Disability And… Access Into: Nickie Miles-Wildin & Ruth Madeley

Welcome to the Graeae and Disability Arts Online podcast, Disability And... Bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month, Nickie Miles-Wildin, Associate Director at Graeae, chats with writer, actor, disability activist, Ruth Madeley. About her work and her journey into acting. This podcast contains some strong language.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Hello, and welcome to the Graeae and Disability Arts Online podcast. I'm Nickie Miles-Wildin, Associate Director at Graeae Theatre Company. I am a white woman, I have brown eyes. I'm wearing some black rimmed glasses. My hair has now got a bit better since the last time you might have heard my voice, I've bleached my hair all over, short at the sides, long on the top. I have a nose piercing in my left nostril. I'm wearing a headset and a microphone. Sitting on a black chair, I look a little bit like an airline pilot. And I'm wearing an orange jumper that has some brown buttons on the shoulders. In my room, I have a bookcase behind me, full of books that I haven't read. I still haven't read, even though we are now in lockdown 2.0. Photo frames on the top, and some lovely flowery curtains.

 And today, here on the podcast, I am joined by the one, the only, Ruth Madeley. Actor, writer and disability activist. Hello, Ruth, how are you?

Ruth Madeley: Hello. How are you?

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Good, thank you. Would you mind just giving us a little description of yourself?

Ruth Madeley: Of course. So, I am sat on a beige coloured chair in my office, also in front of a bookcase. Which I have read all of these books, I'm not going to lie. That was my lockdown... I know, see I'm showing off now. That was lockdown number one for me. I too am wearing an orange jumper, this was not done intentionally, which I absolutely love. Big, knitted orange jumper, perfect for the autumn months. My hair is dark blonde, I have it down and I've got a good old thick fringe. And I'm wearing little gold earrings in my ears. So, yeah, I think that's me. I am also a white woman. And for the first time in about five months I'm wearing some makeup.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It looks good, the makeup.

Ruth Madeley: Thank god, I mean, I've forgotten how to do it!

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. As many things... I said to you just before we started, moments I look at my phone, I'll be like, "I can't. How do I press? What button do I press?" It's like your brain just fries, doesn't it sometimes?

Ruth Madeley: I know. I mean, Nickie, you're very lucky I've also not worn a bra for the how long, so you've also got that joy for you.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Wow.

Ruth Madeley: I mean, I pretty much felt like I was coming out out today. So, that's exciting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Well, I feel proud of that.

Ruth Madeley: Thank you.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Proud that I made you wear a bra, so.

Ruth Madeley: Thank you. You're so welcome, guys.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I'm going to put that on my tagline of my Twitter, "I made Ruth Madeley wear a bra."

Ruth Madeley: I might do the same.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. We are colour coordinated in our lovely autumnal orange jumpers. Trying to feel warm up here, we're both up north. I'm in Manchester, you're a bit further north, in the naughty town.

Ruth Madeley: I know.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Of Bolton.

Ruth Madeley: I'm in Bolton. So, I'm so sorry guys. I'm sorry on behalf of all my town. It's dreadful, isn't it? Everyone says, "Oh, where are you based Ruth?" And I go, "Erm, Bolton."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And that's nothing towards Bolton, it's just the situation at the moment.

Ruth Madeley: It's just the situation. Well, I keep thinking no one’s going to want to come near me, if they know I'm from Bolton. Be like, "Oh my god, no."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, this podcast today, which is being broadcast on December the 3rd, the International Day of Disabled People.

Ruth Madeley: Yay!

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Woohoo!

Ruth Madeley: Whoop, whoop, whoop!

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And thinking about Disability History Month, it's about access into. So, Ruth, I'm just going to have a little bit of chat with you about your access into where you are now.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my goodness me.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Besides being in Bolton.

Ruth Madeley: I know, yeah. I'm never leaving, apparently.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, I know you started working with Whizz-Kidz. What was your access into working with Whizz-Kidz, and do you still have a connection with them?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah. So, Whizz-Kidz is like my other family member. They bought me my first wheelchair when I was five years old. So, I have known them, when I say all my life, it's very true. When my Mum and Dad first heard about Whizz-Kidz, they thought it was a scam, because they were told they wouldn't have to pay for a wheelchair, because Whizz-Kidz would provide it. And my Dad was like, "Yeah, all right. I've heard this before. Right, fine." And no, it turned out that it was... I think I was about the seventh kid that ever got a chair from them, because they'd literally just been born, Whizz-Kidz when I first got my chair from them.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I was one of the very, very first Whizz-Kidz as it were. Which I'm very proud of, that title. And then we were just so... As a family, we were so bowled over by how wonderful they were. They don't just give a kid a wheelchair and say, "Go on. Have a happy life." They're very much about-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: ... helping to promote independence, and confidence. Teaching you how to use your wheelchair. Teaching parents what I still might need help with, what I could possibly do by myself. And that was very much a whole growing up thing. It wasn't just when I first got the chair... And we were so excited to work with the charity who got it, who understood the importance of independence in disabled children.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And yeah, I ended up... As a family, we fundraised for them. I was part of their... it's a mini board of trustees, called the Kidz Board.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I was part of that when I think I was 12, 13. And then I got another wheelchair from them at 14. And then I volunteered for them when I was at university, and when I was at college. Did lots of volunteering for them locally. And then I ended up being a full time employee for them, and I worked with them for... it was nine years. I would have liked to get to 10, but hey, this kind of happened.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, nine years I worked for them. And now I'm really happy to say I am Patron for them as well. So, I've come very much full circle, and I've got a very unique privilege of being able to understand the charity from a beneficiary point of view.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: An employee point of view, and now a Patron. So, yeah, it's a very lovely story. And I'm very, very grateful to everything that they've done for me in my life.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: That's great. And to hear, like you say, how it's come round. And now being a patron of such an organisation as well.

Ruth Madeley: Yeah, totally.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And that real push for independence for young people.

Ruth Madeley: Yes, very much so.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, after Whizz-Kidz, you went on to be an actor, didn't you?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah. It kind of all happened in a bit of a mishmash. I don't know if you're... do you want my story about how I got into acting?

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah, go on. Tell us a good story.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my goodness me. Well, it was a complete accident, for a start. And when I say complete accident, I mean it. It was so unexpected, so not even on my radar. I was doing a work placement at Whizz-Kidz, and I was also doing... Because Whizz-Kidz are based in London.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And at the same time I was working at Whizz-Kidz, I was also, some of the other days in the week doing a work placement at BBC. Because I knew... My degree was in scriptwriting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I knew that I wanted to be in this industry, I just always thought that my role would be in storytelling, in creating stories.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And increasing diversity and disability representation that way. I thought that was going to be my place. And I was very happy with that, that was always the plan. And then a producer that I'd met during my BBC work experience had said, "Oh, CBBC are looking for a wheelchair user for one episode of this drama that they're doing. We can't find anyone, will you just go?"

 And I was like, "What do you mean me just go?" I said, "I'm not an actor." I said, "I'm a writer." And I mean, didn't even have a clue what I was doing. But then I am naturally a very nosy person.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I wanted to go purely as a networking opportunity, because I'm all about networking. It's all about who you know. And I love learning about everyone's jobs in the industry. So, I just thought it was going to be a great way to meet a really great producer, a director, and just expand my knowledge base, and understand how things get cast.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Because that always fascinated me. And I remember, I went in and they were like, "So tell me, where did you study your craft?" And I'm going, "Erm." I was like, "Oh no, I've just come here because I've been asked to." Completely and utterly, so unprofessional, so unprepared. And there were other actors there who obviously were so much more professional than me. And I mean, all the other actors must have been really bad if they gave it me, can I just point out? They must have been, I mean, to give me the job was just insane. But at the same time, I knew I'd done a good job.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I felt the adrenaline in the room. At first I was like, "Why on earth do people do this? This is hideous. This is so stressful and nerve racking."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: "And I don't even care, I don't even want it." And then, when I got in the room and did it, I was like, "Oh my god, I really want it now. I really want it. I really do. I understand."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I got this adrenaline, I was like, "Ooh, that felt good. I want to do that again." And I was incredibly blessed that they gave me the opportunity to do the role.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And that ended up being my introduction into the world of acting. But I never thought for a second that that would be a career, ever. I genuine-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: What was the role? Can you remember?

Ruth Madeley: Yes, I do remember. I specifically remember, because I think I was about 20, and I was playing a 15 year old.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative), right.

Ruth Madeley: And I have never been more proud in my life. I was like, "Oh youth, youthful. Thank you so much." And it was for a show called Half Moon Investigations.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And it was based in a school in Scotland. And I played one of the students. And it was just a one episode, and I remember them saying to me, "Because you're not represented either, you'll be able to get the full amount. You won't have to pay a fee to your agent."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Full pay.

Ruth Madeley: And I'm thinking, "Well, this is nice, way to earn some extra money on the side. You're going to give me this money for doing this? Thank you." And then the BBC helped me, hooked me up with a fantastic agent in Manchester at the time.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I thought, "Well, this will be a nice way to just keep something on the side to do."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Didn't really pursue it, if I'm honest. It wasn't something that I actively went, "What other jobs can I go on?" I think in that... Was it one or two years later, I ended up doing an episode of Fresh Meat with Jack Whitehall.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Which was great.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Again, just one, couple of days on it. I thought, "Brilliant."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Never once thinking that anything big would come of it. And then I don't think I did anything for about a good five years. I don't think I did.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And then a script came onto my agent's desk, called Don't Take My Baby. And I remember my agent saying, "If you get this, absolutely everything changes."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Wow.

Ruth Madeley: And it was a lead role, and I got it. And that was five years ago.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And here we are. Not looked back.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: No. And I think that's a really incredible journey. That thing where I think with a lot of disabled actors, you get used to having those bit parts here and there. And then to have this fantastic drama. And I think, as your agent said, "Things will change," and they have. And it's been great to see your journey after that.

Ruth Madeley: Thank you. Yeah, it was... I mean, I don't know how much subconsciously it was that acting was never on my radar, because I just never grew up seeing anybody who looked like me on TV. Didn't even register into my mind that it was even an option.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: So, even when I was getting opportunities to do those couple of bit parts, it was like, "Oh, well." I went in knowing, or feeling that I was the tick box. I went in, I was like, "Okay, I understand. I'll be the tick box, give me the money and then I'll be on me way." And then when I saw Don't Take My Baby, I was like, "I will be devastated if I don't get this. This is the biggest moment of my career, ever."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And yeah, turned out I was right. The hunch was right, it was the biggest.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It was. And it was fantastic, and incredibly moving as well.

Ruth Madeley: Yeah, it was a big old thing to perform as your first lead. Well, apart from Mary in my primary school nativity.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Bet you made a good Mary.

Ruth Madeley: To be fair, that's quite an important role. But yeah, I was very rusty. Hadn't been a lead since I was five years old.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And how did you get... Did you have any training to go into that role? Or were you just like, "No. I've got this. I know exactly what I'm going to do."

Ruth Madeley: I haven't trained at all, ever, in my career.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: We had one session at RADA with a director. And it was during the audition process, it was like a workshop. So, learnt a little bit more about some people who were in contention for the role. So, you were bunged in with all of these people who were also going for the role. And it was... Honestly, I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Didn't have a clue. And I think it was a case of I just left every drop of fear that I had at the door.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And there was a lot of it, trust me. And I just thought, "Well, if I don't throw everything I have at this, I will look back and regret it so much." And it paid off, so.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And there was a certain writer attached to that project, wasn't there?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah. There was someone called Jack Thorne, you might have... not many people have heard of him, I'm not going to lie. Honestly-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I don't think he's done much since then, to be fair.

Ruth Madeley: He hasn't really done much, no. And he's apparently not a nice guy either. Really hideous.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. No, not generous at all.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my god. I have never been more terrified in my life. You know when you're desperate to impress somebody, without wanting to be obvious that you're trying so hard. I couldn't find the line, I just couldn't. I was just... when he walked in to that RADA session, I was like, "Oh my god, why is he here? Why is he watching? I've got no idea what I'm doing." Yeah, very, very overwhelmed, meeting Jack for the first time.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I think there is something, isn't it. With when you're an actor and the writer is in the room, I think there is something around that.

Ruth Madeley: Pressure.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: That like, "I want to prove to you that you can trust me with your words."

Ruth Madeley: Exactly.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: "With your work."

Ruth Madeley: Exactly. It was the hardest thing to try and stay not fan-girly in any way, shape or form. And to be fair, I mean, I don't think I managed it very well. But it can't have been that bad, they still hired me.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, with it then, were you involved in the script development process?

Ruth Madeley: No.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Or was it very much set already?

Ruth Madeley: Because Don't Take My Baby was based on a true story, it was very much set on what the story was, and what the disability of the characters were. But at the same time, the team with Don't Take My Baby were... the team was incredible. Every single member of that crew and cast worked so well together. It was a really small... because it was a very small cast.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, it wasn't a massive production. And everybody, we really worked together to find out what... In regards to showing certain bits of your body, what you were comfortable with.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, all of that, we had a lot of conversation and dialogue around, and a really good say in. But in relation to the actual story, the story was what the story was.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And yeah, that was heart breaking and beautiful, and everything in between. I mean, it's the kind of role that you would, as an actor, you would dream of getting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I remember thinking, because it was a long, long audition process. Oh my god, Nickie, it was three months. Three month audition process. I mean, to be fair, they had absolutely no reason to trust me. I'd never done a lead role, bar Mary.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I'd never done a lead role. And it's a really important... It was a true story, the whole piece was so important. And it lived and died on the relationship between the two main characters. And if that was going to not be believable-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Or not done well enough, then the story wouldn't work. So, they had to make sure casting was right. And I completely get that.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: But I've never been more exhausted in my entire life. I remember, it got to the stage where I thought, "If I don't get this, I genuinely won't be able to watch it. I'll find it too devastating."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Wow.

Ruth Madeley: I'll just sit there really sad and bitter in the corner, like, "It's beautiful, but I am so upset."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: But you did it, you got through. You made it. And did it go on to win awards?

Ruth Madeley: Yes, it won a BAFTA, which was incredibly exciting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And I was nominated as Best Actress. I mean, Nickie, for crying out loud, you've never seen anybody who... It was quite obvious who'd never been to the BAFTAs before, put it that way. It was like Bolton had arrived, me and my family members, literally on the red carpet, "Ooh, look who it is? Oh my god it's Trevor Macdonald. Oh my god." All of that, ridiculous.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: I've never been more proud to be part of a production that was noticed and recognised on such a scale. It was an absolute dream.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I'm so... Because everyone kept saying when we were making it, "This is BAFTA worthy, this. This is BAFTA worthy." And I was just like, "Ooh, is it? That's exciting." And then when it got nominated, I wasn't surprised it got nominated because I'd... You know when you see how hard everybody works, and you know the calibre of Jack, and Ben Anthony our Director, and Pier Wilkie our Producer, and Adam Long, Wunmi Mosaku. All of these incredible people, I was like, "Yeah, of course."

 And then when I found out I got nominated I was like, "Well, that's a mistake. That must be a misprint." And yeah, how I found out was hysterical. I found out on Twitter. Oh Nickie, it was hysterical.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Really?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah. They don't let you know, you find out with everybody else.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: With everyone? Wow.

Ruth Madeley: I ruined everybody's morning. I was literally going for a read through for my next job, I was on the train, in the quiet carriage because all the other wheelchair spaces were taken. So, I'd been bunged in the quiet carriage. Now, I'm not the kind of person that's put in a quiet carriage, let's just say that for a start. And then I found out by tweet, and then I had... But my phone was on silent, and you're not allowed to make phone calls in the quiet carriage.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I'm just, so I'm hysterically crying. Somebody thought someone had died, I was like, "No, it's fine. I've just been nominated for a BAFTA." And they're like, "Of course you have, dear. Of course."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Yeah, of course you have. Honestly, yeah, clearly. It was hysterical. It was just the most hysterical morning. And one of the best days. If I could relive one day, it would be finding out.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It would be that day.

Ruth Madeley: That day. Not the BAFTAs, actually finding out. Because it was so far from any expectation.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: It was just ridiculous. Ridiculous.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: But then how fantastic. Going through that three month audition process, filming it. To then being on that train, seeing your name appear on Twitter as a nominee. It's just brilliant.

Ruth Madeley: Madness.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And it's been fantastic to see your career go from there. And one of my favourites is Years and Years.

Ruth Madeley: I absolutely loved that.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And seeing you in that was just... When the first episode came on, and I think you were in the car weren't you, going to hospital?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And I was like, "I recognise that actor. Can't think who it is." But for me, it was just... I loved the whole storyline, and if Russell T Davies has predicted anything, he's obviously predicted the whole of 2020.

Ruth Madeley: I'm sorry, but I'm not speaking to him, this is all his fault. But carry on.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It's all his fault, let's put it out there.

Ruth Madeley: Yeah.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: But what I loved about Years and Years was that thing of... And I don't mean this …but that your impairment wasn't there at the beginning, then it was. And then it became... It was just honest, in the entire series, about it.

Ruth Madeley: Yeah. And it was an absolute joy.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And it was beautifully done. How was that? Did you feed into that development?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Or was that purely Russell?

Ruth Madeley: I mean, Russell T Davies, he's the most wonderful, wonderful man. He is a genius, beyond doubt.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Just like Jack Thorne. They're both of them, they're far too talented. It's ridiculous, it's very unfair. But when Russell wrote the role of Rosie for Years and Years, it wasn't written with disability in mind. It wasn't advertised to my agent as a disabled role.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: It was just a character. And when I went for the audition, that was all it was, just another audition. And then when they decided they wanted me, that was when we had a discussion. Russell and I spoke on the phone, and we had chat about how much or how little we include Rosie's disability into the story.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And when we had a chat, I mean, we just thought it was easier just to keep the fact that Rosie has spina bifida like me, because that's just as natural as you can get.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: But then we realized that the story didn't change one bit, whether Rosie was disabled.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Whether she was non-disabled, whether she was blind, Deaf, neurodiverse.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Nothing at all made a difference to the story. Because I mean, I don't know whether you realise, but a lot was going on in Years and Years, a lot. So, the fact that Rosie was a wheelchair user fell of the side, as something very uninteresting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: So, yeah, we just realised there wasn't really anything that needed to change. And nothing... The story wasn't impacted at all.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: If anything, it just made it more layered and interesting. And that's what I always say when casting actors with disabilities, it's not going to hinder anything. All it's going to do is add another interesting layer to the story that's already there, and that's it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. It did. And I think it was one of those where I really celebrated it. You had kids, you were in and out of a relationship.

Ruth Madeley: She was a nightmare. She was a mess.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: She was. But that was what I loved about her.

Ruth Madeley: Yes, me too.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Was she wasn't this nun, do you know what I mean?

Ruth Madeley: She was a nightmare.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It was proper.

Ruth Madeley: I had days where I was like, "Oh my god, I wish I was more like Rosie." And then you had other days where I was like, "I just want to slap her across the face. She's an idiot." And I loved that. She had three kids by three different dads by the end.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Disastrous love life. Everything, it just was... She was politically inept. It was just brilliant. Just absolutely fantastic.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. It was that moment where she got in the van and just went, "Yeah." And she just drove through the barricade. I was like, "Yeah."

Ruth Madeley: I know, so funny. I was like, "Can I do that?" They were like, "No, it's got to be stunt." And so I was like, "Why?" I was like, "Please?" I mean, I couldn't reach the foot pedal, so that would have been a problem and a half wouldn't it? But never mind.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: No. It was fantastic. So, thank you for being part of that.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my goodness, no, I mean the thanks-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Me fan-girling you now.

Ruth Madeley: No, it's genuinely me that fan-girls Russell T Davies all the time. I was like, "Do you have any more jobs for me? Please?"

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. Doctor Who?

Ruth Madeley: Although now I'm like, "You're not allowed to write anything else until we are over this, because I can't take anymore." Because we are now living in the winter special of Years and Years.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: We are, yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Which is just madness.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. It's absolute madness. So, talking about the madness that we're in and lockdown. What have you been up to?

Ruth Madeley: I mean, it's really funny, because I finished my first theatre job this year, on the 2nd of February. And that seems like a million years ago. I still cannot believe, I'll say, "Oh yeah, it was this year that I finished." I'm like, "No, that can't be right. Surely?"

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And that was Teen Dick, wasn't it?

Ruth Madeley: Yeah, Teenage Dick. Yeah, at The Donmar.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And then I was working in South Africa, which is very exciting. On a new BBC America show called The Watch. Which was really exciting to go and finish. And then I literally landed back in the UK, and two weeks later we were in full lockdown. So, it's just been... You know what, I felt like I cheated the first lockdown, because I'd said to my agent... Because I'd been working away for so long, and I'd been away from home for so long, "I need a couple, two, three months. Just to have a bit of downtime."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Downtime, yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And physically to repair as well, because with a disability that is something you have to take into account, of course you do. And it's something that I very much need to take into account. So, I asked for a couple of months off. And then she was like, "Hey, here's lockdown."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: As you ordered!

Ruth Madeley: So, genuinely, for the first month, I felt like I was on an extended Christmas holiday. I was eating when I wanted, I was eating whatever I wanted, I was drinking when I wanted. I was like, "This is delicious. I can stay in my pyjamas, it's fine." Everything was glorious. And then I think about four weeks in, I was like, "Oh my god, I'm never going to work again. My industry is finished. Oh my god."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I was thinking I'm going to have to ring Whizz-Kidz up and go, "Please can I have my job back? It's all gone wrong." But to be fair, same for everybody. Good days, bad days.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And just... I'm very lucky in the fact that... Sorry, you can hear my dog shaking. Stop it. I'm very lucky I was never shielding. I was unsure whether I was at the beginning.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I had a meeting with my consultants, and they ended up saying with spina bifida for me, the way it affects me, it isn't something that I need to be shielding with. But some people I know have been shielding since March.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And they haven't come out. And yeah, so when you're having a really crappy day, you just have to think, "Oh mate, you could not have seen anybody since March. So, just get on with it."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. I'm one of them.

Ruth Madeley: Are you? And it's... Honestly.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. A couple of days out to see family, but it's like, "Nah, take it. Stay in."

Ruth Madeley: I think from a mental health perspective, I think it's just... When you think about it too much, you just go, "Oh my goodness."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. That leads me on to my next question actually. Thinking about what the access to the industry will be like for Deaf and disabled actors, as well as creatives, afterwards. Do you think because people have now gone, "Oh, we can actually do stuff from home. We can hook up digitally, we could see more actors by self-taping." Do you think that there is going to be a change?

Ruth Madeley: I sincerely hope so. I think what was really interesting during lockdown when our industry completely stopped, for the first time ever, every single actor was in the same position. No one was working.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Nobody could go to set. Nobody could see people in the audition room. Everything was 100% equal, and it was a really exciting time to just say, "Right. Going forward, how can we... Because everything has been stopped for us. So now, going forward, how can we make sure that we make it as accessible as possible?"

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I don't think people will be seeing people in audition rooms for a very long time. So, most of its being done by Zoom and self-tape.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Which is really exciting, because there's zero access issues for people with a self-tape, to submit for a role.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I would very much hope that that continues. And it's funny isn't it, the world was like, "Oh no, you can't work from home. This role needs you to work in an office." And then it's lockdown, "Oh yeah, you can work from home." Funny that, all of a sudden, that everything seems possible.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: So, I sincerely hope that we can move forward, and keep access as level as possible.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. And I think with all the movements that are happening on Twitter, with the We Shall Not Be Removed, Nothing About Us Without Us.

Ruth Madeley: Did you see mine, Nickie? I launched mine yesterday.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I did.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my goodness.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Tell us more about yours, Ruth.

Ruth Madeley: I was livid. I mean, I do not want this to be a Spotlight bashing session.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: But I think I have to talk about how it came about. So, at the beginning of this week Spotlight had launched their new website. And they had a specific disability clause in there, so for all breakdowns. Where productions could say that they welcomed applications or submissions from disabled artists. They were specifically, that was another option-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: They were specifically looking for performers from the disabled community. Third, we are looking for performers with blah, blah, blah.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, wheelchair user, amputee, neurodiverse, Deaf or blind. And then there was a fourth option, where it said... Which I have to read out, because I just have to. I have to get the wording right, because it just baffles me.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: "Whilst understanding my responsibilities in relation to Schedule 9 of the Equality Act 2010, unfortunately we are unable to accept submissions from Deaf or disabled performers for this role."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And when I saw that I was like, "You've put a disability opt-out clause."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And for one, that surely for me, I was like, "That has to be illegal." That has to be. Surely that can't be right. You can't say, "We are really excited to advertise this role, but if you're disabled please don't apply."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: It baffled me that that was even a thing.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: And I looked into it, and I saw a lot of people online retweeting it. And Spotlight, fair play to them they came out and they said, "We got it wrong."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: "That was not what it was used for. It was meant for specific roles." I mean, I'm not stupid, I'm a wheelchair user, I know that there are some roles I'm not going to be able to play.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I know that, I'm very aware of that. Just as a white woman, I would never want to play something where it would clearly need someone from a black background. I'm not stupid, I know that I won't be right for every role. But for me, that last option said, "We are unable to accept submissions from Deaf or disabled performers." Now, that is a blanket statement.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: That is assuming that wheelchair users, Deaf people, amputees, all of us have the same abilities or limitations.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: That's not taking into consideration the massive spectrum that disability is on.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: No, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I was just absolutely floored. So, what upset me more was the fact that so many disabled performers who are working, who are trying to work, who aren't working, had contacted me and said, "I'm never going to work again. I just know it."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: With this... It's 2020, And if that is deemed acceptable to put on the website where all actors access work, I'm never getting...

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: If they are promoting that, in 2020, where god knows how many people would have had to sign that off before it went live, and not one person thought, "You know what, that could be problematic."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's not right.

Ruth Madeley: Not one person.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: So many people are like, "I'm never going to work again. I feel so undervalued. What's the point?"

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I took it upon myself to be like, "I need every disabled performer who is on my feed, or people that don't follow me." I mean, I don't have a massive following. "But people all over the world, to see that that's wrong. And that most people, most productions, most casting directors, directors, they want to opt-in, not out."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: So, I just created this disability opt-out. Yeah great, that would be great, wouldn't it, disability opt-out? Disability opt-in hashtag.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Just so that all the people who had said to me, "I'm never going to work again." I wanted them to see how many people want to opt-in.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And it's going very well, actually.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: It's kicking up quite a storm, which I'm enjoying.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It is.

Ruth Madeley: And I'm, so I'm like, "Well, let's just keep that going." I'm going to get T-shirts made and everything.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I think you should.

Ruth Madeley: Decided coasters... I've merchandise, all for it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: I love it. Key rings, badges, come on.

Ruth Madeley: Christmas baubles, the lot.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. You could do a calendar for next year, and each month is a different disabled or Deaf actor.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my god, Nickie, I will pretend that was my idea, I'm going to take that.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Opt-in. Okay, you can have it.

Ruth Madeley: Thank you, babe.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: If these calendars are out before December the 3rd...

Ruth Madeley: I know, I've got a lot to do between now and January the 1st, haven't I? But you know what, it was something that I really wanted to do, because so many people were so upset by it. And like I said, Spotlight did, they help their hands up and said, "We got it wrong."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: "And we're sorry for any offense caused." But I'm like, "But the problem isn't just that you did that. And yes, we know you've apologised. It's a systematic problem that you thought that that was okay."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And believe me, productions do not need a reason to tick... And what upset me was so many jobs are posted on Spotlight. So, if a new production company, or student films saw that Spotlight were giving that as an option, they would think, "Oh, that's okay then."

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative). They don't have to.

Ruth Madeley: And then the next generation are going to have the same thing.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: You have to make the change. You have to be... Don't give people that option, because believe me, they don't need a reason to tick it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: They find their own bloody reasons.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Okay. So, following your opt-in campaign on Twitter #optin.

Ruth Madeley: Disability opt-in. Whoop.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Whoop whoop. I want to come back to something earlier you mentioned, around scriptwriting. Where are you with that? Come on, where are you?

Ruth Madeley: Nickie, you sound like my agent. It's so funny. Right, bear in mind I hadn't written properly since I finished uni, I guess. And I think purely... I'll be honest, when acting started.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: When acting became a thing, I just rolled the wave of acting. And thought, "Well, when this stops, I can have some time for writing. I can go back to that." And it doesn't seem to be stopping. Which is very exciting.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: But it's like a double edged sword, because the more I acted and worked with these incredible writers, the more I realised how bad my writing actually was. So, genuinely, I was like, "I can't write." Lord, I remember when Jack asked me for some examples, I was like, "I can't send Jack Thorne my writing. He'll be like, 'What on earth is this drivel?'"

Nickie Miles-Wi...: But you have written though. Didn’t you write something for Sophie Stone.

Ruth Madeley: I have, yeah. So, this year, last month, I got my first professional writing credit at the Young Vic Theatre, co-written with Jack Thorne, which was absolutely incredible. It was such a dream to have that as my first professional writing piece.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: It was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. And yeah, here's to more.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. You had the delightful Sophie Stone in there, so that was amazing as well.

Ruth Madeley: Oh my god, she's incredible.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, I think there's a pattern here. I did a bit of writing, and then someone asked me to do some acting and I'm like, "Oh, can't act, can’t act. Can't write. Can’t write" Tenner says within the next two years, you've written a TV drama.

Ruth Madeley: Hey, that's the plan. I mean, come on. I think for me it was a bit of fear, and a bit of constant impostor syndrome, which we all have.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And feeling like, "Well, my stuff's really shit." But it was definitely a confidence boost I needed. And you know Jack, he is just so kind and encouraging.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Jack who?

Ruth Madeley: And he really wants to push people forward.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: And it was a dream to work with him. Absolute dream. And no, I'm really excited about writing in the future. It's definitely something that I think I feel a little less afraid of now, after doing that.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. And I think it is, it's confidence isn't it?

Ruth Madeley: Of course it is.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: And like you say, impostor syndrome, we all have that. I don't think I have ever met an artist that doesn't have impostor syndrome.

Ruth Madeley: No. And I'm talking big names as well, we all have it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Every single person.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. Completely. So, just before we wrap up then, two more things. What is next for you? What have you got in the pipeline? That you're allowed to talk about.

Ruth Madeley: Well, no sadly. Which is really depressing. But no, so the show that I filmed in South Africa, The Watch, is out on BBC America. So, that's coming out in America in January, so should soon be on over in the UK... I'm not sure when yet, but I will keep everybody posted. I also did last night my monologue as part of BBC Four's CripTales.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: CripTales, yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Was shown.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: There are a couple of other things that are coming, which sadly I can't talk about, you know what it's like. But yeah, there's some really fun and exciting things coming up that was very much needed after lockdown.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah. So, if people want to find out about these projects coming up, what's your Twitter handle?

Ruth Madeley: So, Twitter is @ruth\_madeley. And my Instagram is just @ruthmadeley. I get confused which is which, so Twitter is the one with the underscore in it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Brilliant. So, keep following you on there, and get your updates on what you're up to.

Ruth Madeley: Absolutely.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: So, this is going out on December the 3rd, International Day of Disabled People.

Ruth Madeley: I love it so much. It's such a good celebration, I love it.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: It is, isn't it? I'm glad that we get a day. Who have you admired, and who would you like to celebrate on this day of December the 3rd?

Ruth Madeley: You know something, I admire so many people. That I find it really hard to put one name out there.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: I think this year in particular, I've worked with more artists and performers with disabilities than I ever have in my entire life, which really excites me. So, I have-

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: My CripTales monologue was written by Genevieve Barr, who is an insanely talented writer, and a good friend.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Ruth Madeley: So, to be able to perform her words was amazing. Amit Sharma who was the first Director with a disability that I'd worked with.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: Mat Fraser, Producer. Daniel Monks who was in Teenage Dick with me, who I am so obsessed with, it's quite disgusting. There are so many people with disabilities in this industry who I'm having the absolute pleasure of working with, and also seeing their work. So for me, I want to celebrate every single person who is working in the industry already, and smashing down every single barrier that's there. But I think this year, more for me, is celebrating everyone who wants to be in this industry, I think.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Yeah.

Ruth Madeley: Who want to train to be in this industry, who want to go to drama school. Who, for them, this is their only option, this is their dream. There's nothing else they want to do, I'm very aware that I didn't have that. It wasn't something that I'd dreamt of since I was five years old. And it happened. It was a case of I was in the right place at the right time. I worked really, really hard, and continue to do so.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ruth Madeley: But that's why I feel really passionate about using this as... I'm very much a firm believer that you end up where you're meant to end up. And I know I was meant to do this. And my aim is to make this industry more accessible for people, all of those people who I just said, who are going to enter it after me. And I'm so excited to see where this industry goes. And it's going to be so much richer, and so much more beautiful. So, I'm celebrating every single person who is going to continue to change the world.

Nickie Miles-Wi...: Brilliant. That's a fantastic note to end on. So, thank you very much, Ruth, for joining us on our Graeae Disability Arts Online podcast. And stay safe.

Ruth Madeley: Thank you so much, Nickie. You too, lots of love.

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