



## EPISODE 2: HOW TO SWALLOW A FROG

**TOM** Hey everyone, and welcome to Episode 2 of the Chorus Project podcast. I'm Tom, Artistic Director of Upstart Theatre in London, and I'll be your host as we speak to artists, activists, change-makers, and citizens across Europe.

We're making this podcast as part of The Chorus Project, an international theatre project about democracy and justice, which is taking place in Germany, Austria, the Republic of North Macedonia and the United Kingdom in 2019 and 2020. It's a collaboration between Pathos Theater in Munich, Theater am Lend in Graz, the MKC Youth Cultural Centre in Skopje and Upstart Theatre in London. We're making four new pieces of theatre inspired by the *Oresteia* – the only surviving trilogy of ancient Greek tragedies – which explores the journey from a world driven by violence and revenge to one governed by law and democratic justice. So, at a time when democracy is facing increasing threats all across Europe, we want to use theatre to ask: what does democracy mean, to all of us, today?

And alongside making these four new pieces of theatre, we're also making this podcast, to share what we're learning, and to open up our conversation about democracy to voices from across Europe. To start us off, I've been talking to our colleagues on *The Chorus Project* – so in our last episode, I chatted to Angelika Fink and Katja Kettner, two of the directing team in Germany, about the different ways we work, and about the political power and purpose of theatre. For today's episode, I spoke with two of our colleagues from what's now known as the Republic of North Macedonia, Kristina Bozurska and Jasmina Vasileva. I'd met Kristina and Jasmina before in January 2019 when we visited them in Skopje; we spoke at Shoreditch Town Hall in East London in April of 2019. For both of them it was their first time in London, and it was so great for me to be able to welcome them, to hear about their work, and to find out what it's like working as an artist and activist at the other end of Europe. So here we go, and I hope you enjoy the conversation as much as I did.

*Transition music.*

**TOM** Could you just, each of you say hello and introduce yourselves so that everyone gets used to your voice.

**KRISTINA** OK I'll be first. I'm Kristina Bozurska. I'm coming from Macedonia. I'm working with the Macedonian team on the Chorus project. I'm a visual artist and I'm working on the artistic stage and the set and the costume and the visual aspect of the performance.

**TOM** Perfect. Thanks Kristina.

**JASMINA** This is my voice. I'm Jasmina Vasileva, also part of the Macedonian team.

**TOM** Sorry, could you...perfect, there we go.

**JASMINA** I'm an actress. But I won't be an actress in this project. I will actually take another role because I want to, how to say it, practice a little bit more in the into the production of the project and everything so I'm going to try to do different things here.

**TOM** Cool. So how do you both come to be involved in The Chorus Project? What's the origin story? I'm doing everyone's kind of like Avengers origin stories.

**JASMINA** Well off the record – no, we're kidding.

**KRISTINA** We'll tell you later.

**TOM** See now I really want to know and record it.

**KRISTINA** I was invited.

**TOM** That's the most boring answer! 'Why did you get involved in this?' 'Someone asked me.' But yeah, fine. OK.

**KRISTINA** OK I'll tell you why I was interested in being part of this project.

**TOM** Even better answer.

**KRISTINA** OK. So I really, about this project what I really liked is that it's not just like any other theatrical piece, but it's, it's an experiment, it's a long process that, also I mean it's an international, it's great that it's going to be a collaboration with other different teams from other countries. We can like really share ideas and meet people and hear different thoughts and from different backgrounds and cultures. But I also liked the fact that this project specifically works really with the context of the place where you come from. And the Chorus part is going to be rewritten, and it's going to use, it will be written with people from the place. So it's really relevant for our country, for the place we're coming from and I - because for me as an artist I really, I'm interested in sociopolitical context and that is

reflected in my artworks - and I found that similar thing in this project where you have a cause that is connected with the place. So for me that was important, the participative part, the people that are not actors but regular citizens that will take part in the project and they will develop the work as well as much as the professionals working in the project but together with with the citizens. So for me that was maybe the most appealing part.

**TOM** Great. Thank you Kristina.

**JASMINA** So I can add to this, also that Macedonia until recent recently was really pretty closed up for these kind of projects. So, we couldn't really find projects where we can work together with the other European countries or different countries from abroad and with which we can cooperate firstly but then we can compare. In what kind of state our countries are the democracy in, what kind of state the democracies in our countries are and everything. And the more intimate story about how all this started it was actually because we are very close friends.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Kristina and Ivica are married, and I'm their friend. I know Ivica for a very long time. So actually, these kind of projects were the ones that we dreamt about every time we were together having lunch or having coffee and everything, and talking about where should our future in Macedonian theatre be. So we needed, we like really, really needed to open up, because we are employees in national state theatres but that is a totally different kind of performances, and we needed, we needed something new and we hoped that one day we would get something like this.

**TOM** What's the experience of working on this project like, compared to if you're working on a project in a state theatre in Macedonia for example?

**JASMINA** Oh well when you work at the State Theatre actually you create your repertoire according to the needs of the audience because you have to *[speaks in Macedonian]* to satisfy all the tastes, because it should be for all people. So you don't pretty much have a choice of what you're going to do. So in the same season you're going to do *[inaudible]* you're going to do Chekhov, you're going to do maybe some contemporary German playwrights. We want to work on German playwrights, for us it's like 'oh my God'. So, but it's very rarely that you get an opportunity to have your own input. You, you have your own input when you act, of course, because it is your interpretation in some way, but in the overall production, and in what you really want to see with it and everything you don't really have to, have a chance to go up there, to spread your idea and everything.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** So doing these kind of projects, first I experience everything on an intimate level. Like first what it means just for me, and then for the, everything around me, for the whole society and everything. So for me it was making friends of course and making new friends and learning a lot from them. This is not just my Macedonian inferiority complex speaking but we really really want to open up and learn new things.

**TOM** How much flexibility do you have about the kind of work that you're doing, the kind of productions that you're involved in or is it very much like someone says or you as a company decide yet that we're doing a Checkhov, we're doing, we get to do this German playwright this time round. But we have to make sure, you know, we have to plan the season six months in advance or whatever. Like what's that kind of yeah, how much kind of flexibility do you have, how much input do you have in that programme?

**JASMINA** Well it depends how much you fight for it.

**TOM** Ah I see. Okay. Yeah.

**JASMINA** So it's the same situation with every national institution that is working with culture. Because you have to answer to the majority of the people for example. You have to cover them all what they want to see and everything. Because the Macedonian culture market is not commercially [*Macedonian*] - what is that? Directed.

**TOM** Yeah. Yeah.

**JASMINA** Because we don't make our existence out of selling the tickets.

**TOM** Sure.

**JASMINA** We are financed by the government. And they don't really care how much we give back.

**TOM** Okay.

**JASMINA** So the tickets are very very cheap. For example it is like one pound, two pounds.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Nothing more than that and maybe three in Skopje or something and everybody can. And also we have a lot of allowances for for example. [*Macedonian*]

**KRISTINA** Social welfare, or like -

**JASMINA** Yeah, for people who are old social welfare, also for students, it is free for people who are younger than 25 years. It is free and everything so everybody has an access to the theatre.

**TOM** I think yeah which is fantastic. And God I wish we had that here. As you've seen I'm sure, like it's uh-, we have this really different set up. Yeah, there is public funding but it's only ever a portion, so we have to make ,you know depending on the show and depending on the company that's doing it for, with Upstart Theatre we have to make probably between 20 to 50 percent of the income has to be on ticket sales for each production and so yeah. We find, you know, although we don't have like we don't have to do Chekhov, but we have to make damn sure that we sell tickets for whatever experiments or crazy thing we're trying to do. Otherwise the whole thing falls to bits.

**KRISTINA** On the other hand. Like what Jasmina was saying, of course that's the positive side but on the other hand there's this thing that the only way that culture is sponsored in Macedonia is through the states, and there there is no access to public funding. There is no extra funds that you can apply to. There is no, I don't know, sponsors. So, if you're a freelance artist or you want to do something you have a plan and you have a project it can be really interesting. But then the financial part is the is the problem. Because as I said everything is, and if it doesn't fit that state logic, then it's hard to realize a project. So on the other hand what you are saying that what you have in in London, in England, and you probably know this, in the other European countries that we're now at this moment collaborating with, you have this access of public funding which is really really helpful, and in Macedonia we don't have that yet. Everything is financed by the state. And sometimes that so that can be a little bit tricky, it can be, it doesn't fit that state logic, if it's not, if it's not too traditional or you know there is like kind of a rigid form of how the projects should look like.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** There's not so much experimentation, there is not space for experiments. So on the other hand that can be the problem.

**JASMINA** And when these conservative party was on rule, was ruling, we had a lot of interference about how to spread their ideology, their propaganda through theatre.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** They pretty much knew how to spread the propaganda through theatre. Right. So it was one of their tools to get the voters to them and everything. So it was that is one of the scariest things when it is funded by the government.

**TOM** Yeah. Because it's directly from the government rather than like a -

**JASMINA** There was such a traditionalising, how to put, of the themes that were supposed to be shown in the theatre. For example, there were a lot of, um, they formed this new theatre called 'Theatre of Comedy'.

**TOM** OK.

**JASMINA** But the themes that they funded were - against abortion especially. And this is like - the women were the ones who were spreading the anti-women propaganda.

**TOM** Huh. Ok.

**JASMINA** Yeah. They put a women to be the man or a woman to be the manager of this theatre of comedy, it became very very popular immediately because of the *[Macedonian]* acceptability of the genre. So it became very popular immediately. It became like attracting a lot of people. And at the same time, they were like spreading their propaganda. Especially from that point.

**TOM** Yeah. Yeah. And presumably with the change of government after the Colour Revolution. Do you find that the propaganda has kind of switched the other way? Or is it sort of, do you feel like it's slightly freer in terms of what you're able to do now and what the Government will fund now compared to a few years ago?

**JASMINA** Yes, there is a lot of difference.

**KRISTINA** There is a big difference that's for sure. But again, the problem is that there is always a shortage in the in the funds for culture, it's always the smallest budget for culture, and it's a cake that has to be broken into tiny tiny pieces so everyone is happy. And then the new government, they wanted to do to have the culture to everybody, to give culture to everybody.

**TOM** Yes.

**KRISTINA** But then that is a small piece for it. For every participant. Right.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** And everyone was not happy with it. So then there is not there is not a perfect answer for the problem in Macedonia. As I say because it's the smallest piece of the cake from the budget. And it's always, culture gets the smallest part -

**TOM** Right.

**KRISTINA** - the smallest funding.

**TOM** I guess that that feels like that's the kind of thing that's the same everywhere. You know like I think we're really lucky in lots of ways and in the U.K. And I don't want to diminish that. But at the same time you know we've had now it's 10 - nine years of Conservative led government in the U.K. and a lot of their policies have been around this idea of austerity which is basically removing the national debt by defunding public services. And of course, culture is the first thing to go.  
What have been the most exciting parts of being involved in the project so far and about this weekend?

**JASMINA** Well you can go first.

**KRISTINA** First of all we're not even able to come to London, right, to England.

**TOM** Yes.

**KRISTINA** If you're not being invited. Yeah. You know. You, Tom, know because you had to send us a letter of invitation and a program, what is the reason for the, the visit of of England. So for us coming from Macedonia we have to apply for a visa. It's a long process. Maybe, I don't know it took us two months to get all the documents in order to get the visa in order to come to London. So just the fact for us was exciting. Just the fact that you are coming to London.

**TOM** Yeah yeah yeah.

**KRISTINA** And so it's just exploring the places and the city and just the area because, we didn't have time, it was a really short time we're here and we have these meetings, but just to walk around the area it's already exciting.

**TOM** Yeah yeah.

**JASMINA** For me it's even more. It's like meeting your imaginary boyfriend from high school. Because I was like growing up in the 90s, I was a teenager in the 90s, and Britpop culture, Britpop had a very big influence on how we shaped our aesthetics our way of thinking and everything. So, like meeting London for the first time, for me it was exciting, as exciting as that. And I'm, like, very happy that I'm not disappointed.

**TOM** Good.

**JASMINA** That is even better if it is even better. Yeah. We only see, we only saw, like this close neighbourhood. I can't wait to meet the Greater London.

**TOM** Yeah. So you're here for like a week right till Thursday kind a time, so, and you're going up to Crouch End for a bit. Right. Hipster North London. It's great. You'll love it.

**JASMINA** Just to tell you because. What. When I, I don't know about Kristina but when I go somewhere I want to try to make a little habits like to imagine if I were living here. What would my habits be living here?

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** So I took your advice about the coffee shop and I drink coffee every day. I went there today.

**TOM** I did want to ask a bit about the visa process, just because I think if you a lot of the people who are listening to this will be probably either in the UK or in Germany or Austria and you know part of either EU countries or who knows by the time this comes out countries that might not be in the EU but still are aiming to have a very kind of close, and a more or less integrated relationship. So, am I right in thinking that you can't apply for a tourist visa as a Macedonian person, or you have to provide documentation even if you're coming over purely for tourist purposes?

**KRISTINA** Yes, even if you're coming as a tourist, yes you have to, still you have to have a reason why you're coming. And then even if you have, you have to submit like from a bank account document, that you have a lot of money on your bank account, reservations from a hotel and all that, and even then you also have to say -

**JASMINA** Somebody to guarantee for you.

**KRISTINA** You still it's need to have someone from the UK that is a guarantee, yeah you're right to guarantee for your trip. And you need to be employed you need to own a property in Macedonia or something that you have a proof -

**TOM** Yeah

**KRISTINA** - that there is something waiting for you back in Macedonia.

**TOM** Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

**JASMINA** And the thing is - sorry - bBut Barbara yesterday asked us both if you had a chance to move here because we are all talking 'oh my god London, London' - if you had a chance,



somebody asks you right now 'Would you move? We have a job for you, and you move right here.' Would you like accept it immediately or hesitate, and we both said we would hesitate.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Because it's not like - it's very attractive to just come here. But we also want to live in our home.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** We want to live home, not leave like abandon home -

**TOM** No, no, no -

**JASMINA** We want to live where we live right now, but to be more open to projects like this.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** Yeah.

**JASMINA** So if we have opportunities to collaborate from where we live right now, we would never then abandon our home.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Like, I wanted to connect it to the great exodus that young people from Macedonia do all the time, because we were talking this morning about how many, how a great number of Macedonian young people just want either, want to leave the country and they are doing at the moment everything to leave it, or they already left.

**TOM** Mmm.

**KRISTINA** This morning we were talking about a how many young people are abandoning leaving Macedonia and migrating to other European countries. And it's 170,000 people that already left Macedonia. Maybe not, not young people or, but for the last I don't know how many years.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** Maybe the last 10 years or more, hundred thousand, one hundred and seventy thousand people have left, looking for a better future.

**TOM** And that's out of a population of - not that many, right? Less than 2 million people.

**KRISTINA** Less than 2 million.

**JASMINA** If you don't know the statistics you can feel it yourself, because every month you get one of your close friends or relatives or somebody leave the country. So that's why everywhere we travel we have somebody, you know we always have 'I have a cousin there.'

**TOM** Yeah yeah.

**JASMINA** Munich: 'I will sleep at my cousin's'. 'Oh, we are in London. I will sleep at my friend's' and everything so and then.

**TOM** And obviously that side of it is kind of that's kind of great right, like you know people wherever you go, but it's also that sense of of home not being home for a lot of people of your generation and younger, right. Of *our* generation and younger, we're all the same kind of age I think.  
So, there's a question that I'm asking everyone for these interviews and these podcast conversations which is 'what does democracy mean to you?'

**KRISTINA** Well, when the first, when we have this question for the first time, when we had these meetings, and the first thing that came to my mind in terms of answering that question, coming from Macedonia. For us democracy is something that we look in other places not in Macedonia. Something that happens - democracy is something that is happening in the other countries not in Macedonia, especially when we had this problem 10 years, more than 10 years actually. The conservative nationalistic party that was the government. We had like really ruined all the, all the pillars of democracy, everything that democracy means. So this connects with what we were saying that so many people left Macedonia and they're immigrating to other countries because they are looking for a better future, right, they are looking for a place where they can find democracy because that's not what we have -

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** - or we had in Macedonia. So democracy is something that you, that you aim for for us. Something that you aim for.

**JASMINA** You said if you remember some time ago like you said it like a slogan, and it was great: 'Democracy is something that happens somewhere else'. It's her slogan.

**TOM** I'm writing that down.

**JASMINA** Kristina's slogan. For me is something we are all saying like farewell to. Like we're sending the democracy somewhere, like it is on a dying bed, like it is supposed to be reimagined, like it's supposed to be resurrected, it is supposed to be resurrected and everything. It's like something that's already done.

**TOM** All right. Yeah, it's a dead or dying idea.

**KRISTINA** Yeah, especially in our country. And we were telling you when you were in Macedonia we kind of told you about our political situation for the last years that was going on, it was happening, so we didn't have like a normal justice system, it is completely collapsed. We had, like, literally criminals that were in the government that were doing all these crimes, and none of them, none of them got convicted or anything. Then there were a lot of scandals. Then there is this 'Skopje 2014' that happened, you know about, we were telling about this architectural project, the revamp of the city centre of Skopje. And all of it was being done, it would be illegal none, and nothing was starting even from there you can see that there is no, there's no system that actually works, from our urbanistic and architectural planning. There is no such a thing. There is no planning. It's only someone's interests, someone that is in power. And when you think about that, you can see the wider picture, that it's kind of democracy has collapsed, completely.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** There is a lot of mistrust in everything. Not just the institutions, not just the politicians and everything, but like, like everything, everyone suspects everyone it's like. Like a very, very scary state.

**TOM** Yeah. Yeah.

**JASMINA** So, I wanted to see that the last few years we were like solving all of our problems with *kapitulacija* - what is the word when you - not give up, but surrender, with surrendering. Like we all surrendered to everything. Also this with the name change.

**TOM** Yes.

**JASMINA** We knew that it was - even if I - I am pro, for example. I knew that like how to put it in Macedonian we say *проголта жабото*, 'to swallow a frog', like -

**TOM** Yeah -

**JASMINA** - something very bitter in order to try and, like create something, some position from where we can go on.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** But it is again by surrendering, so.

**TOM** Right. Yeah. And in terms of that idea of surrendering, is that something that is, do you feel that on like a person to person level, or is it more of a kind of your relationship to these institutions and the kind of political body?

**KRISTINA** I think, more in terms of the individual and the institution and the system.

**TOM** Mm-hmm.

**KRISTINA** After all of that, all the things that were happening in Macedonia and then the protests that took place for two years and more, and how people really tried to bring democracy, and then to bring a system that will function, that will work for the people, to bring justice - and then all people had all their hopes after putting the nationalistic party down, and then the change didn't happen, it didn't happen at all. It didn't. Not only that it didn't happen quickly, but it's people feel like it's not happening, the big change that everybody was kind of hoping for. So now I think that's why everyone that was fighting so, so hard of making a change, everybody kind of feels disappointed or hopeless, and that's why Jasmina was saying you feel kind of you're giving up, you surrender.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** It's like you don't have anymore, you don't have anymore the strength to fight. So then, it's like you refocus yourself only on your -

**JASMINA** Personal.

**KRISTINA** Small personal, yeah, personal relations in your small circle or bubble.

**TOM** I mean obviously the context is really different but I feel that here a lot at the minute as well. Um, I hate talking about Brexit. But - we almost have to at this point in the conversation maybe because it's something that everybody it seems is angry about one way or another. You know that the side that lost the referendum, well we're angry because we lost and we think it's a terrible idea. But the side that won are angry because it still hasn't happened yet, we find ourselves in a state of like stasis, like paralysis which is you can't move this way and you can't move that way. And at the same time you know we've had all these environmental protests over the last couple of weeks here, Extinction

Rebellion, who are kind of amazing and exciting, and they're going 'Guys, the world is on fire, like it's actually on fire', and everybody is kind of *[sighs]* you know, we're just - I feel exhausted quite a lot of the time. And and similarly, yeah I find I'm just kind of focusing on, I'm just getting on I'm doing what I do. You know, sometimes it feels to me like the only thing you can do as a artist in sort of troubled times is just...continue. And that's the, that's the kind of pathetic but important act of...resistance, or something. I don't know if that makes any sense. I'm just kind of talking now.

**JASMINA** Maybe it's just the feeling that our generation has.

**TOM** Yeah, maybe.

**JASMINA** Maybe that's why Extinction Rebellion is great, that it is formed by very young people.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Like 20 years younger than us.

**TOM** Yeah, yeah yeah.

**JASMINA** So it's their real fight right now for them. So, it's great

**TOM** Yeah. And I guess you know like we can kind of - I do find it really inspiring. I feel like I can go 'okay these guys still think there's something worth fighting for. All right then, let's get back up and get on with it, you know, and stop sitting around here complaining all the time.' And, of course, you're working, in the project you're working with very young people, right. Like with high school students and -

**JASMINA** Yeah.

**TOM** And how are you finding that? Do you find their attitudes towards the system in Macedonia are the same as yours, or are they different? How are they changing?

**JASMINA** They are even more indifferent.

**TOM** Right. Yeah.

**JASMINA** Like they have even more mistrust.

**TOM** Yeah

**JASMINA** They have mistrust *a priori*. We had to, like, we had to experience everything and then mistrust the system. They have *a priori*.

**TOM** It's built in.

**KRISTINA** Yeah.

**JASMINA** Yeah. They just....

**KRISTINA** Yeah. For us, for our generation it's a bit different, because we were born in one system, then our – then we were raised in another and we had, like in our late 20s and 30s we had this nationalist government, but we were aware of how, like how it could be, how it was, how it should be. But these young people, they only know, they were all raised in a completely nationalistic conservative setting, and then all the mistrust that they have is valid, because all of the protests or rebellions, everything that was being done, it was never fruitful. It was never, it never had a result. So, of course, they're, they have already lived all their young lives with the idea that they cannot change anything, that whatever they try it's impossible to change.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** It's impossible for them to make something, so that's why they're indifferent and they're, and that's valid. I completely understand why they are indifferent, and that's why many of them are actually deciding to leave. That's why many of them are planning to migrate and there are so many statistics and *anketa*, like when they're, when you ask young people what you would like, to stay in Macedonia or move, bigger percent says that they are planning to move somewhere.

**TOM** Yeah.

**KRISTINA** So, the fact that they're indifferent is – yeah, it has reason. It's because of everything that was happening in terms of politics and everything else. Yeah.

**TOM** Yeah. Can you, in the work that you're doing at the moment or beyond the work that you're doing at the moment, do you see a way through or past that indifference, towards a way that, a way of engaging that feels more active? Do you think? Or is it, you know, are we done?

**KRISTINA** Yeah, well I think that's why I read it as a team decided to work with young people, so that we can challenge them and see if they can be more proactive. Even though there are of course there are a lot of young people that are really active, of course. But this is me generalizing -

**TOM** Sure -

**KRISTINA** And just to hear their voice, to hear their perspectives, their, their interests their, their thoughts on what can be done in Macedonia, yeah.

**TOM** Yeah, yeah. And I guess it is partly by - someone gives you the opportunity to get your voice heard, and then you start to learn that your voice can have some meaning, right?

**JASMINA** I can - I cannot see the solution right now, for me it's like all blur and black but I know it's out there.

**TOM** Yeah

**JASMINA** I know we'll be there eventually. Yeah.

**TOM** Yeah. Yeah.

**JASMINA** We're not maybe going to come up with that maybe people after us. Yeah come up with that but I'm sure it will be there.

**TOM** It's suddenly sounding very *Uncle Vanya*. You know like 'Ah, we'll keep working Uncle Vanya one day. The generation in a thousand years, they will sometimes be happy' or whatever that phrase is, but I kind of get that, I think sometimes that's how I feel. I think like you Jasmina, I kind of feel quite positive about the future even though there isn't necessarily a lot of evidence to point to it. And maybe that's being an artist or maybe it's just trying to stay positive in a difficult landscape. But being able to have both of you come here and sort of take whatever we're all learning together as a group through the weekend back to back to Skopje, and back to working with those young people, and then how does that then progress something. Like a small aspect of civil society, an individual group, individuals and small groups of people, making a small change in how they look at the world. And maybe that's a, yeah, it's a contribution, even if it's not a sort of actively practical contribution to political change. I mean, do you think art can make that kind of change in the world or not? I really don't know any more. *[Laughs]*

**KRISTINA** I'm kind of -

**TOM** - you're shaking your head -

**KRISTINA** - yeah, I'm kind of an idealist, and I do believe that art has the power, maybe not on a, on a global level, but doing it from really small funds of fight, doing it from the, like as an outsider, doing it from different areas, and then, those smaller fights I think can have a

bigger impact. So I - as I said it might be naïve, kind of, but I still do believe that. Even if it is that on a very small scale, even if it's on a small scale.

**JASMINA** Me too, I also believe that art has the potential of that, still it has, and always will have the potential to do the change.

**TOM** And kind of, it feels to me sometimes like on the smallest scale between people and that's when it feels most possible. And then when you look at bigger structural political changes that's, there's like a, if there was a graph of my faith it would sort of tail off, you know, like us in this room, I feel like you could change my mind about anything and we could change something together about how we think, but whether we could then take that change out into the world and force a change on the bigger political scale, that I don't know. On our own probably not, but maybe with ten thousand other people perhaps.

**JASMINA** And not just art, like what yesterday, what we were talking about yesterday about how pop culture shapes our reality right now and how it educates the younger generation about the next fights and everything. And what Barbara said that, for example maybe Greta Thunberg is right now a product. Not a product, like she's a person, but I mean she's already an idol, iconic figure. She's a person but we all identify the fight with her already. With the young girl who will fight ultimately with the greater evil, with everything. That is pretty much cultivated in the last 10 years.

**TOM** Yeah, it's *Game of Thrones* -

**JASMINA** She mentioned *Game of Thrones*, mentioned Katniss Everdeen and Arya Stark.

**TOM** Yeah.

**JASMINA** I don't want to spoil you, spoiler you or anything.

**TOM** Do NOT spoiler me, otherwise yeah, bad things will happen.

**JASMINA** Yeah, it has the potential. We see the potential. We see the result from the last ten years of TV shows -

**TOM** Sure - and we imagine change.

**JASMINA** Yes.

**TOM** Yeah. OK. That feels like a nice point to wrap up I think, unless there's stuff you guys want to add but -



**KRISTINA** Imagine change. I think it's the perfect ending.

*Transition music*

**TOM** So that was a conversation with Kristina Borzuska and Jasmina Vasileva from the Republic of North Macedonia. We recorded this conversation back in April, and it's July now. Listening back to it, I'm really struck by how much optimism both Kristina and Jasmina had about the future, and about the power of the arts and culture, and how tired and jaded I sounded in comparison! To be fair, I feel like we're swallowing a fair few frogs here in the UK at the moment. I'm writing and recording this during a scorching and quite scary heatwave, on the day when the Brexit campaign leader Boris Johnson becomes Prime Minister here in the UK. But I feel loads more optimistic today than I did back in April, and I think that's partly as a result of listening back to this interview, and hearing Jasmina and Kristina talking about working to make the kinds of art they want to see in the world, and placing young people at the centre of their thinking. I feel really struck by how much we've got common, despite our two countries being opposite ends of Europe and with such differences in size, wealth, power and history. And for me, that's such a huge part of what The Chorus Project is about – for both the professional artists and the non-professional performers involved, who you'll be meeting in later episodes. It's about realising the challenges, fears and hopes that we all share, and that we're all dealing with in different ways, and supporting each other while we do so. So, a question that's going to be at the front of my mind as we go on with the project is – how can we keep using the arts and culture to bring people together, and to have the broadest, most honest and open conversations that we can? And so, if *you* want to be part of the conversation why not drop me a line on Twitter at Upstart Theatre, or you can get in touch via the Upstart Theatre website. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time!

*Outro music*

Thank you for listening to The Chorus Project podcast. The podcast is presented and produced by me, Tom Mansfield, for Upstart Theatre, as part of The Chorus Project.

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In the UK, Upstart Theatre is presenting our show *Beneath the City* as part of The Chorus Project. We'll be at Birmingham REP theatre from 16-18 January 2020, and tickets are available online now. You can find out more about The Chorus Project at [www.upstart-theatre.co.uk](http://www.upstart-theatre.co.uk).