

Active Hope - A podcast collaboration

Episode 1 Transcript

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I love the concept of active hope. Hope is not inert and hope is not some sedentary thing. Hope takes work.

Kamilah Forbes: And sometimes you need a little bit of hope as that North Star to continue pushing yourself forward.

Paola Prestini: I am most interested in the everyday voice. The kind of gems that you will see from people who are out there, struggling, living life, that's where the juice is at.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: My name is Marc Bamuthi Joseph. I am a poet. I'm a dad, I'm an educator.

Kamilah Forbes: I am Kamilah Forbes. I am a storyteller, a director, a producer, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and the Executive Producer of the Apollo Theater.

Paola Prestini: My name is Paola Prestini. I'm a composer. I'm a mother, a wife, and a collaborator.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: There aren't a lot of working artists that also run cultural institutions.

Paola Prestini: To be frank, artists are out there constantly exposed to failure, to judgment, and to evolution.

Kamilah Forbes: We work on very much erasing boundaries. What I'm hoping we can do is sort of break open these worlds of curiosity.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: For the Kennedy Center.

Paola Prestini: For National Sawdust.

Kamilah Forbes: For the Apollo Theater.

Paola Prestini: This is Active Hope.

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Paola Prestini: This pilot episode of Active Hope was recorded on January 8th, 2021, two days after the attack on the Capitol. A live audience joined the three hosts who gathered on Zoom.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Hey, hey.

Kamilah Forbes: Hey, hey everybody.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: What's up, family?

Kamilah Forbes: Hey, hey. Here we are.

Paola Prestini: Hi. Here we are, finally.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yes, yes. Yes, yes, great to see y'all.

Paola Prestini: It's good to see you both. We began these conversations in early June. It was right after the murder of George Floyd. Bamuthi, I remember you said, "I'll do this, but only if it's not a one-off."

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yes.

Paola Prestini: So now, after six months of planning, we've come together in this moment that's greater than us all, propelled by yet another violent message this week, another signifier that now more than ever, we need hope. And that's an active hope that contains strategies, insights, inspirations, and moments of truth and a way forward.

Paola Prestini: With art weaving in and out of all these areas of life, reflecting and leading the way as it always does and as it should. And so that's what we'll do in these next five sessions with its subsequent podcast. And I'm really grateful to both of you for inviting me in.

Paola Prestini: So I took a look at active hope in the dictionary right before coming on, and it means backed by hard work and creative energies; To trust, to change, to believe, and to get out of a dire situation which sounds really right to me. So I just wanted to start by, well by asking you both what active hope means or even just where you're both at right now.

Kamilah Forbes: You know it's so interesting because as I was thinking about this conversation today, after the events on Wednesday, I had rumblings in my tummy. I'll be, you know, just to be perfectly transparent, you know. I don't know if I was really prepared to even discuss the possibility, right, of I think this idea of active hope. Because of what is, just physically, I was just continually enraged by what I saw in front of me, right, on all of our television screens and our world and headlines.

Kamilah Forbes: So I mean to be completely transparent, that is where I am. I do think that this idea of good art is all about being truthful. You have to be truthful and if you're not telling the truth, then why are we even here? So I think it's important to put that in the room, I'll just leave that there.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Word. As you know, I'm working at the Kennedy Center so I'm here in D.C. and the melee was happening about a mile and a half away from me. And I'm in D.C. largely alone, largely by myself. I'm 2,500 miles away from my family, and I was struck by a little bit of fear. But here's what was happening as the chaos was going down. So we're living in the shadow of what some might call an attempted coup. But I was on a Zoom call with Bill T. Jones who is one of my heroes and we're working on an opera project together. And he didn't care that my mama was texting me. He just wanted to talk about the opera.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: So the truth is, is that I didn't have a chance to be afraid until after I stopped talking to my favorite artist. When I was talking to my favorite artist, I had nothing but laughter, you know? I had nothing but curiosity. And even though there were sirens literally coming up and down the street, Bill, who is a mentor to me and is one of the guiding lights not only in our field but I think in our

country, was focused on the thing that he could do. So that's what gives me hope that I'm out here doing it with y'all.

Kamilah Forbes: There it is. There it is.

Paola Prestini: There it is.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah.

Kamilah Forbes: Ashe.

Paola Prestini: We're going to hear right now from two people. Part of the way this first whole episode is structured is in the communal, right? Hearing from people from all walks of life on how they're encountering hope, and I feel that it's a perfect choice to really begin with two people from the medical profession. We're going to hear from Erico Cardoso and Charlyne Carmichael.

Erico Cardoso: My name is Erico Cardoso. I'm a neurosurgeon in Staten Island and I am very excited today. I just received my second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. I'm also very thankful for the efforts of the thousands of people involved in a development of this vaccine in record time. It is nothing short of a miracle.

Charlyne Carmichael: My name is Charlyne and I'm an adult nurse practitioner in the Durham, North Carolina area working primarily with the geriatric population. During this time, it's really hard to feel hopeful when you think about the over 353,000 people that have died so far due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These souls were beloved mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and friends that didn't make it to 2021. So hope can feel like an elusive and fleeting luxury. But every day, I see regular people who refuse to let hope die. They extend themselves beyond their nine to five and comfort zones to alleviate suffering anywhere they see it. I think about the dieticians who created a pantry in their office to address food insecurity issues among their patients early in the pandemic. I think about the nurse, who created a mindfulness wall to remind everyone to find joy in the simple things. I think about the bus driver who volunteered to care for a single father's child while he recovered from a catastrophic illness.

Charlyne Carmichael: These people create a fragile network of kindness that has become the safety net of our society. They remind me that the definition of hope is action that is activated through kindness and purpose.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: That's fire, that's incredible.

Kamilah Forbes: That is a word that I needed today.

Paola Prestini: Yes.

Kamilah Forbes: That is a word I didn't expect and that I needed today.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. Well best case scenario, this is what we'll provide over the course of a series of episodes. We are an immigrant and two first-generation Americans so we know hustle, we

know entrepreneurship, we know urgency, we know accountability, and we also know prejudice. There's a thing that as a person of color, particularly as a Black person, you are almost always auditioning for your humanity. And as an artist, you are often auditioning, ironically, for a place in the socioeconomic spectrum that feels respectful as we pass it along. And I wanted to start there because I think that identification, that marker of the artist as other, has led to a kind of diminishment of the place of artist as leader.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: And so, before we start our next, what I would call our hope prompts, and we have several and they're all amazing. But I'm wondering if you could do your administrative job if you weren't also making art? And maybe, what is it about actively making art that enables you to succeed and maybe even thrive in your administrative role?

Paola Prestini: That's such a good question. I'll tell you that for me, there's no world in which I could administrate and not make art. It doesn't exist. It wouldn't make sense to me. I think that a lot of what I try out in my work ends up becoming a pathway that allows me to create opportunities for others.

Paola Prestini: And I think that there's a saying that I love to say that says you have to create as if the sand were stone. And I think that to live in this world today, as an artist, as a human being, as an other, means to have to create constantly a new reality. And I don't think there's a better personality to lead or to administrate than someone who understands those day-to-day failures.

Kamilah Forbes: Gosh, wow that's so great Paola. I mean I think it's also, there's a kind of constant evolution. It's a constant muscle that has to be exercised. And when you don't exercise, we know what happens. There's this sedentary that happens. I think as a leader at an art institution, the arts institution also has to operate like a muscle. Also has to exercise that kind of malleability, that visioning of possibility. And many times, as institutions, as corporations, as businesses, the comfortability is in the 'What did we do last year? Let's model what we know.' But quite frankly, that's incomplete odds with the world of an artist.

Kamilah Forbes: So I say that to say, it's important that we learn from that malleability and adopt some of those principles into our way of leading institutions and way of being as institutions. I always like to say this idea of artist-centered and artist-led institutions is very different than institutions that just deliver art.

Paola Prestini: And then that relates to the pandemic too, right? Because I mean this past year, there was a complete reimagining. And what does that mean when you know, it's not starting from scratch but it's starting without, with having to create new tools.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Word. We have, as another kind of sign post and indexing of this show, we are all three working artists. We also represent these three really incredible institutions. Kamilah, in our opening you defined yourself as a director and a producer among many other things. During this pandemic moment, you produced and directed *Between The World And Me* for HBO. You want to talk about that a little bit?

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah, sure. It's that urgency that I felt at the top of this call as there's rage and I need to do something with this rage is what I felt in June. And luckily, we had completed and had adapted the work of Ta-Nehisi Coates in 2018 at the Apollo and the Kennedy Center. It was originally commissioned

at the Apollo in 2018. And Bamuthi you've been a part of the cast since the beginning. But really taking the world that Ta-Nehisi had envisioned for the book and bringing it alive for a stage production that traversed in both of those cities. And then, 2020 happened. Not only the pandemic, but also denote the racial reckoning of 2020, right? George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the need to say something. So between July and November, we made and brought together an incredible group of artists, activists, leaders, storytellers, who were really looking to respond to this moment in time. And really to be servants, right? In that way.

Kamilah Forbes: So what we have here is we have a clip of two scenes. One- and Between The World And Me is a series of letters that Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote to his son at 15-years-old of really detailing what does it mean to be a young black man growing up in the age of Trayvon Martin, because he wrote the book in 2015. These two excerpts are excerpt of Mahershala Ali talking about finding love, and of Marc Bamuthi Joseph talking about rage.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Word.

Mahershala Ali: I fell in love at the Mecca one last time. Lost my balance and all my boyhood under the spell of a girl from Chicago. This was your mother. I stood with a blunt in one hand, a beer in the other. I inhaled, passed it off to this Chicago girl. And when I brushed her long, elegant fingers, I shuddered a bit from the blast. She brought the blunt to her plum-painted lips, pulled, exhaled, and then pulled the smoke back in. Watching this display of smoke and flame and already feeling the effects, I was, I was lost, running, wondering what it must be to embrace her, to be exhaled by her, to return to her and leave her high.

Mahershala Ali: She was a kind of black girl who'd been told as a child that she better be smart because her looks wouldn't save her. Told as a young woman that she was really pretty for a dark-skinned girl. There was all about her a knowledge of cosmic injustices. The same knowledge I'd glimpsed all those years ago watching the golden-haired boys with their toy trucks and football cards and dimly preceding the great barrier between the world and me.

Mahershala Ali: Nothing between us was ever planned, not even you. We summoned you out of ourselves and you were not given a vote. You deserved all the protection we could muster. There was before you, and then there was after. And in this after, you were the God I never had. I submitted before your needs. And I knew then, that I must survive for something more than survival's sake. I will survive for you. You, born in August.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: This entire episode took me from fear to rage. Fire for the rest of my days. Most of us drink our travesties straight, smile about it. I wrote about the history of Prince George's police. Here's what I knew. The officer that killed Prince Jones was Black. The politicians that empowered that officer, Black. Black politicians, twice as good, unconcerned. By then, the internet had bloomed. That must strike you as novel. All your life, whenever you've had a question you type that question on the keyboard and within seconds, the flood of potential answers. I remember typewriters. The dawn of the Commodore 64. Days when the song that you loved would have its moment on the radio and then disappear into nothing. My curiosity in the case of Prince Jones opened up a world of newspaper clippings, histories and sociologies. I called politicians, questioned them. Was told that the citizens would rather ask for police support than complain about brutality. Told that the Black citizens were comfortable, had a certain impatience with crime.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I've seen these theories before, back in Moorland. I knew these theories even in the mouths of Black people justified the jails, argued for the ghettos and the projects. Viewed the destruction of the Black body as incidental to the preservation of order. I understood what I would not have given back in Baltimore for a line of police officers patrolling my route to school. No such officers. Whenever I saw the police, something had already gone wrong. All along, I knew. There are some for whom safety is in the schools. Portfolios, skyscrapers, ours, men with guns who view us with contempt. Safety was a higher value than justice.

Kamilah Forbes: You know what's interesting, I so needed to hear that line today of resonating, right? Of like safety is a higher value than justice and all the imagery that's ringing in my mind is the insurrection that happened at the Capitol on Wednesday. Where this text was written for a completely different set of circumstances. But that kind of rage, it really helped to speak... liberate my rage, I guess you could say.

Kamilah Forbes: There's something I just wanted to frame about the work. The intention of the work was obviously to respond to an urgent time. But also, thinking about the Mahershala piece and the word liberation keeps coming up and bubbling up, was this idea of just liberation of getting free of Black beauty. And how can we tell- one of the challenges, not challenges, but I should say goals, was trying to tell the most beautiful Black love story ever. Right? With just moments of... And find liberation in that very vulnerable moment. Juxtapose to your piece Marc of finding, sort of, breaking open this moment of rage so that we can find liberation there as well, right? Audience-wise.

Kamilah Forbes: And I guess my question for you all, I mean that was I think just in regards to the process of the artist. In your artistic practice, where are those moments that you have found liberation?

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: All the time. There's a specific moment in my 24-year-old body. I'm in a West African dance class at the Malonga Casquelourd Center which maybe then was still called the Alice Arts Center. But now named for our dear ancestor Malonga. And I'm going across the floor and there was in the choreography, a leap. And I left the ground and for a split second, I really did think that I might never come down. I was flying. Eventually, gravity happens to democracy. Gravity happens to love and to lust. Gravity happens to economies. But there's the fly. The flyness and there is flight, there is anti-gravity as well. And that feeling that I had in my body is the yearning that keeps me coming back. It's physical and psychological, spiritual, and metaphysical. And I sometimes experience it when listening to music. It is the thing that I miss most about live performance. But I use my body in order to leave my body. That's when I'm liberated. That's when I get free.

Paola Prestini: That's the state of flow. It's interesting because as a composer who doesn't perform, my liberation comes through other people's voices. And there's two things that come to mind. One is the very first piece that I wrote for one of the artists I love the most, Helga Davis. And I had written this piece in which there was a scene in which she essentially had to improvise with an orchestra. And it was one of the most, it's a scene about these two girls in Southern Italy that I interviewed. They go out in two and they come back in four. And it's about rape in a tobacco field.

Paola Prestini: And so we played with all this mirroring. And Helga got on stage and it was not knowing what was going to happen, and it was then what happened. And it was a moment that I'll never forget and don't think she'll ever forget. But it was also, it was as much her piece as mine. And I think that's something that we don't think about in western music is that music is a collaboration. Art is a collaboration. That piece would not have been that piece without Helga Davis. There's something about

western culture that needs to own, that is so profound and so disturbing and it's something that I've had to unlearn as well.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: As I've thought about being a first-generation American of Haitian descent. I've thought about my people that live in the spectrum of the African diaspora but in many ways, I live in an African-American context more than I live in a Caribbean-American context. And to be that, to be identified in that way, to think of my people as folks that live in an African-American context, the truth is that what is beautiful and what is true, are often in contradiction. Particularly, struggle. Because Talib Kweli and we've mentioned Ta-Nehisi, there is a beautiful struggle and we make art out of the struggle. In very many ways, Kamilah, the question that you ask is really fundamentally the definition of what it means to be Black in this country. Our entire lives are opportunities that have come out of struggle. It is the thing that, again, Ta-Nehisi speaks to his son about. He named his son after a warrior who struggled. And it's something that's so relatable to us. So I am grateful for conflict. Edges are how we grow. They are what define us and how we grow. And I'm grateful for the struggle. It has afforded us an opportunity to be fricking dope as fuck. Feel me?

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Opportunities and every struggle. No that's great. Paola?

Paola Prestini: I mean, I'm just thinking here about, I guess what I'm thinking about is that I think, very much my personality is just creating out of a sense of urgency. And I think that that comes from definitely being an immigrant, being the daughter of a single parent, there was never any time to not be thinking about mortality. And to be thinking about it in that way where everything is urgent, everything needs to be done. And so to me, that's kind of how I've lived every moment of my life.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Word. Paola, let's pick that back up after our next hope prompt. So again, we're going to integrate a bunch of these call and response moments. This is Mai Khoi.

Mai Khoi: My name is Mai Khoi. I am a Vietnamese artist/activist. I am feeling hopeful because we can't live without hope. I am feeling hopeful even though all of us has to suffer from the pandemic. I still see the power of the solidarity in Black Lives Matter, and in many different movements happening around the world. I am collaborating with many incredible artist/activists who give me hope to keep going. I am inspired from Indian writer Arundhati Roy who likens the pandemic to a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, drag in the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly with little luggage, ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: This is so live.

Paola Prestini: I love that.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: There was a response from our audience, a commenter who said I think that there is a negative connotation of artists as dreamers. If you say artist, you're someone who must live outside the bounds of real or regular society and that's seen as bad or lesser or someone who one day will get practical. As if the dream is impractical. One of the things that I love about what we just heard is, these are folks who compose realities. The composition of reality is a very practical skill. That's actually how the world moves forward. What y'all think?

Kamilah Forbes: I mean, you're right, but we live within a broader world within that kind of... There's always sort of an exotification of artists as other versus artists as a member of civic society, as artists as civic leader. And really recognizing these moments in which art and visionaries have always pushed us forward, have always at every moment in time. So thank you for that comment. Yeah, go ahead.

Paola Prestini: I was just going to say that also, you could just extend the definition of what is an artist, right? Because an artist isn't just a poet and a theater director and a composer. An art is in the way that you see things, and I think that ability to see things in different ways, to keep dreaming, but also the urgency with which, as an artist, you live your life.

Kamilah Forbes: It's this idea of disruption, right? It's action, disruption is action, right? And the idea of a score of music. And this terrifies me because maybe because I'm just not as confident in my piano playing although I took 15 years of piano, thank you, mom.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I didn't know that.

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah, you know, secrets are coming out. Then obviously, the basis of piano is classical, right? And so you're learning, I'm reading the music, I'm playing. As an adult, there's only maybe three pieces of music that I can sit at the piano and still, the muscle memory comes back. After those 15 years, my mother would be very upset with me. But in my dreams, I dream that I can play in between all of those notes. I can disrupt the form. And I always, you know, that's what excited me about piano. That's why I think I was like, yeah, I want to do this, I want to play which kept me going. But I never broke through that barrier, right? I never got free, if you will, in the way that music does. So as you're talking about the struggle, the opportunity within the struggle, the disruption of form, that's what that is making me think about.

Kamilah Forbes: And actually, Bamuthi, I know you guys at the Kennedy Center. Most recently hosted, Glasper, Robert Glasper and a trio -

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah, yeah.

Kamilah Forbes: - the stage and you've had a moment.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I did. And shout-out to Simone Eccleston, our Director of Hip-Hop Culture and Contemporary Music. There's this moment where the drummer took a solo and this is probably the first performance that I'd seen, the first live performance that I'd seen in maybe five months, maybe six months. And the drummer's just getting loose. And I felt my head just bend forward into the ecstasy of this rhythm. And I realized Kam, that he was getting free. And it is one of the things that I miss about live performance is the human connection. The ability to witness someone else breaking free. The construct of the conventional gets disrupted and when you see somebody break out of that, it's infectious.

Robert Glasper Trio with DJ Jahi Sundance: [Instrumental Music]

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah.

Kamilah Forbes: I wanted to play like that.

Paola Prestini: That's so...

Kamilah Forbes: I wanted to play like that.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah.

Kamilah Forbes: It's a sense of freedom. There's a sense of freedom that he is crafting between his fingers.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. And those words -

Kamilah Forbes: Oops, you're on mute.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: That's 'cuz I was squealing.

Paola Prestini: You were drumming along.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I was like, got to try to keep my thug card, you feel me?

Kamilah Forbes: Right, right, right.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Can't be out here like squealing and whimpering. But those words, that the DJ was spinning in. Are you a God?

Paola Prestini: So good. I know.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Are you an angel? I am awake. Which, shout-out to Hank Willis Thomas and The Wide Awakes but just this concept of being woke.

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: As distinguished from the idea of being awake. Continuing to talk about hope, I don't know if woke folks give me hope. But those who are awake, there's something there. The state of being awake. Wakefulness, you know? Engaging with you all gives me hope, that wakefulness.

Paola Prestini: I've been thinking a lot during this pandemic about as artists, we're all missing our other half. We're missing our audience. And how do you connect with that other half? And we're operating in this kind of... People like to call it a digital renaissance when they're being optimistic. These next six months, as we find our way back to intimacy with our audience and I think it's these questions of how do we communicate? How do we build bridges? A friend of mine, this morning, he said, "Paola, you love to build bridges. And remember if you love to build bridges, prepare to be walked on." And I think there's something really powerful about that in the sense that the conversations that have to be had are not easy ones, but they have to be had. In order for this country and this promise of this country to fulfill itself again. And what are those next steps?

Paola Prestini: And the last piece that I'm going to play for you is something that I built during the pandemic. It was based on sharing sounds of isolation. I worked with a good friend of mine who's in Mexico City. I was raised in Nogales and then Tucson on the border. And we collected sounds of isolation. We collected people singing to the chorus of a very famous song. And what emerged out of that was a tenderness that you don't find often in the social media sphere. And it brings me great joy. The first piece is called Tree of 40 Fruit and the last piece is called Cucurrucucú Paloma. And at the very beginning of The Tree of 40 Fruit, you hear Maria who is the nanny who raised me. My mom is a single mom and Maria left her four kids to watch me and I couldn't see her because I was on the Arizona side and she was on the Mexican side. Here we go.

Maria and the Orchestra de Minería: [Singing in Spanish]

Paola Prestini: So I should say that that was the Orchestra de Minería.

Kamilah Forbes: Beautiful.

Paola Prestini: Thank you. They were all recorded in their separate rooms on their phones. And then those are just a sampling of hundreds of cucurrucucús that we received from around Mexico. And then of course, hundreds of sounds of isolation. But what struck me was just again, how much people needed to share and needed to connect in their rooms alone but always wanting to connect.

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah.

Paola Prestini: You know, I think for the three of us, as parents, we find hope in our children. And it's made me think a lot about as a parent to a 12-year-old boy, he and all children are coming into this understanding that they don't have control. And children, of course, thrive on reliability. I remember when my son was I think three or four, we used to play this game of the Who Loves You Game. Because my husband would go on tour and he would go, he was on tour like 120, 170 days a year. And so every night before we would go to bed, we'd make the list and we'd be like, okay, so... And every night the list would get longer. But there's a clip that we're about to watch of Tommaso, my son, and his best friend Jasper McNally Jackson. And they talk about how they're going through this as 12-year-olds.

Paola Prestini: So you haven't seen Jasper in like how long?

Tommi: I don't know, a long time.

Paola Prestini: Four months?

Tommi: Yeah.

Paola Prestini: I wonder if you guys maybe want to just talk a little bit about like where you were in March, and where you were in the summer, and where you are right now?

Tommi: So in the beginning, I was actually pretty bored. I was in my room a lot doing absolutely nothing. So I took it on myself to find something fun to do. I saw a couple kids playing with their yo-yos and I

decided, hey, why don't I do that? And I started yo-yoing and it really took me out of this boredom state. I would do it for like two hours a day. It was kind of crazy. I had a lot of fun and yeah. That kind of, I guess, saved me.

Paola Prestini: Jasper, what about you? Was there anything that took you out of boredom or helped you kind of find a way out of it?

Jasper: Frankly, no. I haven't really picked things up. Actually, that is untrue. I just lied. I apologize. I've been learning Blender which is a free modeling thing. I'm getting really good at it.

Paola Prestini: So now Jasper that you can see kind of, can you see the end of the tunnel of this pandemic? Or does it feel very much day-to-day for you?

Jasper: I think it's very day-by-day situation. A situation where I find hope and hope makes it feel a bit better. Frankly, it really is these days. But what it is, I get to look forward to see.

Tommi: I would say I do see the light but it's actually very dim. It's a pretty dim light to be honest. But I can't really see it yet but I can feel it and I feel like we're not at the end but we're approaching the part that is approaching the end so...

Kamilah Forbes: Out of the mouth of babes, right?

Paola Prestini: Approaching the part that's approaching the end.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yes.

Kamilah Forbes: Yeah. There's so much in that. Wow. It's so fascinating because the one thing I love about young people is they tell the truth.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yes.

Kamilah Forbes: They tell the truth and when I think of my daughter, Satya, she's four. And this summer, we live in Brooklyn and as much as I think that I don't know how much she's really comprehending about what's happening in the world. Except for one day, we took her out on a play date and this was one of her besties from... You know they have four-year-old besties, right? On one of her play dates and by Brooklyn Museum. This was in July. And so we had just... The protests were up and happening in June, month of June, this was actually end of June. We took her to the play date and I remember her and her buddy were riding around on their scooters. And there was a police van that pulled up. And six police officers came out. And she dropped her scooter and ran over to me and said, "Mommy, mommy, why are they here?" And hid under my leg. "Why are they here? Why are they here?"

Kamilah Forbes: Now, we hadn't had a conversation with her about what's happening just because she's four and it's not quite sure how much she can really comprehend. But clearly, I was wrong. There was... She was absorbing and comprehending the fear of police. So as a parent, it broke me because it's my job to keep her safe. And hearing that Mahershala piece from *Between The World And Me*, it hits me because... I found my God in her and that is my one mission in life. And at times, the world... I am not certain if I can keep her safe. But I've got to hold onto that belief that I can, right? Because that is one

thing I think is as she gets older, and I'm not quite sure how to navigate this but it's wonderful hearing from both of you with older children. We've got to make sure that they understand the truth of what's happening in this world. I cannot... She does not have the privilege to live in ignorance.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Nor we.

Kamilah Forbes: And that scares me, it frightens me, but I know that's my job.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: My son is 19. I was just thinking about that brolic-ass dude. Like he's just so huge. Yes. He's 19. I can only imagine the variants but maybe I'll just say, my son started high school when the 45th president first came into... His first semester in high school was during Trump's first term. He had his senior year, essentially, his second semester senior year essentially taken from him because there was no... Which means no prom, no formal graduation, these kind of rituals of crossing over. And then he subsequently is enrolled at Howard University which I'm incredibly proud of.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: He's a beautiful spirit and a talented artist. And he's just kind of floating a little bit like a gas molecule and so I'm not worried about his hopefulness. I'm worried about the constraint. I'm worried about bringing it in and helping him to see that there is growth in this moment, despite the immediate and intimate human connection. Can we make a space where we can agree as parents that we want all of our kids to be safe? We want all of our kids to be inspired. And what Kamilah wants for her daughter is not at odds with what I want for my son. It is all possible.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I didn't realize how much I needed to cry. How much I needed to be broken open. I think another reason why we've come together is because of the quote that we first heard from Mai who quotes the writer Arundhati Roy and she talks about this moment as a portal. And I just felt taken to some other side. Art really has brought us through. It's not only transformed us, it's stabilized us and it has been the vessel for the portal to the other side.

Kamilah Forbes: Beautiful.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I think fam that we're going to close with our friend Tiokasin Ghosthorse who's a member of the Cheyenne River Lakota Nation of South Dakota. Let's dive into a little bit more hope.

Tiokasin Ghosthorse: Hello, my name is Tiokasin Ghosthorse. I'm a Lakota who's learning how to be a good human being. Being in the present, many people have a go-to when they speak about what it means to hope. This cultivating hope, it begins with the Earth for many of us. In the context I would put this in, is that if we go too far in the future, there's anxiety and worry. And we go too far in the past and there's regret and I would say obligation. And many native peoples across the planet, don't have the word or thought or concept for hope. Their language and their living in the present is what gives them that happiness. We also understand if we are not present in our being, either we're just doing without being. We're given the default language that we cannot understand hope in any other way of what's been educated into us. Still, another way to think and to be at peace with the Earth. And once you're at peace with the Earth, the elimination of hope is even possible. You're in the present. For example, there's a tree or a plant or an animal, do they hope? Or are they conscious of being in the present? Just a thought.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I have hope because I get to think with you. Thanks for spending some time over here.

Paola Prestini: Thank you both, you guys.

Kamilah Forbes: Thank you, guys. This was well-needed.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah.

Paola Prestini: It was well-needed and I'm excited for this journey that we have ahead of us.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. Today we mostly focused on hope but we'll continue to frame cultural leadership in our ongoing discussions or use cultural leadership as a frame to talk about the environment, talk about the border, talk about science, equity and aesthetics. And we'll be joined by other guests and have other hope prompts as we continue this journey forward. So thank you for being with us today as we launch.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: To all the artists featured in the performances and to everyone who shared their beautiful thoughts and hope [siren sounds]... I'm live in D.C. so you're hearing the sirens but it just means that hope is an emergency and we're here to take that call.

Paola Prestini: Good night.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Much love to you all.

Kamilah Forbes: Good night, everybody.

Paola Prestini: Good night.

Paola Prestini: Active Hope is a co-production of the Apollo Theater, Kennedy Center, and National Sawdust with Lumahai Productions. Our supervising producer is Elena Park and our producer is Jeff Tang. Our audio engineer is Robert Huott.

Paola Prestini: The live event on January 8th was hosted by the multimedia team at The Kennedy Center including Kristin Fosdick, Paige Lester, and Ayal Subar. We heard music by Jason Moran, The Robert Glasper Trio with DJ Jahi Sundance, Paola Prestini, Magos Herrera and Thomas Mendez, and Square Peg Round Hole.

Paola Prestini: Special thanks for Ta-Nehisi Coates and HBO.

Paola Prestini: The project leads for Active Hope are Kim Chan and Paige Lester.

Paola Prestini: On behalf of my co-hosts, Kamilah Forbes and Marc Bamuthi Joseph, I want to thank you for listening to our pilot podcast. I am Paola Prestini. I hope you'll join us for the episodes to come and more Active Hope.