that conduit of the energy. And so sometimes like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, for instance, he just would not leave me alone. And my team was telling me he was there, that Anthony Kiedis was there. And I was like, "I know, but I'm here and I don't want to take that experience from the deaf people because that's their favorite artist. And I don't want to take it and make it become like the Amber and Anthony show." So that when he came down, I gave him the nod, "You can watch me." I nod and I'm like, "Okay, I know you're here." And then I still tried to maintain that conduit of communicating and having that flow because I didn't want to disrupt that energy that come through.

Keith Casebonne (00:22:38):

Awesome. Oh my gosh. Yeah. Smart. Love it.

Jodi Beckstine (00:22:38):

It's amazing to watch. So you're deaf and hard of hearing fans often say that your work makes them feel truly included in these live scenarios. What does it mean to you to know that your work helps people experience music and culture and these events?

Amber Galloway (00:22:58):

Well, it's the thing that drives me. It's the thing that keeps me going when I do want to stop or when things get too hard, I'll get a message out of nowhere and they'll say, "My deaf child is able to watch music with the family," or, "I went to a concert and they signed like you, and I felt a part of that and I was equal to all of my hearing family members." Those are the things that move me every day. That's what keeps me going because it does get hard. It gets hard when you get told so many nos and especially where I'm like, "It's 2025, y'all know this. It's there. The information is not hidden. It's there. Why is this still happening?" Or when we get placed in an awkward place where they want to put the interpreter so far to the left that the deaf people have to turn back and forth where it's just not efficient, nor is it equal to the experience. Or when they don't make places accessible so that we have also deaf-blind people and they're not able to actually reach those areas or we have deaf wheelchair users and they can't get to the deaf sections at festivals. And I'm like, "Why are we not planning ahead? Why are we not making sure that this is happening?"

(00:24:22):

So the fight sometimes, it wears on you. I'm sure every one of us on here can experience that and know the fight is exhausting and we have to fight all the time. But I'm hoping that the fight becomes less, but it feels insurmountable again. I feel like all the pushing we did, my wife always tells me, "You feel like you're hitting a brick wall, but really it's slowly moving." And I just felt we just got like the brick wall just caved over on us and it's like, how am I going to get out of this? How am I going to get out of this? I've just been pushing, but now I have the rubble all over me. That's what I feel right now. And so it's very tough and the struggles that we have ahead for us.

Jodi Beckstine (00:25:20):

In a lot of ways.

Keith Casebonne (00:25:21):

Yeah, for sure. Well, did you feel, at least before the wall came tumbling back down, did you feel like there was a shift at one point? And maybe it still exists within the circle of music, even if maybe other parts of the world doesn't feel the same way. Have you seen a shift in how artists and venues are thinking about accessibility because of your work?

Amber Galloway (00:25:43):

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And I mean, I don't know if it's necessarily because of my work or because of the work that we're all doing as a community to make it happen. I have seen significant change and also the changes that I've seen are, there are so many deaf people in those roles now where oftentimes I know when I first started, a lot of the interpreter world, again, there was so much pushback about music as a whole, but then they were like, "Oh, deaf people can't be on stage." And I was like, "What? Oh, deaf people are going to be on stage. This is going to happen." And so all of that.

(00:26:25):

So I worked really hard to create that. And then also, I think that when we are working in the interpreter world sometimes, unfortunately, which I know that it happens in other groups as well, where you will oppress, the oppress oppresses the oppressor. And so I would go to other countries and there would be hearing interpreters and they would say, "No, deaf people can't be on stage." And I was like, "You're absolutely incorrect." And so then what I would do is I had videos of all of my deaf interpreters that have been on stage and I would show them a video and I wouldn't say anything. And I was like, "Are they incredible?" And they were like, "Oh my gosh, yes, they're so amazing, blah, blah, blah." And I'd say, "Well, they're deaf." And they would just be shocked. And I said, "You are limiting the deaf community and we have to stop that." We have to stop because the more you oppress... We can't keep oppressing each other because that's what's happening and we can actually lift each other up.

(00:27:31):

So it's been really cool to see. There's one festival in the Czech that I do every year and before they really didn't have much access. I worked with a local group there. We talked a lot. And now last year, I think there was like 27 performances interpreted where before it started, there was like none. In another country, like in the Ukraine, I went over and I also educated the interpreters over there before the war and we provided to a festival that had never had interpreters ever. And there was a deaf person that wanted to be involved and the hearing interpreters were shutting them out. And I was like, absolutely not. And so I pulled them in and I got them on stage and they ended up quitting their job and became an interpreter for a long time right before the war.

(00:28:26):

So I think that oftentimes you just have to see those shimmers of light and those little diamonds in the rough. And sometimes you just have to pick them up and let the sun shine on them, and the moment they shine and they take off. And you can go, "Here's your diamond. There you go." Because I think oftentimes we're so busy and wrapped up in what we are doing in our own world and thinking what we need, we forget to look down and find the diamonds, to find those and also to lift them up because oftentimes they're just stepped over. And we can't step over each other. We have to lift each other up because we're already fighting the fight and we have so much angst a lot of times, we can truly, truly support each other because the more we support each other, the better we are as humans.

Jodi Beckstine (00:29:11):

Yes. I agree. So I want to bring up a particular moment. You were featured in Lachi's music video, Lift Me Up. And such an amazing video. It centers disabled artists and performers.

What was that experience like for you and what do you think projects like that mean for the future of accessibility in music and in media in general?

Amber Galloway (00:29:41):

Well, the fact is that to have such incredible artists, so varied of all the different disabilities that were there making this video and everything that Lachi has done and everything that RAMPD has done for music and entertainment is so huge, right? Because me growing up, I knew two disabled artists, which was... Now I can't even think of it. Stevie Wonder, right? Stevie Wonder and...

Keith Casebonne (00:30:15):

Ray Charles?

Amber Galloway (00:30:15):

Marvin, not Marvin. Ray Charles, yes.

Keith Casebonne (00:30:18):

That would be the two I would say, yeah.

Amber Galloway (00:30:20):

Those were the only two we ever saw. I never saw another disabled artist. I never saw an artist in a wheelchair. And it's like, okay, this is time. It is time to see disabled people in these places because again, those are the diamonds that are out there and they're ignored because oftentimes people don't see us. We're not seen. We don't get seen. We really don't. I do not get seen. As a plus size woman, oftentimes I will have producers come straight up to me and talk to each other and never talk to me. I get that happening all the time. I have sound people walk right by me when I'm literally like, "Hi, I need to talk," and they just dismiss me. So that happens often. I also have physical disabilities as well. So I have very limited mobility sometimes because I had to learn to walk again. I was in a car accident and I lived in a wheelchair. And so I have a lot of leftover disabilities from that. And so I struggle to walk sometimes. And when I ask for chairs, people look at me and they're just seeing me as a plus size person and they think, well, and they'll do all of the different typical-

Jodi Beckstine (00:31:34):

Assumptions.

Amber Galloway (00:31:36):

.. assumptions of why I have to sit. Never knowing that I've had major, major wreck where I crushed my entire pelvis. So they don't know that. They just see me from the outside and they don't know all of the struggles I'm having. So I think that what they have done and being a part of that video and that music... Because first the song, it still brings me to tears when I think of it. But the experience there, being able to help direct it too, and also the visualization of how they produced it is one of my most favorite experiences I've ever had. And the way they actually truly captured the signing and the singing and just how they set it up, it was so great. And it was such an honor to be a part of that and to be able to support that. And I just loved every moment of it. I really, truly did. And I love seeing disabled artists because it's time. It is time because we deserve to be seen and kids deserve to see themself on stage.

Jodi Beckstine (00:32:46):

Yes.

Amber Galloway (00:32:47):

And that has not happened. And this is the time. And I feel like if anything, the movement I've made was actually being able to showcase and bring as many of those diamonds that I can find to the stage. And so many of my team are deaf interpreters and especially interpreters of color that are deaf that would never get those opportunities because of their own journeys to obtaining certifications and obtaining the opportunities. So usually I open the door and I'm like, "Let's go, let's go. Let's go."

Keith Casebonne (00:33:26):

Right, right. Wow. Wow.

Amber Galloway (00:33:26):

But at the same time, I'm also always, always going, "Okay, so what are we doing here? And what are we doing here?" Because I always also talk more, not just about the deaf and hard of hearing community. I also talk about the mobility and what else can we do and how can we improve it and do better because we're always forgotten.

Keith Casebonne (00:33:45):

Yeah. Well, I mean, watching the music video, you can tell everyone was having a blast, so I can just imagine. You can see it. I mean, honestly, it's just incredible. So what's next for you coming up? You got any projects, partnerships, dreams you're excited to share with our listeners?

Amber Galloway (00:34:01):

I do. I have a really cool thing that I'm doing. So my wife, myself, and my cousin who is a disabled vet who is going and getting her PhD in holistic medicine and teaching yoga to help with PTSD, we actually, with an angel investor, we purchased land and we have a new event and retreat center. It's called Soulful Spaces. And we are creating this space to be a retreat and event center that's going to be fully accessible. And when I talk about fully accessible, we are thinking about every possible body that's out there to create this. So we have land, we're living in campers, and there is existing structures, but we have to get those redone and remodeled to be ADA accessible. But we're also heavily focusing on making sure that all of the art is visually represented by sign language as well as having a lot of textured art, making sure that all of the construction is truly approaching the world through everybody and that everybody is welcomed. So when you come here, you don't think about your disability. You just come and you enjoy yourself with your family, with your friends, with groups, workshops, presentations, a camping week, whatever. We're creating that.

(00:35:35):

So we've been here for six months and it's called Soulful Spaces Events and Retreats. And so far we've had quite a bit of challenges, but we're hoping that in the next two months we'll get all of the remodels done of the existing structure to be fully ADA accessible for wheelchairs. And I've been having a lot of art curated by a lot of different amazing artists from all over the world to make it textured and just to have an experience that you've never had before. That's my whole hope. And that you go and you're like, "I never knew I could have that like that. I never knew I could have that like that." And we've been bringing in different friends and people who have disabilities test the waters, and give us ideas and tell us what they want because I want to make things what you would want if you went to an event and retreat center. So that's what we've been doing and that's what we're planning. And this is our new adventure.

Keith Casebonne (00:36:39):

Wow, that's exciting.

Jodi Beckstine (00:36:40):

How thrilling. I have missed out on so many retreats because they weren't accessible. So I am so there when you're up and running and ready and have stuff going on. That's phenomenal.

Amber Galloway (00:36:51):

I would be honored. I would be honored for you to come and see us and just, yes. We have a pool. We have a pond. There's a lot of adventures that we're planning to do. And we're right outside of Austin, Texas.

Jodi Beckstine (00:37:06):

Fantastic. Wow.

Keith Casebonne (00:37:07):

Wow.

Jodi Beckstine (00:37:08):

Great.

Amber Galloway (00:37:08):

Yeah. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (00:37:10):

Before we wrap up, each episode, we have a segment where Keith and I talk, we call it our deep cut, and we explore media in disabled spaces. So is there a TV show, music, video, book, anything like that, that you feel gets it right when it comes to accessibility or authentic deaf representation or something that gets it completely wrong that we should know about? A big question.

Amber Galloway (00:37:39):

I don't know if I'm ready for that. Yeah, I don't know if I was ready for that. I love what they did with Barbie. I love what they're doing with the movies. I love what's been happening there. I think that's phenomenal. I also loved what Amazon Prime was working with us and we were getting deaf artists to be on Amazon Prime Thursday Night Football, the concerts. We were doing that and then of course that stopped with all of the craziness. And so they were doing it right and then it went away. So that was disappointing. But I think that, oh my goodness, DPAN, anything that comes from the Deaf Professionals Artist Network, DPAN, mostly everything that they do and I work with them often. They're just incredible because it's deaf-led, deaf-ran. So they get it. They understand it. But they also understand production and they also understand the hearing world. So they do really excellent work. So they get it. And oh, there's also a documentary about my life that's about to come out.

Jodi Beckstine (00:38:48):

Oh, wow.

Amber Galloway (00:38:49):

Yeah. Yeah. So that's kind of exciting. And I think they actually did that right too, the way that they filmed it. Three weeks ago, we went to Paris to watch it before it got sent, because it's a French documentary crew. And it's incredible because it focuses on what I do, and then it also focuses on the lives of two of my incredible, absolutely incredible interpreters that are on my team that are deaf and their journeys. And so I just am real excited about that coming out as well.

Keith Casebonne (00:39:25):

Oh, wow. Me too.

Jodi Beckstine (00:39:26):

Oh, wow. I'm excited too. I can't wait to see it.

Keith Casebonne (00:39:29):

Is there a release date or not quite yet?

Amber Galloway (00:39:31):

No, because they put it to all of the film-

Jodi Beckstine (00:39:36):

Festivals.

Amber Galloway (00:39:37):

... festivals right now. So I'm hoping that one of them pick it up and everybody can see it because it's beautiful. And it also talks a lot about mental health as well. It features my son who struggles with mental health and the loss of his twin. One of my sons was killed.

Keith Casebonne (00:39:55):

Oh, goodness. Okay.

Amber Galloway (00:39:55):

So just focusing on that journey and his journey as well. So you get to see that throughout the film as well.

Keith Casebonne (00:40:02):

Wow.

Jodi Beckstine (00:40:02):

Wow. How exciting.

Amber Galloway (00:40:05):

Yeah, yeah.

Keith Casebonne (00:40:05):

Very cool. All right. Well, we will definitely be looking forward to that.

Jodi Beckstine (00:40:08):

Absolutely.

Amber Galloway (00:40:09):

Yeah, yeah.

Keith Casebonne (00:40:10):

Oh my gosh. Well, Amber, thank you so much. This has been an incredible conversation. We're so glad we had you. And thanks for everything you're doing in the world of music and accessibility. You're making it better for everyone, and we really love that.

Amber Galloway (00:40:22):

Thank you. I appreciate y'all so much for having me. Bye-bye.

Jodi Beckstine (00:40:25):

Thank you. Bye.

(00:40:29):

Let's take this dive a little further. Deep cut ahead.

Keith Casebonne (00:40:37):

For this week's deep cut, we're talking about season one, episode seven of Only Murders in the Building, titled The Boy From 6B. This episode follows Theo, a deaf character, and is told almost entirely without spoken dialogue, shifting the story into his point of view.

Jodi Beckstine (00:40:52):

What makes this episode important is a disability focused conversation that access isn't treated as an add-on or a teaching moment. Silence, captioning, and visual storytelling become the primary language of the episode, asking the audience to adapt rather than the character. The show doesn't explain this choice or soften it. It simply commits, letting disabilities shape how the story's told.

Keith Casebonne (00:41:14):

Yeah. Well, when this episode aired, a lot of people talked about it as the, quote, silent episode. But silence here isn't a trick. What did you notice about how it changes the viewing experience?

Jodi Beckstine (00:41:28):

Well, I noticed you end up becoming more immersed in the episode. There's not necessarily something missing. It forces you to pay attention the way you do in real life when you're present in a conversation because you can't, as a hearing person, you can't rely on the dialogue to give you context to what's happening. So you have to start looking at the movement of the characters, watching their hands, the distance they are between each other and what they're doing, timing, and suddenly every glance, every movement has weight to it. And I think I love that the audience now has to adapt to the story instead of people with disabilities having to use captioning or whatever to adapt. Theo, the character that we're talking about, he doesn't have to explain what's going out or translate himself. We meet him in the story where he's at. So I don't know that... People were calling it the silent episode. I think it's more about being present and focused when watching this episode.

Keith Casebonne (00:42:46):

Yeah, that's interesting. You definitely notice body language and things like that a little more because you kind of have to. You don't really have much of a choice. If you're trying to understand what's going on, it forces you to view the show in a bit of a different way than you're probably used to doing that. And I think that's really interesting. And it does bring a perspective into watching a TV show that we don't normally think about or experience. So yeah, I agree. It's definitely changes the way that you... It makes, like you said, the audience has to adapt. And I think that was really an interesting approach.

Jodi Beckstine (00:43:28):

Yeah. What I liked is that the show didn't explain what was kind of happening. It committed to it and it just went right into it. And how did you think that commitment affected your engagement as a viewer, especially a hearing viewer?

Keith Casebonne (00:43:46):

Yeah. I mean, it kind of lets that discomfort through the initial... There's an initial discomfort when the episode starts. When it was new and first came out, you weren't expecting that this was going to be the case. They didn't announce, "Hey, this episode will be silent. Get ready." You just start watching and you realize it's in Theo's perspective. And because he is an individual who's deaf, then that perspective means there's no sound. So it kind of trusts that the audience will kind of go with that because any TV show or movie or, I mean, book, any medium really, you're building a story and a narrative and a world essentially that you are trusting the audience will engage in. And if they don't, well, they're not going to watch your show or read your book. So this is just another aspect of trusting that the audience will adapt to Theo's world, which is a world of silence. And I think that that is really an interesting approach. That initial discomfort is jarring for a moment, but I felt you could adapt to it pretty quickly. And you start seeing the things we kind of mentioned before, body language and those other types of things that you don't always see all the time.

Jodi Beckstine (00:45:23):

I agree.

Keith Casebonne (00:45:27):

Sure. Well, as we're saying, this episode asks hearing viewers to enter a deaf perspective instead of observing it from the outside. So why does that shift in point of view matter?

Jodi Beckstine (00:45:39):

We talked about the episode pulling us into his reality and environment. When you remove auditory cues as a hearing viewer, to me, the tension for the whole episode changed. There is a tension to the whole series itself, but I think it changed that. And you realize how quickly you can get lost if you're not reading the captioning and you're not paying attention. And for someone who is hard of hearing or deaf, that could be exhausting, that you have to be in it because I can't tell you how many times I put an episode on a different monitor while I'm doing something and I still know the context of what's going on because I'm listening to it and I don't have to be as focused. And with this episode, you can't do that. If you want to remain able to understand the episode, you have to pick up other clues and you have to read the captioning and you have to pay attention and be focused and it's different. And I think it kind of creates an empathy without a sentimentality about being deaf or hard of hearing. And I like that because there's so many times I find myself not really paying attention to what I'm doing in this. I appreciated that, that put the phone down, focus on what you're watching.

Keith Casebonne (00:47:19):

That's funny. I hadn't really even thought about it in that way, but yeah, so often I'll have something on and I'm multitasking, I'm doing something on my phone or I'm looking at whatever, something else and it doesn't really matter so much because I hear what's going on. I can look up occasionally and see what's... But yeah, you can't do that. But that as a metaphor essentially for how an individual with a disability might have to adapt in our world is really an interesting point that you made that it could be exhausting. I mean, like you said, it's exhausting for us because we're just like, "Oh my God, I have to pay attention? What?" And for someone who this is the way they exist in the world and they have to just interact and so on, that is different. And you're right, there's a level of attention that, and maybe even, I don't want to say mental, like mental fatigue in a sense that maybe we don't think about every day. And that's an interesting point.

Jodi Beckstine (00:48:31):

I'm interested to see if someone will eventually, and there may be out there and I'm just not aware of it, some type of episode or something where the vision is the issue, either it's masked up so you can't quite see or completely a blank screen and you have to rely on auditory cues or what have you. So I don't know if that's out there-

Keith Casebonne (00:48:52):

Interesting. I don't either.

Jodi Beckstine (00:48:53):

... but I'm interested, having seen this one, kind of going, there's other ways to kind of help people get into a different mindset and a different perspective.

Keith Casebonne (00:49:04):

Yeah. Yeah. A neat idea.

Jodi Beckstine (00:49:05):

So we often talk on Disability Deep Dive about representation, about who's on-screen, and this episode makes a case for how the story is told. So what do you think that added to the story in general?

Keith Casebonne (00:49:23):

Oh, I think so. Yeah. I think the representation becomes even more real when you're put as a viewer in that role. You're seeing it, you're not just observing as on the sidelines and not really engaging with what's happening. Now you are that person, you are experiencing the world in the same way that they do. And I do think that that's, I don't know, that's interesting. It's an aspect of storytelling that is different than what we're used to. And it's not relying on sort of outward explanation or exposition to say what's going on. You're just kind of thrown in and you have to, "Oh, okay, there's no audio. Okay." And you just have to adapt. No accommodation. This is it. This is your world now for this episode. So it's really interesting. And so it's representation with a bit of interaction, interactivity, I suppose, as well.

Jodi Beckstine (00:50:35):

Absolutely.

Keith Casebonne (00:50:36):

Yeah. So as far as the actual sort of plot and content of the episode, Theo, the character himself, he's not softened, he's not redeemed, and he's really not made easy to root for. So the show lets him cause harm, independent, not blaming his disability, it's not like a reason he's this way or that way, doesn't excuse his choices either. Why do you think that matters to see disabled characters written with moral weight?

Jodi Beckstine (00:51:05):

Yeah. I think good representation doesn't always have to mean that the person's a good person or going against this hero trope, or it doesn't have to be their villain origin story. That's the other end of it. But disabled characters deserve to be written with the same moral complexity that every other character gets. They deserve to make harmful choices and they deserve to make those choices and it not be centered around their disability or using it as an excuse because disability isn't a halo or like I was saying, the start of a villain.

So I think it lets our accountability for actions and humanity to coexist with disability and the character. He could be responsible for harm and be a fully realized person with fear and anger and regret, and that's what makes him human. And I think that's what can be missing in representations of people with disabilities. So I liked that. I liked that he was complex.

Keith Casebonne (00:52:26):

Yeah, I did too. I thought that was a smart choice on the... It's well written, it's a well written episode.

Jodi Beckstine (00:52:34):

Do you think having the silence changes how the audience may judge his actions or does it complicate their emotional response at all?

Keith Casebonne (00:52:48):

Well, I think it's a really good question. I mean, it probably depends who you are. It probably depends on your experience with disability to some degree. I don't know that it really... I didn't really feel like it was a big factor to me, but I can understand how for many people it would be because they're so used to the stereotypical inspiration plot lines and things. And I can see how for some, that could slow things down and kind of affect their moral judgment of the character. What's really good though about it is that it kind of sidesteps the idea of just flattening a character with a disability to sort of a one note thing where it's, "Oh, it's about disability. It's all about disability. Let's talk about disability." Well, no, disability is one aspect of life, like the fact that they have brown hair is an aspect of mine.

Jodi Beckstine (00:53:57):

Exactly.

Keith Casebonne (00:53:58):

I mean, it's not going to define who I am as a person or my moral standing or ability to make right or wrong decisions. So the complexity is good. I think that it's really smart. And it was also, there was a real nuance in there, especially considering there's no dialogue, with how we feel about the main character of the episode, Theo. He's a very nuanced character, and your feelings about him sort of change as you watch. And it's just, again, like I mentioned, I think it was very well written and doesn't portray disability in the usual stereotypical ways.

Jodi Beckstine (00:54:49):

Yeah, I agree. Definitely.

Keith Casebonne (00:54:52):

So the episode requires viewers to rely on captions, visual cues, and body language. For many hearing viewers, that can be a new experience. So what does it mean when access tools become the primary way a story is told?

Jodi Beckstine (00:55:08):

Yeah, I love that because captions, what we're used to is captions are there for an accessibility need or people who like to keep the volume low on their TVs. Here, you have to have them to know what's, not 100% what's going on, but it helps to keep context going.

Keith Casebonne (00:55:29):

A lot. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (00:55:31):

Yeah. And that's the main way that this particular story is told. So as a hearing viewer, you're the one having to adapt to what's going on. And to me, it reminded me, it coincided, we're recording this around the time of the Super Bowl and people were complaining that a lot of the Super Bowl commercials didn't have captioning. So it kind of reminded me that captioning is needed for accessibility, but it's not always there. And that's an everyday life situation, a lived experience for people who are hard of hearing or deaf. And it makes you feel differently about it because what if they didn't provide the captioning for us? What if we got the episode without it? It would be so different and it's such a different experience. So I think it really, for me personally, really helped me understand the need for everything to be accessible captioning wise and how different the story would be for me to understand if it wasn't there.

Keith Casebonne (00:56:38):

For sure. And I think a thing to note is that because there's no spoken audio throughout 99% of it, that captioning actually is paired with American sign language. So this isn't like, "Oh, I can't hear the audio, so the captioning is helpful." There is no audio. And if you don't communicate using ASL or don't know ASL, you're not going to have any idea what they're saying. It could be any other language, if you don't speak it, you don't know it. So those captions are even more important in this case to pay attention to what's going on. And it's not something... Again, even if you use captions to replace the audio, this is a little different.

Jodi Beckstine (00:57:27):

Yeah. And what I liked about it is the showrunners didn't frame the choice to do this as educational. It was just done. Here's the episode, here it is. They talked about it later because people started having reactions to it, but it was, "This is the episode. This is how we're going to present it to you. This is how you're going to take the episode in." Why do you think that that mattered that they didn't make it this week's special episode type of scenario?

Keith Casebonne (00:57:57):

Yeah. Yeah. Well, that ages us. You can think about [inaudible 00:58:01], on a very special episode of... Look it up, kids, if you don't know what I'm talking about. So yeah, it helps normalize different modes of engagement and I think that's good. Again, we don't have to make announcements of every... If you're going to bump into a person with disability on the street, you don't get a notice five minutes in advance, watch out, you're going to have to share the sidewalk with someone in a wheelchair. I mean, that's not life. That's not how it works. And that would be ridiculous if that was the case. So that's the same. Again, that's here. You start watching the episode and it's like, "Oh, well this is different. Okay." And you just have to adapt. And I think that's, again, it's just how real life works. So I think that is a really great approach. And I like that they just threw it in there and it just happened and we all have to deal with it. That's life. So enjoy the episode, learn something from it. And again, it's sort of the same idea of inspiration, the framing of something is something inspiring or whatever, you don't need framing. It's just life. Just there it is. There's the show.

Jodi Beckstine (00:59:21):

Yeah, absolutely.

Keith Casebonne (00:59:24):

So people still to this day point to this episode as something special. I mean, here we are talking about it for our deep cut, right? So why do you think it stuck?

Jodi Beckstine (00:59:35):

I think because it doesn't over explain itself, I think because it allows... The audience will follow. We always say that when you're talking about film and books. The reader, the viewer is smart too. They will follow you. Just show them where you want to go. And we said it doesn't treat us, on this week's special episode. So I think the craft of storytelling is aligned with the character by following his perspective. And I think we're starting to see a lot more shows experimenting with different perspectives in ways that reveal access gaps that we as a society should be aware of. I'm going to bring up another show just slightly, the new season, I don't know if you've seen it yet, but the new season of The Pitt is out.

Keith Casebonne (01:00:30):

I've seen the first couple.

Jodi Beckstine (01:00:31):

And without giving too much away, there is a person in the waiting room who's a patient that is deaf or hard of hearing. And something dramatic happens in the background and we're for a moment drawn into this person's perspective and we have silence. So all you see is people waving their hands and yelling, but you don't know what they're yelling about, why they're upset, what's happening. Is this person in a safe situation or not? They have to determine what's going on and are they safe? And then later they're back into the emergency department seeing the doctor and the doctor is talking to the interpreter instead of the patient and they keep trying to redirect him. And so I love that they're starting to tell these stories and talk about just, but not in this special way. This is just life. This is what it is. This is this perspective, this person's lived experience. And I think those little small moments are going to start being so important to educate the public without we're going to educate you now things. So I'm really excited about that. And I think this episode was kind of the beginning of that. I like to see it more disabilities being represented, but everything starts small. And so for me, this is an exciting new way to tell stories and a way to be accessible.

Keith Casebonne (01:02:02):

Yeah. Yeah. I couldn't agree more. I think that's a great point.

Jodi Beckstine (01:02:07):

Do you think showrunners will learn from this episode and from this type of storytelling in the future? Do you think that's kind of where it'll go?

Keith Casebonne (01:02:17):

I certainly hope so. I think it shows that it can be done. I think it shows that it was a successful episode. Again, we're still talking about it years later. It's not like the show was canceled or something because of it. I mean, it's doing very well. So go for it. Try different things. And let's explore the human condition in ways that we don't always do in media. So I think it's great. Commit to it if you're going to do it though. Don't dabble. Don't just throw it in as a one-off. Don't just throw it in as like, oh, look at this and that's great, smile and move on.

Jodi Beckstine (01:02:55):

Yeah. Wouldn't this be cool?

Keith Casebonne (01:02:57):

Yeah. Yeah. Commit to it. But make sure that you do it right. And like this episode did, make sure that essentially the form follows the perspective. So make sure the episode is created in a way that fully helps the user understand the perspective of the character with the disability, as this one does. I think that's a really great way of doing it. And you can trust that your audience is smart enough to understand. And this, again, kind of proves that disabled centered storytelling is just another approach and use it. Let's do it.

Jodi Beckstine (01:03:51):

Yep. It's just a part of life that most people have some experience in, whether it's themselves or they know someone or they've seen shows like this. So I think the more we talk about it, the more it just becomes life. And I'm excited to see where it goes.

Keith Casebonne (01:04:08):

Me too. Well, The Boy From 6B shows what's possible when a show doesn't just include disability, but lets disability shape the storytelling itself.

Jodi Beckstine (01:04:19):

Yes. It reminds us that access isn't a limitation on creativity. It's often the thing that can unlock it.

Keith Casebonne (01:04:25):

Thanks for joining us for this deep cut. We'll continue to look closely at how media handles access and representation, recognizing both the work that moves the conversation forward and the places where it maybe misses the mark.

Jodi Beckstine (01:04:38):

Thank you so much for joining us.

Keith Casebonne (01:04:41):

That's a wrap on today's episode. We're so thankful to Amber Galloway for sharing your perspective and for reminding us that access is not just functional, it's cultural.

Jodi Beckstine (01:04:50):

Yeah. Amber's work shows us what's possible when language access is treated as essential, not optional. We have links to her work and projects in the show notes. And if you're thinking differently about how music is shared, who gets full access to it, and what inclusion really looks like in live spaces, that's the point.

Keith Casebonne (01:05:06):

Yes, it is. As we close out season two of Disability Deep Dive, I just want to point out that it's been a powerful season filled with conversations that challenged us, inspired us, and deepened the way we think about disability in culture.

Jodi Beckstine (01:05:19):

Thank you to every guest who joined us this season, and to everyone who listened, shared, and stayed curious with us along the way.

Keith Casebonne (01:05:25):

Yes, thanks for listening, and we will see you in May for season three.

Jodi Beckstine (01:05:29):

That's right.

(01:05:31):

Disability Deep Dive is a podcast that is brought to you by Disability Rights Florida, where real conversations about life, culture, and ideas meet the lived disability experience. Follow us on YouTube, Spotify, and wherever you get your podcasts. You can also find us at disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast.