

Jeff Around Town – January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Jeff:** Time now for another edition of Jeff Around Town. Joining me live in studio, Charlene Donaghy. Charlene is an award-winning playwright based in Connecticut whose work has been staged across the U.S. and beyond, and yet time again, well, she returns here to Omaha to teach at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Charlene, good morning, welcome.

**Charlene:** Good morning, thanks for having me, Jeff.

**Jeff:** Yeah, so you've been coming back, you're based in Connecticut, but you've been coming here for how long now?

**Charlene:** I first came out in December of 2010, so I'm going into my 15th year of multiple visits.

**Jeff:** And do folks in Connecticut say, hey, why are you going to Omaha all the time?

**Charlene:** They do say that, why Omaha? And it's an interesting thing to explain to them, but it starts for me with theater and the arts and writing. It's a place that inspires my writing. The students that I teach here at UNO inspire my writing. And as I've gotten more and more time in Omaha and in the area, I've just fallen in love with being here. So it's, that's always a left turn, right? It's like the left, how did you end up in the Midwest? Well, I found a home here.

**Jeff:** Oh, love it. And you are primarily teaching through the MFA program for creative writing.

**Charlene:** So yeah, I teach in the graduate program in creative writing, and I also teach undergraduate courses in theater and cinema. Those are online and they're great too. We're in our J term right now. So, I'm having a great magical realism course in cinema.

**Jeff:** Love it. So, share with our audience some of the things that you are attracted to about Omaha. What is it when you first came here or did it have to grow on you or was it like an immediate love at first sight kind of thing?

**Charlene:** I think it scared me at first because everyone, you know, it sounds a cliché to say everyone is so friendly, but everyone is, it's a very warm, wonderful place to be. People are, people are so welcoming. And that was the first thing that I found. I came out for the MFA in writing to sort of consult with them on getting a playwright tracked up. It was playwrighting then, and now it's playwrighting and screenwriting. And I went to Great Plains Theater Conference also in 2011. And that was sort of my entry into the theater scene in Omaha. And I tell people it's an incredible theater scene. And people are, I've gotten raised eyebrows and then I start telling them like, what is available here? And it feeds, it feeds me as an artist. I've written here a lot. I just find time to sit in a coffee shop or some wonderful little corner of the city and write.

**Jeff:** Why is it different here though, do you think? Or is it just, is it the same, but just a different place?

**Charlene:** It's, so I've had some, what I call my like writing homes. So, for many years, it was New Orleans. New Orleans was my second home for decades. And I still have a place

there that I can go to. And I would write there at, you know, midnight to like two in the morning in my courtyard and sort of hear the ghosts of New Orleans. And then it became Provincetown, Massachusetts, which I ran an international theater festival there for 17 years. And that would be writing by the sea.

**Jeff:** Was Michael Cunningham part of that?

**Charlene:** Michael was not. I know Michael Cunningham.

**Jeff:** You know, you know him?

**Charlene:** Well, yes, I, yeah.

**Jeff:** Oh, wow, great writer.

**Charlene:** He has-

**Jeff:** Of the, he wrote *The Hours* and a number of other books.

**Charlene:** Yeah, yeah. He, he's, he had done some stuff with us for the, it was the Tennessee, Provincetown, Tennessee Williams Theater Festival. So, I've got to meet him and yeah, he's great. But, and then, so those were, you know, New Orleans with like this ghostly city and P-town, which was sea and Nebraska and Omaha which is this beautiful place of, of quiet and introspection and inspiration. And I think one of my favorite sounds is I hear the train whistles out there.

**Jeff:** Oh, yeah.

**Charlene:** And they just, I actually put, I put that noise in one of the plays that I wrote.

**Jeff:** Oh, really? I love that.

**Charlene:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Jeff:** Speaking of sound, would you share a little bit about your falling in love with KVNO from afar?

**Charlene:** I did. So it, I, I always knew of KVNO, like since I started coming here back in 2010, but I didn't connect greatly to it until the pandemic hit. And KVNO became the music that I write to and it started in 2020 and it became the music that relaxes me. It's my travel music. So, I will try to make sure I can play that wherever I'm traveling. I have this great memory of this... of 2024 driving home from Tennessee. I usually go there once a year or so. And it was during the spring fun drive. Having that on and listening and enjoying, enjoying the drive and being a supporter. It's... it is when I write, I, I tend not to want to hear music with words. **Charlene:** I want to hear music that sort of can seep into me and inspire what I write. And that's what KVNO does.

**Jeff:** And this music is so great for the creative process. So thanks a lot, Charlene.

**Charlene:** Thanks.

**Jeff:** That's another Jeff Around Town.