**[SHORT CLIPS]**

**Katharine McFarlane**: *Organisations thinking about wanting to attract quality freelancers, if they're just really upfront about what you’re gonna be paid, and then follow that up with communication, if work is kind of stretching out longer, keep talking about it and keep discussing it.*

**Shonagh Murray:** *For me, it's kind of systemic issue of even just attitude to the industry. And this idea of like the arts industry is kind of hidden in plain sight.*

**Leyla Josephone:** *Pay an accountant, don't do your tax yourself unless you're a Virgo or a psychopath, you will never get that time back.*

**Heather Parry:** *I have been looking for so long for like a really good strong left wing criticism of UBI (Universal Basic Income) and the only one I can really find is that it's not communism*

**Intro:**

**Morven Cunningham**: This is the Future Culture podcast. In 2021, the Culture Collective programme was created and established a network of 26 participatory arts projects, shaped by local communities alongside artists and creative organisations, funded by Creative Scotland. Since then, they have embarked upon an event series entitled Starting Points, that explored pertinent themes to community-based art projects within the network. This podcast will explore what comes next! What does the future hold for creatives and their importance for communities across Scotland as we go forward?

In each Future Culture episode, we will consider different themes which mirror those of our initial Starting Points events. In this episode, Spotlight, we focus on a subject close to my heart, that of creative freelancers,.

This week we explore:

* Without an official HR department, how can we better protect Creative Freelancers in the future?
* Recognition of precarity for freelancers and how covid has further exposed that precarity
* Why do we find it so hard to place value on ourselves as freelancers?

**Part 1: Without an official HR department, how can we better protect Creative Freelancers in the future?**

**MC:** Whilst we journey to our first location, I wanted to explain a bit about creative freelancing. Many people listening to this podcast will be creative freelancers but there will be many that aren’t and the hope is that this may shed more light on some of the myths. So, what is it? Simply put, it can be anyone who receives income, goods and/or services in exchange for their creative work or services. BUT, it’s not employed in the traditional sense, but rather work surrounding contracts on one or more different projects. It also doesn’t have to be limited to one field within the creative industries, and can be multiple, including writing, acting, musicianship, event producing and much more. It can be a juggling act and it can mean lots of work in a short space of time or long spells with no work, meaning potential burnout or financial worry. It also isn’t necessarily your traditional 9-5 Monday to Friday BUT on the plus side, it can offer freedom and flexibility and the people who work in this field are what arguably keeps the creative industries alive. So, let’s explore this subject more with the help of some people and let’s get to our first destination…

We have arrived at the Seedhill area of Paisley and we begin with the EVOLVE project. This 18-month creative regeneration project will build on existing community momentum gained during the Seedhill Urban Growing and Recycling project (SUGaR) 2016-2019. Through an artist in residency programme, bi-weekly creative workshops, events and the use of green and underused spaces, residents will have the opportunity to regularly connect with creative practitioners. Their aspirations are to inspire and unlock community potential, to create a sense of place, celebrate local identity and renew pride in the area while developing a creative vision.

Two of EVOLVE’s team Katharine Mcfarlane and Rebecca Livesey-Wright took part in the Spotlight Starting Points event, and both work as creative freelancers. Katharine is a freelance Online Workshop Coordinator with the EVOLVE Project. She is a Skye-based poet, performer, facilitator and ex-Children and Young People’s Librarian with a passion for creating connections, celebrating communities and championing underrepresented voices through poetry, spoken word and storytelling. Her work explores themes such as identity, tradition, environment, relationships and journeys and she is particularly interested in exploring how we as individuals instigate change and adapt to changes in our lives and environment.

Rebecca is RIG Arts' Project Coordinator and is a Glasgow-based queer community-focused creative practitioner, working in facilitation & coordination with a curatorial lens. They are driven by an approach of unearthing hidden narratives by putting into dialogue individual experiences & works. Rebecca is committed to working with communities to enhance social inclusion & social justice through the arts & culture.

Both have a wealth of experience as creative freelancers, with Rebecca also factoring in work as a single parent, a subject that was tackled at the original Spotlight event. It can be quite a daunting place as a freelancer, especially when starting out. You effectively create your own working day, and that also includes all the structure at its nucleus. Let’s begin by hearing from Katharine and Rebecca on some of the things that have helped within their current projects freelancing…

[CLIP] **Katharine Mcfarlane:** *I think one of the things that had sort of attracted me to the EVOLVE project was that it was very upfront that it was Artists Union rates, and then it was discussed again at the interview. So there was no awkwardness at any point about remuneration, we've discussed how I'll invoice for that when I'll invoice for that just openly from the very start. So I think, you know, organisations thinking about wanting to attract quality freelancers, if they're just really upfront about what are gonna be paid. And then follow that up, as Rebecca said, with communication, if work is kind of stretching it longer, keep talking about it and keep discussing it. Because I think it made me feel quite confident to be able to say, No, it's fine. It's still within the scope of what we planned, or actually this part of it, because, you know, we're now looking at print costs that I hadn't had, you know, it factored in initially. And so we found that from another budget, and so we've been able to have those really open discussions, but that's because it was there from the very beginning. It's not like I've done all the work and suddenly turned around and said, Please, yeah, do this. So yeah, I think it's just being open and honest. And that's from both parties, the freelancer and the organisation as well. So I suppose if it's the organisation putting out a call, then the onus is really on them to set that tone from the beginning to say, this is what we're offering and we can discuss it. Having worked in a kind of paid role for many years. I think, often that's just an oversight, you know, you don't think about your time as in blocks of hours as an I’ve attended that meeting that cost X amount, whereas when you're freelance, that's exactly the way you need to be thinking about it. So I think again, it seems sort of unfortunate and unfair for that to fall back on the freelancer, but quite often, and I think you do need to be quite vocal about well, if we're coming in to discuss a concrete project, my time is x amount per hour, this will take approximately x hours and just be quite kind of business like about it.*

[CLIP] **Rebecca Livesey-Wright:** *That's something that's always at the forefront of my mind because I'm in this weird position where I work as a freelancer working this project coordinator role part time. And then I freelance doing other stuff in my other time. And in this role, like I said earlier, when I am in this privilege of having this long term contract, it's set hours each week, it's a set wage each month. And I'm hiring other artists and something but I will like repeatedly say to all of the artists I work for is like if you work more than what we've said, what we've initially agreed, you tell us, because this budget is flexible, people are creating amazing, amazing quality work. And sometimes that does take longer than you think it's going to take. And that's okay. I think that the thing that I would say to other freelancers is just communicate like if it is taking you longer communicate, and then we can let you know if there was room in the budget to pay for that extra work or whether you need to try and rein it in a wee bit, whatever it is, but like, generally speaking, you should always get paid for the work you do, unless you're kind of like surprising somebody with like 30 extra hours or something like that. But if you have worked longer, the good organisations will if they can find the budget to pay for that extra work and it's worth it. We want our freelancers to feel supported. And because then it works for the both of you.*

**MC:** The key word in all of this is communication. A word that can make and break not only organisations, but also creates huge barriers for creative freelancers. Katharine’s comments about the importance of organisations being upfront, the mention of artist union rates (which we’ll come onto later) and sometimes how helpful it can be to be business-like in your approach is all relevant. And as Rebecca rightly points out, *amazing work takes time*. Freelancers are doing their work ahead of time, so there has to be some kind of prediction as to how long something is going to take and realistically, the actual measurement won’t come until the project is completed. It’s then that the risks start to come in. What if the work can’t be completed in the predicted time set? What if there isn't a budget to exceed time? Contingency is also a hugely important consideration. And all of this is just the tip of the iceberg. It’s great to hear the positivity that Katharine and Rebecca talk about, especially the upfront communication and subsequent stability that this creates.

Another artist working as part of the EVOLVE team is Seamus Killick. Seamus is a visual artist from Wales based in Glasgow. Currently his work is about using costumes, masks and spectacle to explore local history and culture, his own imagination and collective mental health.

One massive talking point that has been coming up more regularly over the last few years is that there is effectively no recognised HR or Human Resources department for creative freelancers. HR in its conventional term is a group who is responsible for managing the employee life cycle. It’s of significance for many employees including when they may be experiencing difficulties in the workplace. So we were keen to ask Seamus: Without an official HR department, how can we better protect Creative Freelancers in the future?

[CLIP] **Seamus Killick:** *I'm quite new to the game really, this is the first few months of me going full time freelance. So I'm still learning the ropes. I feel very lucky that I work with a really great organisation who are really supportive and I'm really becoming everyday closer and closer with my colleagues. It feels like a really strong team. And I'm just thinking if or when situations arise how those would get dealt with just in terms of what HR has meant for me in my previous positions, I've worked a lot in care work. So there's been where HR really, really important facet of that work. I think in terms of organisational administrative stuff, that's definitely not my strong point at this stage. Like, I'm still really learning. But yeah, in terms of all the meetings, the schedules, like I have quite a strict routine, but it's still like, there's a lot of digital communication stuff, which I'm still getting my head around, like, I mean, a bit of support around that, I think would be brilliant for those starting out. But then again, I mean, the people I'm working with are very supportive in that respect, and very understanding, A strong organisation who are really impassioned by the work they're doing, and believe in the work they're doing. And I feel like that, that feels really new for me, because I've done a lot of work with with good organisations, but people who've been really ground down by unsupportive workforce management and colleagues and so working in this organisation, which is very, very centred around people, it feels really refreshing to work with people who, who love the work they do, and are really understanding of the people. There's like a sense of autonomy you have as a freelancer, which is quite new to me being control of when I work, that level of trust, I really appreciate. And I don't feel like there's a huge amount of pressure on me there's expectations, there's not this very ominous pressure. That feels really good. And I feel like I'm getting the work done. And like that natural, there's a very natural drive within me which they believe in.*

**MC:** Seamus echoes his EVOLVE team’s comments about how important the support of the organisation is here. As someone who is new to freelancing, Seamus delivers some real positivity with regards to the autonomy of a freelancer and how pressure can be reduced where there is trust from the offset. This is why so many people have the desire to become freelancers. His comments about the realisation surrounding admin, meetings and scheduling was however, somewhat of an awakening for him. And his wish to have more support surrounding these things, is likely similar for a number of freelancers. The learning curve is exponential, these are the extra bits of work that can take away from creative projects and can at times overshadow the enjoyment of this work and cause undue stress, especially if we have never had experience of “self-admin”.

Therefore our first provocation is: If in a salaried role, meetings, planning, admin etc. is all factored into our wage but as freelancers, this is something that we can end up doing for free. ***What therefore irks us most as freelancers and how could we approach this aspect more effectively?***

**Part 2: Recognition of precarity for freelancers and how covid has further exposed that precarity**

**MC:** Our next stop off is South-West Scotland where we visit Ayr, Girvan and Maybole. Greeting us is The Ayr Gaiety Partnership. A project which will build on community engagement work by taking on six creative practitioners to work within six communities. Three of these are geographic and three are collaborations with existing local groups who target and support people with a range of different needs. The Ayr Gaiety Partnership will run ‘fun days’ in Wallacetown, to talk to the community about what they think Wallacetown already does well and the changes they want to see in the area.

For creative freelancers, there is the real threat of uncertainty when it comes to work and income, and there is general consensus that the pandemic exacerbated challenges that freelancers already faced, such as unstable job prospects. Thousands of jobs in the creative industries were lost overnight and there was a collapse in working hours across the sector.

Two creative practitioners who experienced this and who are working with The Ayr Gaiety Partnership are Lydia Davidson and Shonagh Murray. Founders of Fearless Players - a female-led theatre company, Lydia is a Geordie Actor, Writer, Director and Lecturer and Shonagh is a composer, musical director and a singing teacher.

Both are producing a Dementia friendly theatre show as part of their project which promises to be both innovative and inspiring. Here’s what they had to say about their experiences during the pandemic including what could potentially improve things…

[CLIP] **Lydia Davidson:** *Before the pandemic, I’d just come back, I’d just done a year in South Korea, writing musicals. And then I came back for Fringe because we had a we had two shows at Fringe. And so I produced them from South Korea, and then came back here so I was exhausted, and then had to build up a new freelance practice back in Glasgow, and I felt like I was just getting things would just rolling and then just overnight, everything was just gone. I don't know if there's a good story of the outcome of that there is there is because I got work back and I survived it, but I guess I always thought it was kind of uncertain. It's always been a bit of a rocky thing. I guess. I've been a freelancer for just under 10 years now, but it really exposed that really everything can go overnight. Like that's never happened to me before and I don’t think that's ever happened to most people I know before so quickly, and it was kind of mad for it to happen to everyone all at once. It was awful, but also weirdly felt like at least we had a bit of community as everyone. Everyone was in the same awful boat. It's taught me that I need to have savings. That's something I'll never, never not do again, I didn't have savings at the beginning of the pandemic. I always thought when people said, You need to have three months savings as a backup that was like, That's ridiculous. No one has too much savings as a backup. Now I realise why you need too much savings as a backup. I remember just working really hard every day, and I'm not really sure what I was doing as I didn't have a job. But I think I was just like sitting on my computer desperately hustling, trying to figure out how to get a job. So I started teaching English online for a while I was really bad at that. I don't know why they let me do that. But I just remember, like, I remember working harder than I've ever worked. I think at the time, it was just like survival mode. So it was just like, just get through it and figure out a way. And then I feel like it hit me probably like quite a while later. And then it really had an impact. I think it was like worked to get the work built up the work and then suddenly overworked myself for I don't know, how long has it been 10 years, but then by the time it got to like the end of last year, the end of 2021. Just like full exhaustion, I feel like that's when it all hit and now I feel like majorly burnt out, I'm kind of just starting to like pick up the pieces again and feel a bit more relaxed.*

[CLIP] **Shonagh Murray:** *​​I think I've always had an awareness of how vulnerable we are as freelancers. I think I've been especially working in the art. So not just as a freelancer, freelancer within the arts industry is in itself, society deems it to be an unstable environment already. So I mean, my parents, my mom was an accountant and my dad worked in insurance. So it was the furthest from freelance you could get. And so I kind of always grew up knowing that I would either have a stable lifestyle, if I worked nine to five, or I'd have an unstable lifestyle. I'm very lucky in that I have a teacher's qualification in anticipation. I didn't know it was going to be for a global pandemic. But I got I got my ticket thinking I'll make myself indispensable in the event that I I don't get the work to support myself. With with the lockdown hitting the pandemic getting, that kind of just solidified in a really sad way, all of what I had kind of been marinating over growing up, which is, which is a shame because especially when during the pandemic, everyone turned to the arts in support, everyone was therapising themselves through all of our hard work. I had been working as a part time lecturer down in London, as well as doing freelancer things. And so even that is a more of a freelance friendly contract. I didn't qualify for furlough because of that kind of contract. And because I had that contract which offset my freelance income, I didn't make enough that actually qualified me for freelance help. So it's all these kinds of things of like we're trying to equip ourselves for an event like this. And the act of equipping ourselves actually disables us. So it's very ironic. But yeah, so I moved back up, and I very gratefully took use of my teaching qualification, and kind of got myself back up onto my feet. It feels like the absence of what we had during lockdown is exactly what we needed. Just the very fact that there wasn't, there wasn't really any kind of government support for freelancers in that way that have lots of lots of pots to attend to, you know that if you were a business and you ran your own business, and you and you had and you had employees and you had a board of directors or any of these different defining features of a kind of standard business, that was a wee bit better for you, but unless you had connections with like, Help Musicians UK, they were great. Like I signed up for that help as well of just like here's some money because we know that everyone's lost out. I think for me, it's not as simple as like, what, what one or two things would we have to have differently in a future situation. For me, it's a kind of systemic issue of even just attitude to the industry. And this idea of like the arts industry is kind of hidden in plain sight. Even just the idea that theatres didn't get official permission to shut down, they weren't financially capable of shutting down but insurance wise it was an absolute, it was chaos. So I mean, I think it just needs to be a mega attitude change.*

**MC**: Lydia’s account is a common one. The need for work and “hustle” as she describes fuels a desperation, but it also further amplifies the experience of having dry spells when it comes to work, and this was pre-pandemic. The problem of that being cemented over the pandemic, has meant that the difficulty in saying no to work has been increased or in extreme circumstances, many people have actually left the creative sector and retrained in different fields. Going back to that desperation however, can lead to burnout. Freelancers can try to cram numerous contracts into short spaces of time, through fear of no or low income, resulting in unhealthy working hours, subsequent poor mental health with no time to develop skills, or to think about future creative evolution. So, we have two provocations for this section and the first is: ***The pandemic highlighted how precarious it is to be a creative freelancer including some folk not qualifying for furlough for example. What can we do to protect ourselves from precarity and burnout?***

Shonagh makes so many relevant points that it’s difficult to focus on one. The fact that she says she had a teacher’s qualification “in anticipation” is again something common. Why do we feel that our primary role as a creative freelancer isn’t enough? And that is perhaps answered, when she goes onto talk about the systemic attitude to the arts and how that needs to change. But one of the most worrying aspects of this, is that despite this conventional back-up plan, Shonagh didn’t qualify for furlough AND she didn’t qualify for freelance help either. She puts it perfectly when she says “what we equip ourselves with disables us”.

Someone else who is part of The Ayr Gaiety Partnership is Jerry Taylor. Jerry is a well-known actor from Ayr and has enjoyed success with his work. He also took part in the previously mentioned Starting Points event and spoke about how fundamental Ayr Gaeity’s support was…

[CLIP] **Jerry Taylor:** *The Gaiety were great with me at the start, when we came out of lockdown, I had three shows that were meant to be in the space of a year, but they got pushed to the space of six weeks. So coming out a lockdown, I had six weeks to put the show on. So we'd lost a lot of money during lockdown with the marketing and we were doing singing ‘Singing’ I’m No A Billy, He’s A Tim’, I’m producer of that, ‘Singing’ I’m No A Billy, He’s A Tim 2’’ and we had the Armadillo show coming up. And I spent about three grand on the promotion with the old dates on it. So The Gaiety gave me a six month contract to start with to work freelance with them. And if it wasn't for that stability, I wouldn't have had the money put into the shows and I would have had to cancel them. So they gave me the ability to go out and still work, as well as working for them on a six month contract, when that contract ended for my freelance work, The Gaiety, again amazing, the all the projects we were doing, were really going somewhere. So they brought me back in on a monthly basis. So I will invoice them on a monthly basis for any work that we've been doing. But that first six months was a real blessing for me.*

**MC:** For someone like Jerry who is producing big shows, we can perhaps forget the impacts, and domino effects of the pandemic on existing works. A 6-month contract was something that gave Jerry stability to be able to provide security, but also be able to look at the completion of bigger goals. The very concept of stability is something that many of us crave, but COVID-19 turned a lot of things on their head and showed that everyone is vulnerable. It also, however, highlighted lack of job security and employment support as a major area of concern for the creative industries, and an issue that needs to be addressed going forward. Taking into account many of Shonagh’s points and Jerry’s account our next provocation therefore is: ***Would something like Universal Basic Income change the landscape for creative practitioners and give them the stability they need?***

**Part 3: Why do we find it so hard to place value on ourselves as freelancers?**

**MC:** We travel next to visit The North Lanarkshire Culture Collective. A collective working with four creative practitioners delivering six projects locally, co-produced with individuals and groups most affected by Covid-19.

Their project will work with and through Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire’s six community anchor organisations, who are embedded in existing communities and have a rich understanding of local needs and priorities, helping to reach those most affected by the pandemic. Those organisations are: Health and Wellness Hub (Airdrie & Motherwell), Orbiston Neighbourhood Centre (Bellshill), Glenboig Community Centre (Coatbridge and Glenboig), Cumbernauld Care for the Elderly (CACE) (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and surrounding areas), North Lanarkshire Carers Together (Motherwell) and Getting Better Together (Shotts and Wishaw).

One creative practitioner who is working with the collective is John Martin Fulton. You may recall that we spoke to John in episode 2 of this podcast. He is an award-winning Scottish artist who trained at Glasgow School of Art and focuses, and is known, for his painting. He has worked for years bringing the joy of art to people in social care, and with children as well as adults with learning disabilities. John is a great example of a creative freelancer who has not only been working in his field for a number of years but also across various projects including Culture Collective.

One of the biggest learning curves for freelancers is how to value themselves. And this doesn’t just mean financially but also brings in the subject of self-value and our inner monologue. Throughout this episode you will have heard snippets about burn out, about hours worked, finance lost and more. It’s all those elements that contribute to the wider conversation of value also. Financially, you might feel clueless when it comes to setting rates, you don’t want to overcharge and get no offers but you don’t want to undercharge and be taken advantage of, it can be extremely stressful. Similarly, when it comes to valuing yourself, there are many battles including imposter syndrome, overloading oneself with too much work, no time for self-care and it can be a very lonely field at times.

John’s abundance of experience as a freelancer made it feel that it was perhaps the right time to ask Why do we find it so hard to place value on ourselves as freelancers?

[CLIP] **John Martin Fulton:** *There is problems with that, you know, be placing value on yourself. Even within this project, I've priced something like a bit of work, a commission and then the person that's in charge of the project as they looked at the Scottish Artists Union rates of pay and said you have like severely underpriced yourself for this, actually we’ll need to pay you this. So it is mad that we do that, if you think about why, I don't think it's just that we’re freelancers, I think that we’re freelancers and the cultural sector, and I think, in Scotland, you're just like, trained for the day one to see that as, as icing on the cake as like, this extra thing that is after hours. That's just non essential. So it's just so inbuilt to us all. And so we just treat it as you know, well, if you've got a alot of hurdles in yourself to get over, before you can start getting yourself the right pay that you deserve. I've worked in other sectors, you know, I've worked in the newspaper sector, and I've worked in the charity sector this is all for decent number of years and when you're self employed doing your, your own work, you know, when you're when it's your own art form that you're passionate about, you really do work very hard. Actually, what you need to do is stop yourself working too hard. For myself, I'm at an age where I've got to wee kids. So I'm dead conscious often I don't want a be somebody that thinks about you know that overworks I'm at least I've been doing it for years like 8 years or so. So I know to set limits on myself and that's that's the key now you got you can protect yourself from yourself from working too hard kind of thing.*

**MC:** John highlights something that is not only important, but also quite worrying when it comes to creative freelancers. He talks about how being a creative freelancer can be looked upon as non-essential work. And this harks back to Shonagh’s point about systemic attitudes to this sector. Arguably, when you are treated a certain way repeatedly, your inner narrative may begin to change and you may start to believe something surrounding your own worth. It comes as no surprise that there is a desperate lack of confidence in the sector when it comes to how we regard our work. It’s also argued that the arts doesn’t always pay what it should, organisations may say that a budget is tight, someone may be willing to do the job at a fraction of your cost and you may be considered “difficult” if you challenge rates, the list is endless.

There is however a truth and that is, the arts is essential. It provides people not only with enjoyment but it is part of the economy, it aids things like therapy, it brings communities together and as mentioned in previous episodes, can bring stories to the forefront.

Another practitioner working with North Lanarkshire Culture Collective is Scott MacDonald who also took part in the live Culture Collective event. In this clip Scott talks about what keeps him grounded in his infancy as a creative freelancer…

[CLIP] **Scott MacDonald:** *I come from a mental health background where I worked with a charity called Men Matter Scotland, and they're based out in Drumchapel. So it's basically a charity based around purely kinda men’s mental health because of the suicide rates up that way. So coming from that, and kind of working with these guys, and learning from them what they do to, you know, to kind of focus themselves to keep themselves in a good space. What I’ve learned from that is I kinda meditate on a daily basis now, so I'll do it once in the morning, once at night. And that can helps me kind of focus on on kind of positives and things like that. And not just that it's working with them and working with the guys at the recovery place where I’m working now, it's kind of feeding off them slightly kind of getting positive feedback from them and seeing how much they enjoy it. So that that can so far that's kinda helped me with that. Because I had a bout of poor mental health a few years ago, which is why I went to Men Matters as a service user to begin with. And then once I was better, I was able to kind of go back and sort of stay I think it's that's that's part of it as well. But then we go back to the community. And through that kind of work is kind of it's kind of self gratification a wee bit. Yeah, I can see both sides of it. Yeah. So it's definitely something that I think is made me a lot more gracious with what I have got and the opportunities I've been given so far. So yeah, definitely.*

**MC:** Scott’s comments on learning from those he is working with, is another massive pro to being a freelancer. The abundance of relationships you make because you are not limited to one organisation and instead working on multiple projects, not only builds confidence, introduces you to numerous practices and people, but it also builds skills and networking. Here, it was personal skills that Scott learnt by adopting a meditative technique and incorporating that into his lifestyle. And that is a way of adding value into our lives as freelancers. Some people may say that time costs money when you’re a freelancer, but time is also vital for health and wellbeing and work-life balance.

What role do those distributing those freelance contracts play though? They may not have a conventional duty of care to those not “employed” so is there a duty of care at all? How can we gain extra external validation to promote our internal validation? Does that need to come from organisations? Do we need a bigger power to change this narrative? Should organisations do better by freelancers? Therefore our next provocation is: ***Should organisations be held to account more when it comes to poor treatment of creative freelancers? Or, should the steer come from funders to those organisations they fund directly?***

**Part 4: Leyla Freelanci-festo**

**MC:** We wanted to do things a bit differently on this episode. As part of the Spotlight live event, performance poet, theatre maker, screenwriter, facilitator, project leader and filmmaker Leyla Josephine specially wrote and performed a Freelance Manifesto. We were lucky enough to catch up with Leyla, who gives us a shortened follow-up for this podcast and explains why she wrote it… A printed version of Leyla Josephine's Freelancifesto is being published by Speculative Books. A pdf copy will also be made available on Leyla Josephine's and the Culture Collective website in due course.

[CLIP] **Leyla Josephine:** *My name is Leyla Josephine. And I am currently in a shepherd's hut in Conon Bridge just outside Dingwall in the North of Scotland, I'm writing a collection of poetry from my van. I was asked to write a piece for this. And I decided to do a “freelanceifesto”, which really was kind of advice to myself, or what I've kind of learned over the last 10 years of being a freelancer. Yeah, I’m just going to do the first ten. I wrote the ‘freelanceifesto’ from my perspective, and for my own sanity, we decided to release it into the world with the hope that maybe the ideas will help you realise what your own ideas are about being a freelancer, everyone has different barriers. And not everyone is alone in the house like me. So if you have time, it's a good exercise to maybe write your own one and you can totally borrow some of mine if you like.*

*One, in many ways it is good to start with the unpleasant stuff first, it means the only way is up. So let's start with this. Being a creative Freelancer is lonely, especially if you work from home, in an empty house. Empty doors from empty rooms the days can feel endless, accompanied only by the sounds of the kettle boiling, a pen scraping on a piece of paper or the postman pushing bills through your door. You wander like a ghost curl up in bed, watch the birds do the dishes, answer that email. Maybe you go to the shop, working up the courage to speak for the first time. No, I don't need a bag, thanks. It's hard to keep track on days like these, the long ones, you can't remember what you did. And to be honest, you don't have any proof that you existed at all. Well, apart from the ticks on your to do list, this is why you should always keep a to do list.*

*Two, being a lone worker means that your battles are usually your own too. A problem with a contract, a misprint, a Twitter troll, an unreasonable organisation - it can be hard to measure the issue with a colleague to bounce off over the watercooler. You go over and over the problem in your mind until it becomes something else entirely. You voice the hypothetical arguments in your mind playing both parts, a kitchen sink drama vibrating off the sides of your skull and you're good at it. So your body reacts like it's actually happening. You get sweaty palms, your face flushes, your cholesterol fizzes in your veins, have a friend you can call in these moments or write it all down, don't store it in your body and do not hit reply until you are calm.*

*Three. You never get invited to Christmas night out. So you have to organise your own. I usually dress in office attire and winch someone I probably shouldn't be winching under some plastic mistletoe*

*Four. A solution to numbers 123 is to build a community for yourself. I live for the days that I am amongst other living things. The days I get to say Good Morning, the days that I am offered a coffee and a biscuit, the days where I am told thank you or have you thought about doing it this way? Make sure you have at least some work with others or a creative freelance career is nothing more than time pulling your hair out or staring at a wall.*

*Five. Get a paper diary the online ones are a faff. It is your anchor, do not lose it.*

*Six. The goalposts move silently when you're not looking. Find a way to celebrate your achievements or the past you buy like ships in the night.*

*Seven. Pay an accountant. Don't do your taxes yourself. Unless you're a Virgo or a psychopath. You will never get that time back.*

*Eight. Carve out a routine. This doesn't necessarily mean 5am Yoga followed by meditating on your intentions and a cold shower. If that's what works for you, go for it. But if that feels like too much, just do one thing every day at the same time. Maybe you get up at 10 every day or read every night, or write three morning pages at the crack of dawn, or maybe it’s reading with an avocado face mask on at noon, whatever as it will organise your day.*

*Nine. Don't get mad at yourself. If you're not a morning person, you're a freelancer. So you get to choose what the fuck you do with your mornings and lie ins are glorious. Be grateful that you're not on somebody else's schedule. You can always do extra work in the evening if you have to.*

*Ten. Turn off your notifications. Yes, even emails. You are not a firefighter or a paramedic, you are not on call 24/7.*

**Part 5: Host Round-Up: Morvern & Heather**

**MC:** At the end of each episode I like to have a debrief with a guest to discuss the themes raised each week with someone who is connected directly to the episode theme. This week our guest is Heather Parry - Heather is a Glasgow-based writer, editor, and publisher. She is the co-founder and Editorial Director of Extra Teeth magazine, co-host of the Teenage Scream podcast and the Scottish Senior Policy & Liaison Manager for the Society of Authors, a trade union for writers. In 2021 she created the free-access Illustrated Freelancer’s Guide with artist Maria Stoian. Her short stories and nonfiction have been published internationally, and her debut novel, Orpheus Builds a Girl, will be out in October 2022 with Gallic Books.

Here, I catch up in conversation with Heather about the provocations in this episode and take a look at the future.

[CLIP] **Morvern & Heather:**

**MC:** *How are you doing?*

**HP:** *I'm alright…*

**MC:** *Good. I was thinking a lot from the event. And also from some of the audio that we've got from our interviews, in the run up and earlier, to this podcast episode about some of the things that really annoys me as a freelancer, I think there's already been some mention of the fact that if you're invited to come to meetings, then you tend not to get paid for that. And that personally drives me wild. I like, one of the things that that kind of really gets my goat is when people say, Oh, it'd be great just to pick your brains. And I'm always like, that costs a lot of money to pick my brains, it's not just the price of a coffee. There's a lot of unpaid work involved in being a freelancer. And I was interested in kicking off our conversation about asking you, what irks you most, and maybe how that could be addressed better in the future?*

**HP**: I definitely can relate to the free meetings thing. So I've been a kind of freelance editor, writer for about a decade. And my worst thing is when someone tells someone else what I do, and then they have a fantastic idea. It’s a business idea as well. They've got this genius unique business idea that they just can't explain over email. So they want to get you on the phone or on a zoom call, which will be minimum an hour of your time to explain that essentially, what they need is some copywriting done for their website. And they won't have any budget and they won’t want you to do it. But they want to get on the phone, which you know, I'm a millennial, if if you have to pay me to pick up a phone. So yeah, it's, it's difficult, I just essentially don't do that work now. If someone can't tell me what they want me to do in an email, that means they don't know what they want the project to be really. So I've just started saying no to that work. But that's only something that come that can come when you're like, a bit more financially secure when you've been doing it a long time. But yeah, that and travel, if you have to travel, people not really considering the cost that that will be for you, especially now when it could all be done via zoom. But the thing that gets me most is just the constant late payments, because it's so unnecessary. Like I understand that if you're a huge corporation, you have kind of schedules for payment, but everyone within the organisation gets paid every month, and the payment terms of 30 days in this country. Unless you've you know, in some rare cases that 60 But it should be 30. And it's just not that difficult. And then the refusal to pay late payment fees which are a legal right of a freelancer.

**MC**: Boom. So include late payment fees and your invoices.

**HP**: Yes, and I should say as well. I think it's 70 and 100 quid or the two higher late payment fees that you can, you can charge and you should and if more people do it, it normalises it, it normalises people paying within 30 days because they don't want to get that kind of fee added on afterwards. And it helps everyone like it feels selfish, but it is a collective good.

**MC**: I think that selfish thing is an interesting point because I think there is something around the precariousness of the freelance lifestyle, anything like this that we choose. We choose this difficult road but like the There is there is something inherently I think precarious around being a freelancer and a freelancer in the arts and, and that's something that the pandemic in particular, really highlighted, not to mention all the folk that we're doing a mixture of PAYE and freelance work, and then not actually being able to either get furloughed, or then the self employment income support so kind of falling between. What can we do to protect ourselves from that kind of precarity? And maybe the burnout that that kind of career might lead to ultimately?

**HP**: I mean, that's a huge question, isn't it? The furlough one was strange, because it also it, it benefited the people who had kept good accounts, basically, and who I think you weren't eligible for, for the self assessment support. If you earned less than 50% of your money As a freelancer, I think that was the case, which seems to penalise people who, you know, they are working a PAYE wage job, but also they're freelancing on the side. And it's tough to know, that's kind of a structural change that needs to happen, isn't it that if there was something like this, again, where people's finances were hugely affected, how would we make sure that we were supported? I suppose the best thing is that you can join a union, as freelancers, we often think we're on our own. But there are so many different unions, you know, you could even join something like the IWW, which is Industrial Workers of the World. It's a non hierarchical union. And it's got very low dues, so it's very accessible. And they kind of will put anyone, so a lot of retail workers, but also a lot of creative freelancers as well. But then you can also join the unions within your sector of the industry. So I work for the Society of Authors, which represents writers. There's also the Writers Guild, in America, there is a freelancers union, which I think we're kind of lacking here. But you know, there's the Musicians’ Union, there's Equity, all these kind of things. And that just helps you have a larger voice when it comes to these things. And they do have really great lobbying, you know, even the bit, especially the bigger ones, they have a really great lobbying sort of power. In terms of the burnout, it's so difficult, isn't it, because the thing that would help is money, the thing that would help is not having to worry that within a couple of months, you're not gonna be able to pay your bills, pay your childcare, keep up with your mortgage, pay your rent, whatever it is. And there are things you can do with your finances. So like, I could say, you should put your money into a lifetime ISA. But you're just taking it from your future pocket there. Or I could say you can get income insurance. But again, how can you pay for that if you don't have the expendable income. You almost feel that by giving this advice, you're justifying that people have to do it. And I don't, I think joining a union is probably the best thing you can do and sort of becoming active in a union as well.

**MC**: That discussion around having a bit of a buffer. And having some kind of income that you can rely on coming in leads me kind of to my next question around Universal Basic Income. And just question that, would something like Universal Basic Income change the landscape for creative practitioners? And perhaps give them the stability that they require going forward?

**HP:** I mean, yes. We've answered that. No, my I have been looking for so long for like a really good, strong left wing criticism of UBI. And the only one I can really find is that it's not communism. And it's like, yeah, cool. I agree that it isn’t. But it does seem to be something that would just be so beneficial, and also a good way of government money being spent. And also then it would bring so much back in return. So yeah, I think it would hugely impact people. And have you seen that there's in Ireland, they're about to start the UBI for artists? I think it is.

**MC**: Yeah that was I think, the result of the creative taskforce report and, and also in Wales, they're also trialling it with care leavers as well.

**HP**: I mean, look, look at all the artists, you know, look at all the creative freelancers. Imagine how their life would be changed by knowing they had £1000, even coming at the end of the month. And people would invest it, they would invest in new projects, they would invest in things that would pay other creatives as well, you know, it goes so much back into the local economy and into the creative landscape, I think. And I just wish that people in government positions could think more creatively like in this kind of way.

**MC**: Scottish Government, we would like to try a UBI in Scotland, thanks. It almost felt like the self employment income support was a form of UBI at one point during the pandemic. But yeah, I think that in terms of the creative landscape across Scotland, it can be a bit of a mixed bag when it comes to how well organisations treat or work collaboratively with freelancers. So, in your opinion, do you think that organisations should be held to account more when it comes to maybe some of the lesser treatment? Or the bad practices when it comes to working with creative freelancers? Or should the steer come from funders to actually put pressure on those organisations that they fund directly?

**HP**: I think it's kind of both, but I think they should be held more accountable. Because funders can only do so much. And funders can only prove bad practice, when people are talking about it more openly. And like everybody knows that universities are terrible to work with as freelancers. But a lot of people who are starting to work as universities don't know. So, you know, if you do if you're a writer, and you go and do a talk at university, and you don't know anyone who knows this to tell you, you might not know that you're going to have to jump through hoops and send them copies of your passport and then may not get paid for four months, which might have a major impact on your life. So yeah, I think people should talk about it more. And I think there should be some sort of, wouldn't it be great if there was like a, what's like a government organisation? The Ombudsman, wouldn't it? Wouldn't it be great if there was like a freelancer ombudsman, where you could just come and say, This person hasn't paid me or they're really asking way too much in terms of me proving that I can work, or they've taken this fee off me or something? And then the ombudsman would just sort out when that'd be amazing.

**MC**: Or that freelancer union, you mentioned that we don't have yet as well.

**HP**: Yeah, yes, exactly.

**MC**: And just just thinking about, like, where government could come into this as well. Do you think that government led funding should be placed in creating additional support for freelancers, such as kind of workshops, mentoring, platforms to bring freelancers together? What are your thoughts on that?

**HP**: Yes, I do. I think it's happening as well, in Scotland, there are projects that are being funded. I think the amount of freelancers in the UK grows by a third every year or something. So it's a huge part of the workforce, you know, salaried jobs become less and less stable. So I think the government would be smart to address that. And I think they are. And, you know, we got Creative Scotland funding to write the Illustrated freelancers Guide…

**MC**: Ah yes! The Illustrated Freelancers Guide, good. I was gonna ask, I mean, if we wanted to find somewhere where we could find out about late fees, lifetime ISAs, maybe joining a union, where would we find that Heather?

**HP**: Yeah, this was a guide that I wrote with the brilliant illustrator Maria Stoian. And this is a kind of self propelled project. So we actually just started out like the conversation we're having now just talking between us about what, you know, challenges we faced as freelancers and what we wanted to change and how we might change it. And information that people didn't know enough of basically, and Creative Scotland kind of noticed that we were talking about these things invited us in for a meeting, and we put a printed proposal together in under a weekend. You know, it took a year to get that project funded. But we were able to create this free access guide, which tells you all about your rights and kind of best practices around creative freelancing. Things like how to do your taxes, where to find this information. You know, what if you're a parent, and you're a freelancer, and also like, how, what is small claims court? How do you chase up payment when you've put late payment fees, and they just start to ignore you? Because I think something like 55% of freelancers have done work that they've never been paid for. Which is a kind of terrifying statistic, but I know I have. So yeah, the guide is like downloadable, freely downloadable from the Creative Scotland website. But we've also got printed copies which are available for free. And we're also doing some more accessible versions at the minute so we'll have a plain text version and an easy read version. Who knows after that?

**MC:** It’s the end of another episode, but we do want to leave you with one big provocation courtesy of Heather to take forward. And that is: How can we better employ freelance creatives in the changing world of work?

**MUSIC BED**

In our next episode, Broadcast, we focus on Scotland’s Languages. In the meantime, why not head over to our Miro board, an online space that’s been created to invite you to join the conversation. Add your thoughts, insights, experiences and questions here, and we'll include your perspectives in our future conversations. You can find the link in the show notes to accompany this podcast or on the Culture Collective website. You can view videos of the original Starting Points events there too.

**Credits:**

**MC:** The Future Culture podcast is presented by me, Morvern Cunningham, produced and edited by Halina Rifai, with music by Hen Hoose. Culture Collective is funded by Scottish Government emergency COVID-19 funds through Creative Scotland

**END**