



## Transcript: Episode 1

### Rising Above the Racial Issues of the Past to Inspire the Next Generation of Performing Artists

#### *A Conversation with Nate Jacobs*

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**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** Welcome to Rising Together! A podcast on the Art and Design of Inclusion. I'm Dr. Elcin Haskollar.

**Curtis Anderson:** And I'm Curtis Anderson.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** Each month we'll have a special guest and we'll learn from their personal stories and experiences about how to create change. From thought provoking discussions to real life strategies, we'll explore the transformative power of inclusion and discuss how to create a world where every single voice matters.

**Curtis Anderson:** We hope you can join us as we dive into the art of creating inclusive communities. Let's embark on this journey of transformation one story at a time. Stay connected, stay engaged, and more importantly, keep rising with us.

**Nate Jacobs:** So whatever it is that you dream, believe with all your heart and work at it with everything you know and never, ever, ever stop.

**Curtis Anderson:** You can catch the latest episodes of Rising Together on the first of every month on Spotify, YouTube, or your preferred streaming platform.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** And now, in today's episode, we will talk to Mr. Nate Jacobs: Nate is a singer, a play-writer and actor, a father. He's the founder and the artistic director at Westcoast Black Theater Troupe. Welcome to the show, Nate.

**Nate Jacobs:** Thank you. Glad to be here.

**Curtis Anderson:** Thank you. Thank you for being here. Let's just get the conversation started by... How about you give a little bit of who you are about yourself to the audience?

**Nate Jacobs:** I am a native Floridian born in Tampa, Florida, and kind of grew up between Daytona Beach, Florida, and Tampa. I attended high school in Daytona Beach. I graduated, went to Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida, and was a fine arts major there. And an invitation of a mentor couple who owned a church and they had started a private school within the church and needed an art teacher invited me to be here in Sarasota. And I came here for, I thought a few months, but fell in love, what I was doing at the school and stayed around a big family.

I come from a very, very large community of people between Florida and Georgia, where both my parents were from and ten siblings, nine brothers, one sister and 11 of us all living and well, thank God. And I grew up around a lot of family life, just good environment, good, healthy, wholesome

environment. And so that made it very sane and solid and normal world for us, thanks to mostly my mother and grandmother and my father.

So that's pretty much about me. Always had a creative instinct, kind of lost at one time because I had brothers who were scholars who were selling through school and I was trying to figure out, okay, what's special about me? One day my mother looked over my shoulder and I was just doodling and she said "Did you draw that?" And I looked up at her and she said, That's really good. And I thought, and then art teachers in high school would look over my shoulder in art class and go, like "You were really good." And why not teach and say "You know you're the best artist in my class?" So that's why I made sure, because I was like "Well, I guess that's the special thing about me. And that started my artistic journey from a visual perspective, because in college I drew and I sculpted and I brought that to the private school here, and those kids all knew each other. So, they were talking the whole lot of my art classes. And one day I looked out over the class and I said "You know what? I'm going to start doing something to keep these kids engaged more creatively." And I started doing theater in the school. And that's kind of, I think was the incubator where I discovered my knack of developing and teaching and coaching, acting to young people and writing scripts and doing shows.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** So how did you go from being the quiet artist to standing center stage in the spotlight? Because, you know, you created the only professional black theater company on the west coast of Florida that's highly successful. Can you tell us a little bit about that journey?

**Nate Jacobs:** My talents begin to put me out front against my will, you know, singing I was art, but art was a still a little more private. People noticed I could sing. And so even in college, they kept taking me. And I was... I joined the Concert Chorale. I could still be in the number lost in the crowd in the college's Concert Chorale. But while I was there, I joined this gospel choir. And soon as the director heard me one day in rehearsal, he gave me this lead part and I stepped out and I sang and everybody went like "Oh my God." So, then I became a lead singer of the group. So, there I was still kind of trying to figure myself out, leading the choir in songs. And that happened at my hometown when I was still in college. When I would go back to visit, I would go to church. They wanted me to lead songs. So that kind of began to mentor me of being comfortable being out from the singing. When I moved to Sarasota, the church had this professional touring choir that I became a part of, and the director heard me sing.

So, there I was, traveling around the nation, touring and becoming a professional singer then. And I did a lot of tour dates and television and all of that. So it was the singing that really brought me. And then to be honest with you, I was kind of settling with that career. I thought, maybe that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to be a singer. I was doing theater, but the singing stents was telling to kind of be the biggest talent of mine that was being called on. The theater happened because I began to act professionally at the Asolo Theater because in the school, one of the founders of the school, the wife saw me one day and I guess she had been watching me. She said, I've been watching you in these classes that... you're what we call the natural. She's that you, God gifted actor and you need to be involved with the... Sarasota is a very rich cultural community because I was in that church within the four walls of that church doing what I was doing. And "You need to be involved. You're really talented." And I kind of looked at her and I was just like "Wow". And so, one day she literally just took me by the hand. "We're going for a ride." We went to the Asolo.

There I met the artist, the director at the time, he handed me a script. He said “Read this” and I read it. “Oh my God. You were right. He's very talented.” So I'm looking at the two of them. And he looked back and said “How would you like to be on the show here?” And I was like... She said “Oh he would love to!” And that began a professional admin career.

So there I went from on the four walls of a school working with kids, traveling at times, singing; to being in front of 200, 300 people every night performing on stage. And I began to kind of like that. I was still pretty much an introvert, but I liked the art of theater. As I began to work at the Asolo and other theaters in town Florida, Studio Theater mainly, as a professional actor, I noticed that there were no people who looked like me. And even at the Asolo, those roles that I had were always servants because they did a lot of period shows. And when we were in our thirties and forties, the servant somebody, some were going away and I loved still working because it was fascinating doing it. And after a while it began to concern me and I started having discussions and at the Asolo I said “So why aren't there any African-Americans here?” They said “Well, they don't attend theater here.” I said “Why?” “We don't know”. And so I went back again and I said “Well, you know what? What have you guys got doing shows that were more relative to the black community? Maybe they'll come more.” And I was given “Well, we couldn't do that. Our patrons would never support anything like that.” And I said “Okay.” And I kept acting, but little did I know this curiosity was the beginning of what was to be Nate Jacobs: discovering who he was and the impact that he would have, and that there was this new theater coming over the horizon that I was to birth. Although I brought the issue to their concern, that was somebody else's job. I would, but I would participate in somebody doing this work that would attract African-Americans to the theater. But I didn't see myself as the catalyst and as the key person at the time. So it took a while.

I was talking to my mentor and one day I was just venting. “You know, I'm talking in these theaters and I mean, they say that they really can't produce this stuff because the patrons don't really want it and-” And he was listening very patiently. And when I finished, he said “Why don't you do it?” And I looked and I said “What?” “Is It? Why don't you do it?” He said. “I'm a native of Sarasota.” He had graduated from scholars, got a full scholarship to Floyd, and now I've got a full scholarship to Yale University. And then he eventually came back to work with his community. He said, “I'm a native of this city and we have never seen an all black cast ever on any stage” he said. “And frankly, I'll tell you what, I believe that's not gonna happen to Nate Jacobs: Do it.” And he left me standing with that thought. And I thought to myself, Why would he say that to me?

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** Were you excited? Were you afraid? Were you petrified?

**Nate Jacobs:** I was a little taken aback and shocked that he would even think I could do something like that. I'm working at this elaborate theater company, you know, beautiful stage, massive complex. And he tells me you could do that. And I'm this black man who pretty much is driven by his passion for the arts. I have never done anything in finance or building anything, organization. And he tells me this. I wouldn't know what to do with it.

**Curtis Anderson:** So it seems like there's like a string of people who are calling up something in you that's almost the opposite of what you were. Believe in yourself to be this quiet, inner introvert artist. So I guess I have to ask two questions to kind of bridge the gap. So, you went from school-teacher and someone was speaking into your life. At what point did you stop thinking you were

the quiet artist that you were, had a little more of a voice than— No that introverted people don't have voices, because I think I can be introverted at times. I think it's a good... it's a good character trait. But did you still believe that you were that introverted person throughout this whole process? Did some part of the introverted person gain a little bit of an “umf.”

**Nate Jacobs:** When things are important to me as a person and when things are convicting for me, they forced me to come out of my shell because there I was, this low-quality actor at the Asolo just doing my job. And then I'm standing in front of the artist director confronting him about “Why don't you all do black shows here?” I wouldn't have that naturally see myself doing that, but where I was with this thing on my mind and the passion of knowing, wanting to know why it was pushing me out.

**Curtis Anderson:** Yeah.

**Nate Jacobs:** So there I was talking to the artistic director and then here it is, the executive director of the community Theater calls me in a meeting and I'm dealing with the executive director, and then he gives me this opportunity to direct the first black show at the community theater. And he said “What do you want to direct?” I said “I'll think about it.” And a girl friend of mine who had just graduated from FAMU in drama, she walked up one day and she said “Why don't you think about doing this show?” And she had the James Baldwin's Amen Corner. And I looked at the script. I said “Why not? It's a black show.” So I went in and I said “I'm going to do this.” And, after I read it, and so “Its okay, we're going to do that.” So we went to the Arts Council. They gave us a little money, and then he just chopped the whole thing in my lap and it was like, okay, I had the first meeting and production meeting it was called, and I went into this room with all these strangers, mostly Caucasian and I think there was one African-American person there. And then they start saying “Who is this guy? A black show at the players? We can't— we don't have two black people audition for us ever at this theater.” And “How is he going to find a cast?” And I was just sitting there in this meeting because I don't even know if he even told them my name yet. How are they? Who are these people and... whatever. So by the time they got to me, what made me push out that day? I was taken aback. How you— How dare you sit in my presence and you tell me what I can't do? So when he said to me, he said “So, Nate, what did you think?” I said “I think I can do it.” I said, I don't know who these people are, but they're not me.

**Curtis Anderson:** Right

**Nate Jacobs:** And I said, I think I can do it. “Here's all of it. They think he could do it. We're going to do it.” And all of these people will like they were upset who I still didn't know.

**Curtis Anderson:** Right.

**Nate Jacobs:** The meeting is over and then this is chunked in my lap. And now I got to find black actors and I go walking down the streets of Newtown, which is the black community here, of course. And do you— “Have you ever done a show before?” And they look at me kind of straight. I say “I'm not crazy. I'm getting ready to do a play and I'm looking for actors.” And someone goes “Okay, come into the studio.” So I end up with like 23 people. They gave me this special space that they had not rehearsed at the theater. We worked in some kind of storage space, and there I was with these 23 people putting up James Baldwin the Amen Corner. So I'm an actor. So I stepped

into one of the major roles because I wanted to be a catalyst for these newbies that had just come on the scene. Most of them had never been in a show. A few of them have. And here we are, the first black cast that would do a show at the community theater. And so we walked into the building and I could feel this push back when we walked in. And I'm thinking "Okay, what is this going to be all about?" And then I hear "Oh my God, we are working for niggers." And I thought to myself "Did I just hear nigger?" And right after that, the guy said "Nobody told us we were working for niggers." And so I can look around and the people that I brought in with me, they were looking at me. I said "Let me handle this. I even know who that guy was. I knew the production manager there."

And so he was saying "Shut up, Who's that? No, nobody told us." So I just walked off the stage. I went up front to the administrative office. I got on the phone and I called the executive director who had offered me the opportunity and I said "We're at this theater. This is our first night here for rehearsal." And I said "The minute we walk inside this theater, we hear, Nigga." He said "You gotta be kidding." I said "No. And he didn't just say it one time, he has said it about three or four times and he's in this theater. I don't know who this guy is, but he's screaming—" and Hairball was the production manager trying to get in and be quiet and he won't listen to him. And he's like "Go! get Hairball on the phone." And he got on. He said "Who is this guy? He said "That's my nephew." He said "Well, fire him right now." And when he went to tell the guy he was saying "nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger". Then he got outside the door.

**Curtis Anderson:** Thanks.

**Nate Jacobs:** And it was just quiet. And those black actors looked at me. I looked at them and I said to them "We can do this anyhow. We're not going to let this get in our way." And then, of course, they were apologizing with "I'm so sorry with that. He's so stupid, he's so ignorant—" and all of that. I just rolled out of my shoulders. I felt like what we were doing was the most important thing. And I kind of got corralled. Everybody else that was in the movie. And so we presented it openly and I, the executive director, came to me. He's highly upset. "You said the black community didn't want to see our show and they have not called here and bought these tickets." I said, this is a new thing for this theater. That means you're going to have a new audience. I said "Which means African-American audience would just walk up the night of and they'll buy tickets for the event." "We don't know anything about that. That's not how we operate here at this theater. And I want you to know you will never be able to do this again at this theater, because it took everything for me to convince the board to do it." And I'm standing there listening to him open. And I am one of the— I said "Look, I'm in this show. We have 30 minutes before showtime. I'm going in the back and putting my costumes on." He said "That is your problem." I said "I don't care. Nobody showed up tonight." And so I go in the back and I address— I say nothing to the actors about our discussion. The lights come up and the place is packed. Is a 500 seat theater, half black audience, half white audience. We do the show and I meet him after the show and he's crying like a baby. He said "I have never seen anything like this in my entire career. I've been in the arts business for 30 years," he said. "It's like the Build a dream. You said it would happen and it did." So that need and want to see a change on the cultural scene and in the theater specifically community forced me to step out to be a director for the community that I was acting for. So I knew what that theater Gore audience was in Sarasota and what they expected. And I was hoping that I could present something

that would convince this very sophisticated, intelligent audience that we have here in Sarasota for performances. Everyone sold out.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** That's such a beautiful story. And the West Coast Black Theater Troupe did change the cultural, you know, scene here in Sarasota. And in the—

**Nate Jacobs:** Yes!

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** In the beginning, you know, from 1999, he didn't have any money or employees, no board. And then now West Coast Black Theater Troupe is producing these amazing shows at an average rate of, what have I seen, 94% attendance. Yes. And I attended the celebration for Dr. King on Sunday. And that was absolutely phenomenal. I walked away inspired. So what was— what was the turning point?

**Nate Jacobs:** The turn? Well, I went ten years with that struggle. No money, no studio, no theater, of course.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** And you had a white van that you used...?

**Nate Jacobs:** Well, I was walking one day and a woman who had come to my show, she said “Nate Jacobs:!! She said “What are you doing walking?” And I said “I don't have a car.” She said “You don't have a car.” She said “Where are you going?” I said “I'm going to a meeting.” And she said, she pulled over to the side. She said “You don't have a car.” She said “You can't walk to every meeting.” She said “I'm going to call you.” So she did. A few days later and I ended up talking to her husband and she said “We're going to go to the Ford lot and tell them they need to give you a van, loan you a van.” And so we went into the meeting. The man was like “Well, I don't know. We don't really do that.” She said “Well, Nate is doing what he's doing. And if they are. They need a van.” Older woman. And so the man when we talked a little bit came back “Okay, we'll let you have this van for three months.” At the three months, I get up one morning and they just took the van overnight, said nothing to me. And so I called the president. I said “I got it this morning, the van.” “Oh Yes, we came last night and took it.” And I was like “Well, why?” is it, well, my son— Because the man who was over that his son was working didn't know about the negotiation we made with you. And he came and sent his people to take it. And I said, well, what I'm going to do from here is say “Well, we're not going to give it back. We were happy too.” And I called her and told her that and she came to pick me up. “We went out to her house and that was the first time I saw somebody buy a car over the phone.” The husband got on the phone. He said he looked at me. He said “They took the van. Then we'll have to just buy the damn thing.”

**Curtis Anderson:** Right.

**Nate Jacobs:** And so he bought it. And later that day I met him at the lot. He gave me the keys. He said, You take this van and go do what you know you need to do to build this company.

**Nate Jacobs:** So that's where the white van came. And I drove that van for— that was the car, that was the studio. That was many times the dressing room, the makeup room. It was everything and carried me over personally keeping something mobile and for what we were doing in the true. So,

ten years I suffered struggling pulling this thing down the road and I was burnt out and I was like, I'm done and I'm over. And this city doesn't really want us here because I received a lot of pushbacks. I didn't anticipate it as an actor. I celebrated. And then when I started to be a founder, it seemed like a lot of people in the Corps community of culture here did not like that, and I didn't understand that. I still don't understand that. But yet and still it was something I was confronted with very privately. I suffered in private. It was a story I never really brought out to the public that people who came to see our shows, I never got up and said "Y'all just don't know how— how much I'm being mistreated in this town." They never knew because I just decided not to tell that narrative to people who supported us, and I still would suffer it.

The next morning, somebody would make us some nasty phone call and say something. And I was tired and I had built my career not only as a founder but as an actor because I was still acting and everyone was like "Get out of the city!" They didn't know about that, but it was just said. You shouldn't be struggling to tell them to go to New York and— You've done diversity. Why don't you go and do your thing? Something kept pulling me back and I wanted to go to New York. After ten years. I wanted to leave the struggle of the company, but my heart would not release me.

And Howard Millman, who was my boss when I was an actor at the Asolo, had come on my board. He had retired from artistic director of the Asolo and he had been on for a year, and had been very quiet. And I told the board president, after those ten years "I'm done." He said "What do you mean you're done?" I said "I'm done." I said "I'm leaving." And he called Howard. Howard called me. He met me. He said "You can't give up." I said "Yes, I can." I said, "I am tired." I said "Howard, this doesn't make any sense to me anymore. It has to make sense." And he said "What if you change your mind?" I said "If I leave, I'm not going to change my mind." And he took me to an art gallery and in the middle of the art gallery was a den. And he said "Do you think you could do something here?" Because again, we were to have no place. I was just. I was too barebones. Nothing. No money, nothing. And I was standing there looking in that den with him and I could feel my mojo coming back. And I was trying to push it back in my mind. No! no! "I believe it. I'm done with this." And look, that thing just kept turning until I knew I was back. I didn't even want to tell him I was back. He was standing right next to me and he said "So what do you think?" And finally, I looked at him. I said "Okay." I said "I can come in here and do some small reviews." And he said "Okay, good." And then he walked away and got in his car and left me. And I continue the journey. And that year was my pivotal year. He said to me "The community, they know that you would pull this thing down the road by yourself." He said "They think you got a lot of help because when they come to your shows, you look so well put together." He said, "You need an executive director." He said "You never had one. Like every organization in this town, you need an executive director." And we ended up getting an opportunity to talk to a business woman, a former banker who was in retirement from banking. Christine Jennings. And I said to myself when he said "We're going to go talk to her about working with you" I said "This fluid, very wealthy business woman is going to come and help me run a struggling black theater."

And we went to the meetings that night, just tell your story. And I did. And I could see her tearing up, and she said to me "Oh my God." She said "Nobody sticks with dreams anymore." She said "I am so inspired right now, hearing your story and I want to help you." And she came on board, said she said she would be there for six months and we started working together to turn my struggle around. And I was hesitant because my experience with a lot of people who look like Christine in

this town was not positive. And I said “How did this happen? That I'm struggling?” And then it looks like I'm getting ready to move to another ship. And here I am sitting here with this woman. And she said to me “I know what's been happening.” She said “Everybody's been telling Nate Jacobs: what he ought to do. Nobody's been helping Jacobs do it.” And I just bonded over and started crying. And I was trying to figure out why you cried. But she had touched something in my found herself that it seemed like people could never understand. In my struggle, my world began to change.

And I began to realize I was never alone. The vision was alive and well in the world. That was the reason why I have spent ten years of my life running with it, and the vision had a life, and the vision was beginning to draw necessary people into its space. And Christine was one of those people and then benefactors and donors who had never given us one donation began to come and meet with us and sit down.

So, you know, one day she said “Do you think me being a white woman helped with these donors looking at your organization?” I said “Of course it did.” I said “You know, it did.” I said “If this is America.” And I said “It's just in America and down here south in Florida. It makes these benefactors feel more confident about giving big donations because they feel like the money is going to be... they can trust to give their money to.”

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** When Curtis and I met you in December, one of the things that we discussed after we left the meeting with you was mentorship. I didn't have any mentors. I don't have any mentors. Do you have any mentors, Curtis?

**Curtis Anderson:** I do not.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** And I know that the West Coast Black Theater Troupe is more than a theater company. It's also a nonprofit organization that provides mentorship opportunities for young artists to improve their, you know, skills and confidence. I just found out that you are mentoring Will Mauricette, who is helping us shoot our episode today.

**Nate Jacobs:** Yes, very much so.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** Can you tell us a little bit about the mentorship opportunities available and why is that important?

**Nate Jacobs:** It's extremely important. I was told by a gentleman, he said “The mentors are rabbis that show up on your journey.” He said “If a person never has their rabbis show up on their journeys, most people will never make it to their destination and where they desire to go.” And he says, for Westcoast Black theater troupe, I had mentors show up on my journey, and I realized that I was a natural mentor the way I thought that the care I took into people, the interest that I took into people, the resilience I had when I decided to support our stand by somebody, where I got that from probably a little bit from my grandmother, my mom, my dad, my dad, I found out was a natural mentor.



My father left us. I think he was like 65 years old. And at his funeral we're sitting there, me and my nine siblings and all of these young people getting up, one after the other: "Mr. Jacobs! So and so, so, so... Mr. Jacobs did this— and Mr. Jacobs did that— And when I was this Mr. Jacobs— we sent him to—" Who are all these people? He was living in Tampa, and he had affected so many people. When my mother passed away, all of these young women got up and: "Ms. Better, she would call me... and Ms. Better called me— and Ms. Better said—" We sat there and we learned how my parents had affected so many other folks. And she had 11 children and she was still connecting to other young people in the community.

So I think I got that naturally. So the theater took on that characteristic because of who I was as the founder. And young people have always drawn to me. If Will— leaves and go on, another one shows up. It's been like that since I've been in the world, since I've been... What? Maybe 18 years old. It's a natural flow that happens in my life.

And sometimes I know when I get the next assignment. But what happens within the company is this organic training and developmental and coaching program that happens. You get a guy or a young lady walking in there straight out of the community, totally clueless, and they get into that machinery. Because what I do in my rehearsals, I'm mentoring and I'm coaching. So, it's the natural thing. I just took that, set it right in the middle of my company. It's a spirit that everybody feels, everybody knows, and people choose who their mentors are. Even young people, we choose our mentors. Something happens inside of us about this person and there's a connection. Is the spiritual connection that some are connected and sometimes many times with men we don't write because we are like: "Well, you know, I'm okay." We miss it many times, but people choose their mentors, and that's when it happens because there is a trust that has to happen between the mentee and the mentor. And that's when the results happen where that person can effectuate your life. And I have about three or four vital mentors that have helped me on my journey and help Nate to believe and continue to come out of the shell.

Because when you shine your life fully, you give the whole world the license to shine their lights. And that's one of the things I realized when I got to the point where I was able to come out of that shell, all these little lights I lit and still lighting tonight when I go back— last night, I was talking to this artist's, lightning his light, and what that has done and what that has ignited of— and the wonderful gratification I have because of that element that we don't just do shows, we change lives.

**Curtis Anderson:** Your upbringing in your personal life and in your career, it's built on the foundation of this mentorship. And it's so cool to see that it's a fundamental pillar in the theater. I mean, I think that's like hitting the hammer in the nail, like the lack of wanting to be vulnerable and to let other people speak in. You welcomed those voices to then build a wall around you, which I think is really cool. Taking a step back a little bit, not back, but let's branch out in the world of art and design, right? How do you see the cultural or cultural diversity shaping creative expressions?

**Nate Jacobs:** I still feel there's a lot of work to do when it comes to inclusiveness. I was just talking to another person and a view yesterday from a young student from Princeton who wanted to do another story about the plight of inclusion and stuff. And I said to her, I said "Institutions like the

Westcoast Black Theater Troupe are vital.” I said “Here is the governor here talking about taking certain things, stories, brown and black stories out of the history books...” as if we had a lot of already in there. Okay? Let's just start there. But the few little mentions take them out— let's— let us control the narrative. It's like, no, you don't get to control the narrative of our story. That's our duty and that's our right to do that. I think whatever that design is and whatever that art is shaped into, goes with that core group of people that are running theater institutions. They are running programs at universities and high schools. Who are those people? Who is making those decisions? How important is it to that staff that they are inclusive. How aggressive are they with making sure that they are doing what many times you pick up the load of pamphlets and stuff, they say: “We are this, and we are that, and we are this!” And none of that is really happening right off paper. The students that they don't see anything like that.

They are like “Really?” they probably look and they do “This is not happening.” That is the catalyst that will reshape the way art is done. There is a convention of art and expression in the theater. Most people know it. They know all the classic pieces from Shakespeare to the musical genre and what typically happens on stage. A lot of that stuff does not really include people of color. Those standard plays are, if they don't cross caste, take a role that is written for a white actor and put a black actor in it, then there is no inclusion in there. Right. And a lot of them are not really interested in producing a fully all-Black show, not even theaters with all kinds of money and kinds of support. They are not interested in that. They are. let's do this one because that's a very popular one and it's about four people in it and we feel safe with doing that one. I was just telling the girl yesterday in the interview, I said one of the things that I really want to do is go and challenge these programs and what are y'all doing?

I got calls from local institutions who were running, and that's this master's program for acting. And we can't keep the African-Americans to stay. They come here for two months and everybody wants to leave. And I say, because they come in, they can look at the staff and go like “Okay, I see what this is going to be is the same thing I had in high school, same thing in college. And here I am in the master's program.” In an institution like what I have kind of flipped the script where you walk up on a campus in the state of Florida and there is a black founder. I mean, where does that exist? Okay, that's unique in itself. “Oh, you're the founder?” “Yes, I am.” When I did the first show for the players, the first black show...

I was told “You're going to meet this woman at this building and she's going to give you the key.” So I go to the building, the door is unlocked. I walk in. “Hello? Hello?” I hear nobody. I'm walking and all of a sudden I turn the corner and see this Caucasian woman standing and she is “Please don't hurt me. Please don't hurt me.” So she goes down to her knees and she covers her head. And so I'm thinking to myself “Do I know her?” “Is this like?— It's just— Is she an actress?” And so, I noticed that this— “What is this woman?” So, as she goes on... something inside of me says she thought you were white. So I said “Excuse me, ma'am, I'm Nate Jacobs.” “Oh! I didn't know who you were.” And is she getting up off the floor? And then she comes over “This is a key and this is the door, and that's the lock blah blah.” And she's embarrassed. She's all red, and she gives me the keys and I try to help. Of course, she's just really embarrassed and “Oh no, no, no, no, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.” They had never seen that before.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** So you have this incredible story and you're also a father...

**Nate Jacobs:** Yes, my daughter is in L.A. and a professional singer. She— I was surprised. She went to Howard from here, and I was like “You're going out of State? Fine, go do it.” She went, did very well. And she's been out in L.A. for almost eight years singing with top stars, Beyoncé. She did Coachella with Beyoncé. She traveled the world with Kanye West and on record with Elton John and Stevie Wonder. Just doing wonderful stuff out there.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** That's amazing! Curtis is also a girl dad and I have two daughters myself.

**Nate Jacobs:** Oh! Okay.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** So what would your advice be for young people and for our students?

**Curtis Anderson:** As we wrap up, I guess.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** Yeah.

**Nate Jacobs:** Believe what's in your heart. Decide specifically what it is that you want. Never, never, never change for what you know that you know that you know is true.

You can do anything you have enough faith to believe that you can do. And it has absolutely nothing to do with anybody else in the world. You can decide your own destiny because you have that power within. I had a million things put in my ears building this company, advising me many times out of concern and love for me what people thought I should do.

All of it meant walking away from building the West Coast Black Theater Troupe. I knew what was in my heart. I knew what kept beating drums to me, even when nobody else understood it. And I tried to explain “La la la la.—” And I can see people glaze over looking at me going “Oh my God, he's so naive. He's so passionate.”

Oh my God! One day he's going to wake up and go get a real job!” I can see in their eyes they were looking at me. “Okay. Okay. I heard it. I believed it.” And you got to believe it. Until buildings show up. Until money shows up until acknowledgment shows up until appreciation shows up. But you will have to walk a road.

If you are such a one that has to pave an unbeaten path or create something new that nobody has ever seen before. You can do it. I believe you can do anything you want to do. So whatever it is that you dream, believe it with all your heart and work at it with everything you know and never, ever, ever stop!

**Curtis Anderson:** Wow...

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** I feel inspired.

**Curtis Anderson:** Yeah. Thank you so much for stopping by just to share your story.

**Nate Jacobs:** Thanks for the invite. I'm honored to be on this.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** This was incredible. Thank you.

**Curtis Anderson:** I have no words. This is amazing.

**Nate Jacobs:** Thank you.

**Curtis Anderson:** Thank you.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** I really appreciate you sharing your wonderful, incredible, incredible story.

**Nate Jacobs:** My pleasure.

**Dr. Elcin Haskollar:** And I think that it'll be very impactful for our students. We appreciate you.

**Nate Jacobs:** Thank you!

**Curtis Anderson:** And that concludes today's conversation. Thank you for tuning in and joining us on this journey of design and inclusion. You can find all of our episodes, transcripts and other wonderful resources on our website: [ringling.edu/risingtogether](http://ringling.edu/risingtogether). Join us next time for more insightful conversations. And remember to stay connected, stay engaged and keep rising together with us.

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