Santeri Kinnunen: From Finnish Farm to the Stage 38

Charlie Morrow: Yeah, no mic … your microphones.

Santeri Kinnunen: Now audio!

Charlie Morrow: Now audio?

Santeri Kinnunen: Yes.

Charlie Morrow: Santeri, it's great to see you on the screen.

Santeri Kinnunen: Great to see you too.

Charlie Morrow: I'm really happy to have a chance to talk with you about what you've been doing all these years, especially since you are a second generation actor with both parents in the business. I have a similar situation. My parents were both psychiatrists.

Santeri Kinnunen: Okay. But you are a musician'.

Charlie Morrow: Yeah, I'm a musician. I'm also a voice actor. I do a lot of narration work and as a podcaster, voice acting …

Santeri Kinnunen: That's a great part of my job too. I have done those. So in 1995, I started to [work on] cartoons and things.

Charlie Morrow: That's fantastic. You were telling me over drinks the other day. Some of the characters that you've done [was] for the Disney group here, if I recall.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. The first was the film *Pocahontas*, a Disney film. I was John Smith and then I got a role in Toy Story and since then I've been Buzz Lightyear.

Charlie Morrow: It's a pleasure Buzz.

Santeri Kinnunen: Thank you.

Charlie Morrow: Mita Kuuluu, Buzz.

Santeri Kinnunen: It's Buzz Lightyear to the rescue.

Charlie Morrow: That's great. You do have a great Buzz Lightyear voice.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah,

Charlie Morrow: it's good casting.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yes. Thank you. Disney's choice. There was [an audition for] voice acting before I got it. They thought that I was the best one in Finland to do Buzz Lightyear.

Charlie Morrow: I haven't met all the people in Finland, but of all the people I've met, you are the best one.

Santeri Kinnunen: Thank you.

Charlie Morrow: I appreciate you coming onto the show. We had a little rehearsal about it. Over drinks. I said that what we talk about is a common theme in all the shows – the first immersive experience that people had and I wondered if you would tell me that story again.

I thought it was pretty amazing. I asked you when you first felt like you were really someplace else other than the life that you had been living.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah, I did lots of… my cousins ... there was a great big farm in Miikkeli where I worked when I was a little boy. All my teenage life I have been [on this farm] and working with horses.

Charlie Morrow: Yeah, that's the story. You said there was something very special that you experienced.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah, because it was a totally different life than in Helsinki. It was the countryside and horses and everything like that. It was a kind of a cowboy life when I was child and it was a very rich thing to have because I'm a child from the big city.

Charlie Morrow: Enormous difference.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. It was.

Charlie Morrow: I'm curious then since as an actor you have also to go someplace different each time. Like there, you were suddenly on a horse. It was not city life, but as an actor, you are constantly, I don't say becoming a character, doing a character. Somewhere in there. There's some process that happens when you are in a character role, and I'm really curious how you think about yourself in those roles? How do you become somebody else?

Santeri Kinnunen: 35 years of doing this professionally… It's always different. It always comes with a text and it comes with what a writer has written and it's always different. Some roles are [more] difficult than others, but it's always interesting to be somebody as I'm never bored of looking at different sides of myself while I'm doing those roles.

You know, how do you say it, it's a very colorful life, with all those characters that I have done, all kind of a characters from historical characters to outdated characters and everything …

Charlie Morrow: What was your latest role?

Santeri Kinnunen: It's Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. It's a great story, yeah, a mystery story. In Helsinki at the Arena stage. That was the last one. And now we are starting to rehearse. We are doing the writer and the director; it's a new text named *Let's Play Business*.

Charlie Morrow: That's a great title.

Santeri Kinnunen: We just had reading rehearsals today just before we met.

Charlie Morrow: Nice. I'm curious now that you've explained your first out of yourself performance with the horses and then now becoming a character, how it was growing up with two actor-[parent]s and how did you get from there to here? Do you …

Santeri Kinnunen: When I was child, my mother and fathers were away a lot. They were in theater a lot and I had babysitters most of the time and so lots of time – ha – spent in theaters and seeing lots of different kind of plays, *The Death of Danton* …Wow. Yeah, my father was beheaded on the stage and everything like that, and when I was four, but I was a little worried, but then my mother and I, we went backstage and I saw how the magic was done. So I was not worried after.

You grow up in that kind of a [life], when you grow up in places like that, [you learn that they're not always home]. You spend so much the time in the theater and at first I didn't want to become an actor. I thought that I would become a drawer or some kind of a graphic artist.

But I still draw. I like drawing. I like photography and things like that. And those things helped me in this work as well. Yeah. But it was a normal life to me because I didn't know any other way to live when I was child. I was used to that.

Charlie Morrow: I've been curious, since I'm a composer, whether you've performed any plays that have been done to the accompaniment of music.

How many of your plays, not as musicals, but where there's a music, whether you've done much performing with music.

Santeri Kinnunen: I have done lots of musicals. I have done *Some Like It Hot*, *The Phantom of the Opera*. I've done *The Producers*, The last one was over 10 years ago.

I like to sing, but there are so many much better singers nowadays in our theater. I don't do music pieces anymore. But I sing and I like singing. Yes.

Charlie Morrow: Oh, that's lovely. Oh, I know that Sibelius wrote accompanying music for quite a few plays, and I'm wondering, have you done any of those classic plays with Sibelius's music?

Santeri Kinnunen: Well, *The Kings Go Forth.* That was the one when I was playing a role, which was actually not a singing role. It's as a narrator.

Charlie Morrow: Who was the composer?

Santeri Kinnunen: Composer was Sallinen. Aulis Sallinen. *The King Goes Forth*. Very good. Yeah. And we won a prize for it. It was a recording, best classical recording in Europe that year. And it was great honor to be in that production.

Charlie Morrow: I can imagine. You have such a resonant voice. That's why I ask you about music, because with a voice like that, you could be in those kinds of roles and have the strength to be heard. You speak over the instruments because you have such a good instrument …

Santeri Kinnunen: Thank you. Yes. They have said that I have a kind of resonant voice. It's pretty much the same tone that my father has, and they always say, "you sound just like your father," and I know that, but I can't fight that. You can't fight against windmills.

Charlie Morrow: He has a great voice. So I was wondering though, did you do any vocal training? Did you do elocution? What did you train your voice? Was it just natural?

Santeri Kinnunen: I suppose when I was younger I took lots of singing lessons and things like that, and also voice training lessons, but nowadays I do it myself.

I don't know how much I need. But I don't need professional help anymore. I can do that myself because I know the ways to it from before. I always open my voice and things like that.

Charlie Morrow: Would you mind doing a little of that for me and for our listeners?

Santeri Kinnunen: Mi mi mi ma ma ma ma ma ma maaa. It's that kind just to get your throat warm.

Charlie Morrow: It's great. The Rs are especially difficult in Finnish for me anyway. I was impressed. You have great Rs.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. Yeah. But you Americans still use Rs, still pronounce the R. In England there is no R any more. Yeah.

Charlie Morrow: That's right.

Santeri Kinnunen: If there is a Lady BRRacknell, which is the character from Oscar Wilde's*The Importance of Being Earnest*, they used to say Lady Bracknell in earlier times, but nowadays, in England, they say, lady Bucknell. There's no R in England anymore. But in America, they still pronounce it

Charlie Morrow: Well. There's definitely an R in Trump.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. Yeah. And in Scotland they pronounce the R.

Charlie Morrow: The Spanish are pretty, pretty much very cool with their Rs.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. Yeah. Ah, speaking English this much, makes my mouth dry, so I drank some water.

Charlie Morrow: That's, I think, a good thing. I wonder if there's anything that you would enjoy telling our audience about?

People interested in our show have been discussing immersion, like that experience of being somebody else in all different professions. We've had architects and designers. I just interviewed Harri Koskinen …

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah.

Charlie Morrow: Many different kinds of things and I'm just curious what you'd like to share with an audience that cares about these kind of ideas.

Santeri Kinnunen: Actually being somebody else; I don't see it as being totally somebody else. It's a kind of a digging something else than you. it's inside you, but it's always a part of me. It's not a totally different person, and that's the whole point in acting. You can't be *totally* somebody else. That somebody else comes from you, and you have to find the sides of you that you can use to give an illusion of somebody else.

Charlie Morrow: I hear you. That's very nicely put. You play musical instruments as well, I understand.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah, no, actually once uon a time I started taking piano lessons. It didn't go well. So I played drums and timbales and drums and many things. But those are my instruments. In high school years I played in *Good Grief.* And we played those old classic CCR hits and and everything like Lynyrd Skynyrd and things like that. And I was the drummer.

Charlie Morrow: When you're a drummer how do you experience that character? Is it very different from acting?

Santeri Kinnunen: No, it's not very different from acting. You just have to go with the flow. You have to take it like a round ball; when rhythm comes – it's acting. You have to just go with the flow. It's just like when there is a

performance on the stage. When it starts, it's rolling like a ball, and then it ends up as good music.

Charlie Morrow: That's very beautiful. I appreciate your sharing these thoughts and spending this time with me today.

Santeri Kinnunen: There s lots of bands I like. Yes, there is Jethro Tull I loved so much and I have all their records.

Charlie Morrow: The other thing that I didn't talk about yet is the part of acting that I find very difficult, which is being able to block your movements and act at the same time, whether it's a movie and you're running or bicycling or it's on stage where you're confined to a stage, and have to be in the right spot all the time.

How do you negotiate space? I'm really curious that since that's something I can't do.

Santeri Kinnunen: Well, as I wrote in my reference email, I think that what I've done in my high school was, I was in a drawing high school. I was drawing, photographing and that's always interested me – the visual things.

And that has helped me in my career, that I can in some way understand the visual things. Where am I going to place myself on stage? And that's very important when you want to make your expression. And it's very good to understand your own position on the stage and since I've drawn so much, it has helped me to see those things. I can't say there's actors who don't understand that, but maybe there are, but it's always useful to understand it visually. The whole visual scene when you're acting in it.

Okay. There is a director for that, but it's very helpful if you understand yourself as an actor where you are positioning yourself on stage.

Charlie Morrow: I thank you for sharing that. I'll share a little story with you that is related to it. In Greek times, when people were training to become public speakers and orators, they used a standard building to learn. They would memorize first the mud room, then the living room, and so forth. There would be a certain number of rooms in a standard house for memory purposes, and then all the speeches would have pretty much the same sections to them.

There would be an introduction and then a development and an argument and so forth when doing those classic Greek speeches. And then when the orator was speaking, then they would walk through the memory house. When they're on stage or wherever they're talking, they would walk in their mind through it and the parts of the speech would come back. They use that to memorize long bits of text.

Santeri Kinnunen: That's pretty true because all of the movements and your physical dueling on stage helps you remember. If you're in some position, it usually makes you a little bit confused and all this is connected, the physical [aspect] on stage. It helps you remember your lines and it comes together and then you don't actually have to remember anything. It just comes. And that's a very good story about those Romans because it's a very similar, when you make a great monologue, if there are two or three pages of monologue on a stage. You have to anchor it in places when you're rehearsing, actually. After that it comes but it helps when you anchor it, pinpoint some goals in that monologue. It helps you remember.

Charlie Morrow: Fantastic. I didn't know that. I can imagine you must also have a feeling in your body as you move through it as well.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah.

Charlie Morrow: It's a journey. A play is, in fact, a journey.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah. If you miss some props, you have to have some kind of a wallet or something. And if you don't have that then it makes you very confused on stage and then something usually happens, you can lose your line or something like that. It's a very delicate thing to play.

Charlie Morrow: That's amazing. I'm curious, do you dream very much when you sleep?

Santeri Kinnunen: Actually yes, I do. Time to time. My dreams are very peculiar. Yes, actually I can say yes, I dream a lot.

Charlie Morrow: Do you find yourself acting in your dreams or …

Santeri Kinnunen: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. And that's no fun at all. They are usually nightmares. You don't find your clothes and you don't [remember] your lines, and you are going to do some great monologue and you didn't rehearse it. That kind of thing. The doors are locked. You can't find the stage and the place is going and you are always late and usually actors nightmares.

Charlie Morrow: I'm curious, do you have a pet?

Santeri Kinnunen: No, we don't have any pet. We used to have a parrot, but it died about 15 years ago. We didn't know how old she was. Oh, he was he. He didn't like me. He loved my wife, but he didn't like me. Bit me once very badly.

Charlie Morrow: That's a horrible story. It's like being eaten by your dog.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah, pets are in this profession, pets are not quite a good thing because our working times are so weird and, if you have a dog, you have

to take it out and things like that. Because we're living in town and my working times are also so weird so that it's not possible.

Charlie Morrow: I would ask you a little bit about film because obviously stage acting is completely different. It's a continuous performance. But in film, you are usually creating pieces. What are your thoughts about film acting?

Santeri Kinnunen: Atthe point when I'm acting, it doesn't change, but what changes is the instrument, that has changed. But the basic acting doesn't change. But maybe there's things that you have to know when a camera comes too close to you. You have to know the volume of your expressions and things like that.

Of course, when you're acting in front of a camera – actually film acting is 90% waiting and only 10% of that six hour or eight hour day is acting, about half an hour or something like that. They are very boring days. That's why I like being on stage, because it's alive and you can't do another take. You can shoot another but you can't shoot another take when you're on stage. Then it's some kind of more satisfying event when you're on stage.

In front of camera it's always waiting and it's very dull.

Charlie Morrow: I have something like that, except it's not dull. I was a symphonic trumpet player for a while, and often there's very long waits. I think it's in Brahms *Requiem* that the high trumpet part that you wind up waiting 15 minutes and then you play a very high note, very loud.

Many people in the profession wind up drinking a lot because you're in terror that after 15 minutes of sitting there, you have to do something very difficult and you can't hide because that instrument is very loud. So if you ruin the note, everybody knows.

Santeri Kinnunen: Yeah, that's true. And that's the same thing in movie-making or acting in front of the camera because so many hours go by and you're no longer warm anymore. It takes a lot out of your nerves too, how do you say, stay warm all those hours when you're just waiting, when we're shooting my scene. It's very frustrating sometimes.

Charlie Morrow: I can imagine. On the other end, and this will be my last question, what has been your favorite role? What have you enjoyed the most?

Santeri Kinnunen: Oh. Okay. The voice acting role was last year and this was totally the best. There's so many roles I've done in my life. It's 35 years. I don't even remember all the roles I have done, but there are so many that I've liked. I always liked the one that I'm doing now. It changes all the time when the new production starts and things … I can't name any favorite. Okay. Maybe in the

last few years *Jerusalem* was one of my career's finest moments. But there were many fine moments. I love all my roles.

Charlie Morrow: I appreciate your taking up the role of interviewing with me and I thank you for today. And we'll say goodbye. Thanks again.

Santeri Kinnunen: Thanks very much and say hello to all your listeners and whoever reads this.

Charlie Morrow: Keep well, bye-bye now.

Santeri Kinnunen: Bye-bye … leave.