

- Bryan Smith: Bryan Smith here and welcome to the DreamPath Podcast, where I try to get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now let's jump in.
- Bryan Smith: Jere Shea is on the show today. Jere is a classically trained actor who grew up in Boston and attended Boston College. He then went to the prestigious Tisch School in New York, and not long after that, got a starring role on Broadway as Giorgio in Stephen Sondheim's Passion. By the way, if you're interested in seeing that exact Broadway production of the musical Passion, it's available in its entirety on YouTube.
- Bryan Smith: Jere was nominated for a Tony in that musical and then went on to star in the crime thriller Southey with Donnie Wahlberg, Lawrence Tierney, Rose McGowan and Will Arnette. Then Jere took an unusual turn for a successful actor. I won't spoil what the turn was here in the intro, but I think you'll really enjoy hearing Jere talk about the choices he made after achieving so much success in theater and film.
- Bryan Smith: Jere's more recent work can be seen on the Showtime series, City on a Hill, in which he plays a police detective in Boston in the early '90s. Produced by Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. Jere's co-stars in the series include Kevin Bacon, Sarah Sharhey, Aldis Hodge, Jonathan Tucker and Mark O'Brien among many other super talented actors. If you haven't seen City on a Hill yet, check it out on Showtime. It's a crime drama set in the early '90s and I don't think this era is portrayed a lot in TV and film. The acting is superb and the characters are colorful and unique. It makes for great television.
- Bryan Smith: After checking out City on a Hill, be on the lookout for Jere's next movie, Jungleland with Charlie Hunnam, which should be making the film festival circuit soon, and hit theaters after that. I had a great time getting to know Jere and hearing his story, and I hope you will as well. So please enjoy this wide-ranging discussion with Jere Shea.
- Bryan Smith: Jere Shea, welcome to DreamPath.
- Jere Shea: Thank you Bryan. It's a pleasure to be here.
- Bryan Smith: Yes. So, I have looked at your work over the last several months, and we connected a few months ago and I've been really digging in to your work, which started apparently back in the early '90s with Passion on Broadway. I don't know if you know this, but Passion is available to view start to finish, with you and the cast on YouTube.
- Jere Shea: My kids shared that with me a few years ago and I said, "Hey guys, I think you're old enough to watch this one." They said, "Oh, we watched it years ago"

- Bryan Smith: Yeah. It is kind of risqué, isn't it?
- Jere Shea: It is the first 10 minutes or so-
- Bryan Smith: Yeah. The first scene is pretty intense.
- Jere Shea: It raised some eyebrows for sure, especially in those days.
- Bryan Smith: Yeah. So, how did you find yourself on a Broadway stage? I looked at your background, you started at Boston College and went to Tisch after that. Tell us how you found your way to Broadway.
- Jere Shea: I've got to say, huge blessings and a lot of luck and some great people around me. I was fortunate enough to go to a great school, undergraduate to learn about theater. I'd always known my whole life that I wanted to be a storyteller in some form or version. And acting seemed to me the most accessible thing, then I understood the best.
- Jere Shea: So I went to BC, Boston College, and knew that I wanted further training. Signed on and was lucky enough to get into NYU at Tisch School. It's sort of one thing leads to another, like any career, I had a great opportunity to be part of the ensemble for a show in a play in Shakespeare in the Park in the Delacourt theater in New York. And it was, As You Like It. I was playing a singing lord. So, basically a spear carrier but they handed me a guitar at one point and asked me to sing a song too.
- Jere Shea: So, just little notices from that performance, I was asked to join the ensemble for a Broadway show called, Guys and Dolls. It had opened about four months before that and one of the understudies for Peter Gallagher, who was playing Sky Masterson. The original understudy left and I came onboard. So, I played the drunk in the show, for about a year, and I went on as Sky Masterson about four times, [inaudible 00:04:21] would go off and loop a film.
- Jere Shea: After about a year I decided to spread my wings and I auditioned for a show called Damn Yankees, that was out at the old Globe. That was in the pre Broadway tryout and I wound up in the meantime being asked to audition for Passion by Stephen Sondheim. It was just one of those things where, it is the right age, the right type I guess, and I could sing. We all just clicked and agreed it would be a good idea.
- Jere Shea: So, I just felt incredibly fortunate to have that opportunity so quickly out of school. I was out of school I think a total of a year and a half, two years by the time that show rolled around for me. I still scratch my head about how that happened. It's very fortunate.
- Bryan Smith: So, when you were in high school, did you know that you could sing?

Jere Shea: I did know. Although I have to say in high school I sort of was in denial about it. I grew up in a pretty blue collar neighborhood. I like to say, a no collar neighborhood. Working class people who had their nose to the grindstone, there wasn't a lot of money around. The arts were a luxury. Not that people didn't appreciate music and beauty, God knows we did in an Irish neighborhood like mine, but it was something that it wasn't useful to me on a social level with my friends. It took more [inaudible 00:05:41] than anything. [crosstalk 00:05:42]-

Bryan Smith: It's actually harmful to you.

Jere Shea: It actually hurt my reputation here and there. I'd sing at weddings and funerals, that sort of things, my mom would always make me do that which I'm grateful for now.

Bryan Smith: Yeah.

Jere Shea: Yeah. I knew I could sing from a young age and I played the guitar. So, music has always been a part of my life. But I never really aspired to be on a Broadway stage singing show tunes growing up. I had a wonderful teacher, Deborah Lapadis, who really turned me on to it at Tisch, at NYU, and really showed me how it needs to be done to be really great. And I just felt it's just such a high form of acting that it's right up there for me with classical theater. It was with Shakespeare and Jacobi and great dramas.

Bryan Smith: Yeah. And talk about challenging material, you going to Shakespeare, As you like it, all the way to Stephen Sondheim on Broadway. This is not for the faint of heart as an actor and a singer. These are really complex tunes that are... they're not pop tunes.

Jere Shea: Right.

Bryan Smith: These are tough songs to learn and to perform. And so you go through Boston College, did you get the classical voice training that you would expect a Broadway star to receive? Or did you go about it a different way?

Jere Shea: At Boston College was a liberal arts school and I was a theater major. So theater arts degree. It wasn't a fine arts program. Anyone would reconsider a professional training program. It was a really wonderful place to learn about theater and storytelling, and gain experience and some confidence.

Jere Shea: I knew that I needed those technical skills that I would pick up at a place like NYU. So I had applied to some of the top schools and NYU, Yale, Juilliard. I got into NYU, and that was the place I really wanted to go and I just felt so lucky to be there because I knew that I wanted to work on classical theater. It was really important to me to have a background and things that... There [inaudible 00:07:48] people called the method Stanislavski and others like Meisner.

Jere Shea: There's a real sort of mix of disciplines there and techniques that our teachers fuse together to make a training program. So I learned many styles of acting and then the approach to acting itself. But the technical pieces of its speech, dialect, singing voice and all of those technical requirements that are so important when you're doing theater and eight shows a week, they come into play at a school like that in a conservatory setting. So it wasn't until grad school that I really started to become steeped in those skills.

Bryan Smith: And at Tisch, who did you come up with? Who were you surrounded by in terms of acting talent and staged talent?

Jere Shea: We had [inaudible 00:08:34] I look two years before and two years after to some of my favorite actors but there are... In my class we had 17 of us, Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine, who was on The Chi, now on Showtime. He is just a wonderful actor, who actually spent some of his childhood... He's Ugandan and American. And he spent some of his childhood in Brooklyn, which is about 20 minutes from where I grew up in Hyde Park in Boston. Neil Huff is on Broadway right now with Jeff Daniels in, To Kill a Mockingbird.

Jere Shea: There are people of a couple of years before me, Marcia Gay Harden was two or three years before me. Garrett Dillahunt, who was a consummate character actor that I always admired. He's someone who in fact just played three roles, three different roles in Deadwood. In the movie that just came out this year too. He's someone who just as a chameleon.

Jere Shea: So many other people, Debra Messing. Billy Crudup was a year or two behind me there. Michael Gaston. These are people whether you know their names or not, you've seen their faces about a million times on television and in movies. People that... if you're in the business and you know your actors, I consider them real actors, actors. Another guy is David Zabel. David Zabel was a really fine actor who was in my class and went on. He was also a very talented writer who wound up being showrunner for ER for many, many years and rights films and television shows to this day.

Bryan Smith: Garrett is a pretty special character actor and-

Jere Shea: He sure is.

Bryan Smith: ... he is actually from my hometown of... Well he's from Sila. I live in Sila.

Jere Shea: Oh, great.

Bryan Smith: Yeah. So he's a local legend around here.

Jere Shea: He should. He's a legend everywhere. And he and Michelle Hurd, his wife, they're really wonderful actors and wonderful people.

Bryan Smith: So when you're surrounded by all this wonderful talent at Tisch, at the time, are you seeing the trajectory of these folks and can you really see how great they are? Or are you just too deep in it to really know what's going to happen and how special these people are.

Jere Shea: I think both things. If people who came out a year or two before me started to hit with things, Pete Krause, Camryn Manheim, who after a few years of hammering away, pounding the pavement, [inaudible 00:10:58] in her career really took off. Another person who I should say I admire greatly.

Jere Shea: So you'd see things start to happen for people. And you saw people over the years, Michael McKean was in a class in a few decades before me. You'd see these things happen to people who came through the program. So everyone's dreaming, "Gee, I hope that happens for me." But ultimately you have to be yourself and have your own career and take your lumps like everybody else does. But in a day to day, everyone's sort of sweating and straining and sometimes being so frustrated, we punch holes in walls and break chairs. There's a lot of emotion and [inaudible 00:11:35] about the process for a lot of us.

Jere Shea: So it can be a real struggle on a slog and it seems like sometimes you're not going to make it through that third year, but ultimately you'll look at the folks who've gotten out before you and done well. But you also have just something inside you that says, "I can do this too. I can do this and it may or may not happen for me, but I'm going to stay in the fight and trust that I do have somebody skills already in place.

Bryan Smith: Yeah.

Jere Shea: It's a leap of faith.

Bryan Smith: I mean, I guess there's got to be something inside of you that knows that just because you've got into the program, which is so storied and historic that they saw something in you that was pretty special as well.

Jere Shea: Right. I remember asking Ron Van Lieu, who was the head of the program with Zelda Fitchandler. And he was our guru. He was the guy everyone wanted to please in our scene study classes. I remember saying to him after our first year, "Why did you allow me in?" I was really struggling with, do I want to come back or? I did have some opportunities to get an agent close to halfway through and I knew that I was not nearly ready. That's the one thing you learn is what you don't know. You learn very quickly that you're not ready to go out there in the world and do what you really aspire to do ultimately. But you could go out and possibly make a living, but you hope for more. So I always wondered to this day I'm like, "Geez, how did I get in based on that audition?" I remember how it was and trust me, I was not good.

- Bryan Smith: So, have you ever had what I've referred to, and I think others do as well, as imposter syndrome?
- Jere Shea: Yeah, I think that would apply. I've done a lot of things for a living too and frankly that's something that at any point along the learning curve early on in those first few months or even years, you can feel that from time to time. I think that's human nature, right? I mean there are people who I think never have it and those are the people I'm concerned about.
- Bryan Smith: Great. Well it was a Bruce Springsteen who's 70th birthday was yesterday.
- Jere Shea: Yeah, I heard that.
- Bryan Smith: I think he was quoted as saying, "You should think that you're the baddest ass in town and also that you suck. It keeps you honest."
- Jere Shea: I think that's a really good approach. [inaudible 00:13:54] helpful. You need them both. You really do.
- Bryan Smith: Right. So let's fast forward from Tisch to the Broadway stage, and you're on stage with all of these wonderful actors and you are featured pretty much in every scene. I watched it on YouTube and I was struck by how much time you were up there singing and insane lines and the spotlight is on you. Is that exhausting?
- Jere Shea: I will say this before I answer that. I mean, my father was a school teacher, my brothers were firefighters. I have a sister who was a teacher. My mom raised five kids. A brother who worked with disabled people. They work really hard. They work really hard. That's exhausting work. So I feel really lucky and like I'm a slacker and black sheep of the family for sure. That's two hours on stage, I'm running around and then when I'm not on stage I'm running behind the scrim or under the deck to get back on the other side and make another entrance.
- Jere Shea: Yeah, it can be pretty exhausting. But in the end, when you have 1500 people, 2000 people clapping for you at the end of the night, it's a wash. It's pretty good. Actually I come out way ahead when... There's nothing like it.
- Jere Shea: And to be working with people who are working just as hard as you. For some reason, it's all relative that everybody's pulling in the same direction. I feel like I'm fed every night and energized by the end of it. But yeah, you sweat. It is a lot of work and you have to get your rest and eat right and stay in shape and to do it.
- Bryan Smith: Was it five days a week? Six days a week? How many shows were you doing per week?

- Jere Shea: We get one day off. It'd be one day a week. And usually in the theater it's on Mondays. They say theaters are dark on Mondays and most of them are. So we had eight shows a week over a six day period.
- Bryan Smith: Eight shows a week and for six days a week. I mean, I just... Everything has to go right in a Broadway production or any type of production. But on Broadway the stakes are so high. Is there just a constant level of stress about something going wrong? Somebody getting sick, their voice goes out or I mean any... family emergencies, understudy problems. What are the challenges that you remember from that experience?
- Jere Shea: I think it's one of those things where there are people whose job it is to plan for contingencies, to have backups and backups for the backups. If a set piece doesn't move in and out, they're going to be people in clothing to sneak out on stage when the lighting cue changes and move that set piece off stage. So things do happen all the time in the theater. Marin Mazzie and I, she just passed away just over a year ago. I played opposite Marin who was a brilliant person, star, human being.
- Bryan Smith: She was Clara, right?
- Jere Shea: She was Clara, yeah. And we had this scene at the beginning, the scene you alluded to earlier that we had this nude scene and we were getting into the bed on the set before the curtain rises and suddenly the curtain rises in the houselights are still up and everyone just looks up at us. I just waved to the edge of the crowd and then we just turned and smiled to the crowd and said, "See you in a few minutes." And the curtain eventually came back down. We started the show over again. Those things happen all the time in theater.
- Jere Shea: There are times in a run when you do something close to a year or even more sometimes where you welcome those things because it resets the tone and it puts everybody on edge in a really wonderful way. It reminds you that every night needs to happen for the first time. Anything can happen. A prop can break, someone can go up on a line and there are times words would come out of my mouth that were not written by Stephen Sondheim. He'd be backstage smiling at me. After the performance I say, "I was just running myself a little Sondheim musical for you tonight." Things happen. You have these little brain tweaks that happen over the course of a show that you just embrace and trust that something good is on the other side of that if you stay relaxed.
- Bryan Smith: Did you ever have a chance to meet Stephen Sondheim?
- Jere Shea: To meet him?
- Bryan Smith: Yeah.

- Jere Shea: Oh yeah. He was the person... He and James Lapine and Wendy Ettinger and Scott Rutan, they were all present and were the people who made the decision ultimately Steve and James and the producers, Jerry Schoenfeld, the [inaudible 00:18:22] organization were all present and speaking with me and putting me through the paces during the audition process.
- Jere Shea: So yeah. I got to meet Steve and work with him. He was there very frequently, especially at the beginning. He was there throughout most... I'm pretty sure all of our preview performances and he would come back in at least, sometimes weekly or monthly to check in on the run. And every once in a while he'd even tweak the show after we ran. He's a perfectionist and it's always about the details with him. So he was around quite a bit. I know I have recordings of him singing, teaching us the music. So it was cool. Yeah, we definitely felt that we had access to him and he always had access to us.
- Bryan Smith: One of the things that I've always enjoyed about theater is the knowledge, even if it's not conscious. But there's this subconscious understanding that what you're seeing is never going to happen again in this exact same way.
- Jere Shea: Don't you love it?
- Bryan Smith: Oh man, it's so exciting. Plus, there's all these contingencies and these things that can happen that kind of keep you on the edge of your seat sometimes. If someone flubs a line or something and... It really is exciting. Even when people aren't flubbing lines, you're seeing something that is just extremely unique and now.
- Jere Shea: And it has to be. It has to be life for the audience. [inaudible 00:19:44] they pay a lot of money to sit there and to be moved or entertained and it has to be fresh every night so that it can just happen for them. When you try to repeat a performance, it's stale for everybody. Nobody has any fun.
- Bryan Smith: Wait. Where do you think Broadway and theater has gone? Is it in the same place that it was back in the early '90s when you were on stage or are we in a different place now because of how spread out and diluted our attention span is with all of the content that's available streaming. It just seems like a more challenging space to be in from the outside looking in. But what are your thoughts on that?
- Jere Shea: That's a great question. It's one I haven't thought too much about, but just off the top of my head, I can tell you that the shows and the plays that I've seen now really respond to that and understand those audiences. It's really hard to get a production on Broadway anyway. And by the time it does, it's been put through those paces and it's really been measured by that contemporary yardstick. Are people going to be able to latch on and feed on this production for two hours, two and a half hours and sometimes three hours a night.

Jere Shea: They're built in a way that... I think by artists who are very connected and aware of what's going on in the world. And you'll see technology being used. Sometimes that's fused into the production itself and people are tweeting along with the show and that is harnessed in some way. But yeah, I mean I think we do have to think about, "Gee, can someone physically sitting in a chair for three hours in a night now?" I think that is a question that has to be answered. But if you find... if someone's shifting around the chair, it maybe something that you can fix. It maybe something about the show that maybe we're losing the attention. So there's so many factors that have always been in there.

Jere Shea: It's easy to lose an audience, especially when you start trying to fake your way through a show or you're whitewashing over a part of the piece, the written material that still needs to be reworked, that sort of thing.

Jere Shea: So I think some of the old rules still apply. You have to entertain, you have to really grab hold of your audience and don't let go of them. But that's it. People are not used to sitting there and it's a really good question. Though I think if the quality is high, like something like Hamilton, like something like To Kill a Mockingbird and the performance is as strong people are still the same. They're going to be moved. It's how long you sit with your loved ones at dinner, some nights four or five hours, and it's, "Oh my God, it's midnight. We just sat down here." If you're moved and you're connected and invested in an emotional level and in an intellectual level, the night flies by. So I like to think that we're doing fine with that. And that's a question that's going to be answered over time.

Bryan Smith: Yeah. Let's go back in time a little bit. Back to your childhood and your influences. It sounds like your dad was a teacher?

Jere Shea: He was a teacher. Yeah, my history teacher in [inaudible 00:22:48] schools.

Bryan Smith: Anybody in your family or mentors that you had growing up who were in the arts that made it seem possible for you to do what you do now?

Jere Shea: No. Like I say, I grew up in a neighborhood where it was not really something that was front of mind for most people. My early influences were people in movies. Robert De Niro, Meryl Streep, John Savage people, they all happen to be in one of my favorite films, The Deer Hunter. Things like that, that I would see as a younger person in my early teens. When I was still in elementary school, I'd sneak it on these movies and I'd watch them. And those are the things that moved me. So when I thought about being a storyteller and an actor, I always thought about doing things on camera and how ultimately that's something I've also been very fortunate to be able to do.

Jere Shea: So, theater was not something that I was exposed to growing up. My sister was the first person to invite me into the theater. She was at a little [inaudible 00:23:49] girls school in the next town over. She would truck over into this place called Milton, to this Academy and they needed [inaudible 00:23:55] all girls, I

needed boys to be in the shows and in the plays and she said, "Hey, do you want to come over and do this?" I did it to meet girls. A lot of people do I guess. But that was my introduction to it. I had no idea what I was doing. I was terrible. I was a pain in the ass to the director and everybody around me. I was just an immature, little punk kid who was running around just wanting to have fun.

Jere Shea: But I quickly learned that there's a real work ethic to [inaudible 00:24:23] and that you have to take it seriously and that there are skills that you have to develop over time. That no one is great when they start out and that you can really work your way toward being great over time. So that was something I have to thank my sister for inviting me in. My sister Sarah, who is a wonderful actor and director, who now teaches and actually went onto teaching and now she's in real estate in Massachusetts. She was my biggest influence. I think the person who really triggered this in me and said, "You can do it."

Bryan Smith: So when you got into acting at Tisch and started to study the various methods Stanislavski and Meisner, did you find yourself kind of gravitating toward one type of school of thought on acting versus another or did you try to throw them all into your psyche and see what happens?

Jere Shea: I think one of the best things about NYU is that it is a real collage of ideas and I find that Stanislavski and Meisner and Hagen and Strasburg all these things that have the same roots in something that we find there's an emotional truth that we all try to tap into and understand. At any given point in any given role, along the way, I can just use a skill from one or the other.

Jere Shea: It's something that I think people now say, "Oh, he's a method actor," or "She's a method actor," And that definition has really gotten lost over the years. And there things that were traditionally called the method like Stanislavski that are different methods that people can name. But in the end, I think the great ones, the most useful ones that have been helpful to me have been things that I've pieced together from all of that work.

Jere Shea: There are nights where it's like, "Geez, I'm not really finding this moment anymore. What am I doing wrong?" And it comes back to something very technical, and maybe taking a breath at a certain point that if I'm singing or holding the breath until the next line, that can really do something in your body internally that does something emotionally [inaudible 00:26:32]. So there are technical approaches that I can just... I can call upon those over one of a show or in rehearsal process. So bottom line, it's a real mishmash for me and that's the fun of it to decide at any point along the way in a role, [inaudible 00:26:48], "What's going to work today for me?" And I try to be as flexible as possible with that.

Bryan Smith: Does that process of learning the nuances of all of these methods and these approaches to acting, does that process ever end or are you constantly taking classes and learning from others?

Jere Shea: It's a lifelong thing and I do a lot of teaching and for me right now that has been sort of the formal classes. The classes that I teach are classes for me because I'm an incubator with usually younger, people college age and sometimes high school age or even younger at times, aspiring actors. I learn from working with them. And I'm supposed to be the teacher, but just seeing them work teaches me so much. My formal training has continued right along the way and anybody who stops learning or feels like they're done and they know how to do this thing, I think they're cutting themselves short, they're selling themselves short and they're missing out on a lifetime of enjoyment. I'm never going to consider myself a great actor because great to me... I know there are some wonderful, great actors out there and I'm still working toward it. So yeah, I hope I haven't learned everything that I'm going to learn. I know I haven't learned everything that I need to learn.

Bryan Smith: As you may have noticed, there are great resources and advice mentioned in all our episodes, and for many of them, we actually collect all of these resources for you in one easy place, our newsletter. You can go to dreampathpod.com/newsletter to join. It's not fancy, just an email about each week's episode, featured artists and resources to help you on your journey. Thanks. And now back to the interview.

Bryan Smith: Now I'm jumping around a little bit here, but I want to ask you about your experience with, As You Like It, Shakespeare. I'm curious about the language, the Shakespearian language and how easy or difficult it was for you to absorb that material. Because I've read Shakespeare before, I've done it in school and I tell you it is probably the most... I mean, I would probably have an easier time understanding calculus than I would Shakespeare. Just because there's the density and the complexity of the prose, it's just almost insurmountable to me. So how did you approach it and what was your learning curve like?

Jere Shea: It's been steep the whole time. Right to school, it can be very steep and you want it to be, right? I had a really great guide, Nora Dunphy who was one of a kind actor, who was our Shakespeare-text coach in our... I think it was our second year at NYU. She and Deborah Hecht who was a speech teacher, really informed me about rhythm and meter and breaking it down into those beats, is this that I am [inaudible 00:29:51] and five feet per line, and there's this [inaudible 00:29:54] that happens in every line. You could actually do the whole canon of Shakespeare in this rhythm. And then when that rhythm is intentionally by Shakespeare hundreds of years ago, broken like [inaudible 00:30:05], he throws something in that you must say in a different rhythm.

Jere Shea: There's something emotional that is happening there. It's like Shakespeare's directing you from the grave. So when you understand from a technical standpoint what's happening with the rhythm in the meter and you give over to that and you don't even understand what you're saying. You will find the emotionality of it. And eventually when you do understand the syntax and the glossary of terms that he has chosen the use in his day, that the vocabulary,

when that comes to you, as you keep studying and looking words up and asking your coach and teachers and colleagues and director about it.

Jere Shea: Those things do eventually come together. And there's this emotional component that is almost dictated by... I would say absolutely dictated by the rhythm and by that writing. There are times when you just can't take a breath until the end of this thought that's happening. Regardless of what is on the page, and that forces something in your body and it's like, "Oh, I'm going to be struggling to finish the end of this line." So what's happening with this character that he is struggling so much here? It's almost like you just give over to William Shakespeare like its music and you sing it in a sense.

Jere Shea: I find the same thing with Stephen Sondheim that his approach to writing it's so complicated. I think if you approach it just by the ideas and the approach as just purely technically, and you're, you're, you're approaching the meter and the rhyme and you're hitting your marks just technically, you will find where he's getting at in this piece. And then you have to back up and just say, "Okay, now I want to make a choice on top of this and make it my own and that's going to be informed by my life and my emotional life and my sensibilities." Those are things that happen as new layers come to the performance.

Bryan Smith: So it sounds like you just start by saying the words even if you don't understand the words.

Jere Shea: Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes it's the case. Over time there are a lot of repeat words and phrases. You get to know when you're reading a lot of Shakespeare for instance, you just get to know the language. It becomes more familiar, it becomes easier with each play that you do. And the syntax of things, the order of words and the length of ideas is another big thing. You realize, "He's not done with this thought yet." The thought is longer than the diversity you're in. Once you recognize that, it's easier to delve in and break it down into acting beats that feel much more natural and contemporary to you.

Jere Shea: And yet you don't want to reduce it to be like, "Hey..." You're trying to make it like it's David Mamet. It's never going to be that, it's got to be something else. But if you know what you're saying and you understand that and that with all the clues from rhythm and everything else and the context clues from the rest of the story. Once you understand it and you give over to the emotional components of it, I think the audience can really tap into it and they will understand that. I've seen Russian classical theater being done. I've seen Chekhov being done in Moscow and I don't speak a word of Russian. And I felt I knew exactly what was going on. Have an emotional level with that. It can be the same thing.

Bryan Smith: How did you find your way to Russia?

Jere Shea: We were really lucky. The year that ... It was actually beginning of the third year, I believe, it was at NYU. We did an exchange program with the Moscow art theater. So they had a group of Moldavian students coming over to spend a month and a half at NYU, and at the same time we went to Moscow to Stanislavski's Moscow art theater. It was during a very interesting time when it was just before the fall of the Soviet union. And we didn't even know when we were there that my wife... I was just married just a few weeks before I went over there.

Jere Shea: And in '91 we had no idea about the... There was a big problem with the gas. A fuel shortage for jet fuel. People weren't even sure we were going to get back into our own country at the end of our trip. There was a coup attempt, all these things were happening and we're running around in the Moscow art theater and doing amazing training with Russians and having a translator try to help us out with what we were supposed to be doing. It was incredible.

Bryan Smith: You also were in Ireland for a time, right?

Jere Shea: Yes. That was during my undergrad days in 1987. I was allowed to travel with a group of Boston College students to the Abby Theater in Dublin. Our program was an Irish literature program with an acting performance component to it. The focus was on OKC and staying in Yates. So we got to do these performances in the peacock stage, which was this little theater in the basement of the Abby Theater, working with some incredible directors and it was such a blast to be in the Homeland as we say, the old squad.

Bryan Smith: Can you tell us how you made your way into television and film and why you think you chose that path after all the live theater?

Jere Shea: Well its something I don't consider myself just a stage actor or just a film television actor. I want to be able to do it all. I always have... I've always done a mix of that. I did... The things years ago that I was most known for were tended to be on stage. Just because I've got bigger parts on stage like in passion for one. So when you do a Song time musical, you tend to be associated with the musical theater, which again I was surprised and felt really lucky to be able to do that. But that's it. I've always had a yearning to do film and television anyway because I knew that people back home would see that there.

Jere Shea: I have friends and family that weren't able to come to New York to see theater or go out to San Francisco to see me in a show or a play. So I knew that the access was there with movies and TV. So it's something I've always tried to do more and more of as I went along. So, the resurgence of my career. I left for many years and came back, and it happened to be this incredible project, City on a Hill that came my way. And be just valuing how television works. I guess that'll be something I'm known for as well.

Bryan Smith: Yes. So, how did the City on Hill project come to you?

Jere Shea: Am I not the luckiest guy? This is one where I was in Boston at my desk. I'd been fundraising for about 12 years for nonprofits and I was in [inaudible 00:36:51] had been in this job for about a year. And acting was the furthest thing from my mind at the time. But an old friend guy grew up with, Jimmy Cummings who was a really wonderful actor, writer and producer. He had a good friend, Chuck McClain, who wrote this pilot, created city on a Hill. And he and Chuck apparently had been speaking about me for this role. Hank Cigna, the state police detective for a while. They asked me to read this thing.

Jere Shea: I said, "I'm retired." And I used to say jokingly retired from the business, because I left 20 years before that. And I've got a job. I can't leave the job. And they said, "Keep your job. This will be a part-time gig for you." Every once in a while I'd be like a pick up basketball game, once in a while we'll call you and to do this thing. So, okay part-time job. Okay. I'll read it. And, I read it that night and I have to say and I've said many times, it's easily one of the best things I've ever read. And I'm saying play movie script teleplay whatever. It's just the dialogue, the story, the way it moves though the honesty and the authenticity was all there. And the role itself was just one that just, I felt would fit like a glove. I put it away because I said no, and I don't know if anybody's actually really going to call me on this.

Jere Shea: It was a month later, a casting director finally called and said, "Hey, can you come in?" And it was a Friday afternoon, "Can you come in on Monday morning?" And read for this thing. And, I can't do it Monday morning [inaudible 00:38:19] meetings and cannot do it late in the day? I went on Monday night and went on tape for them. And I realized over the weekend I went to sit down and learn the lines for this things. And they were in my head from the first read though the lines, it was pretty extensive dialog and four scenes. For some reason this role was just in my head where I read it once the dialogue was so sticky and so fun that it just stayed in my noggin. And I just really sort of was able to find it.

Jere Shea: I guess they liked what they saw because they made it. They cast me in it and they said "Jim, do you have an agent?" And I say, "Well I can, I know I can call someone that I used to work with." And my agents... My old agent agreed to sort of represent me on it because they, they weren't making a series regular, which was a surprise to everybody.

Bryan Smith: Oh, so it didn't start as a series regular?

Jere Shea: No, it was going to be recurring role. Every once in a while like I said, it was going to be part-time gig, it was going to shoot in Boston. I was going to keep my day job and working around my work schedule like they said. And in suddenly it was not that as a series regular and it was assigned for several years. As is typical five, six seasons. For most people going into these projects, you never know if they going to get picked up. It doesn't mean you get the work. It means that they have the option to use you or not use you if you... As long as the work is continuous for that length of time.

Jere Shea: So yes, it was a big step. And, I realized that I... My kids were older and I had left the business to be able to raise my kids and be a husband and my kids are older and my wife was very supportive of the idea. And how could I turn this opportunity down? Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Kevin Bacon, Elvis Hodge incredible group of people. Tom Fontana wound up being the show runner was an amazing guy. I put him up there. He would probably hate me for this, but I'll say he for me, he's up there with Stephen Sondheim in the television is such an incredible writer and storyteller.

Bryan Smith: He's a legend. Yeah.

Jere Shea: Absolutely. And Chuck McClain is a guy who that people didn't really know before this. And he will be thought of the same way when you see the work that he does and is capable of doing.

Bryan Smith: So you were basically retired from acting, it sounds like at the time that you had this role.

Jere Shea: Yes, I... Back in 98 I had come off, I think it was my second extensive trip away from home. When you... I was doing theater. I was doing a theater piece out in San Francisco. And I came home after three and a half, four months and my kids were three years old and they were born right at the very beginning of the run of passion. Just after the Tony awards. And I... They were just these toddlers. My wife will let the kids stay up the twins and they were in the pajamas at 10 o'clock at night. The car dropped me off and I put my luggage down, my guitar down, and they were just giving him a hug and they said, "Daddy, you're going to stay over?" And they thought it was no, I no longer lived.

Bryan Smith: Oh my goodness.

Jere Shea: And I realized of course, how could they not see it that way? And I said, "No, this is, I live with you and I'm not going to leave you again." And I promised them, I promised myself and my wife that I would work it around being home. And if I couldn't, I wouldn't do it at all. And then very quickly, I realized there's just so much out of town that if I want to give them everything that they need financially, that I would need to make changes. If I could have made my living in the business and stay in one city, I would have done that. But the more success you have, the less you see your family. I think that's just the way it goes in the business. At least, that was the way it was from me. And I was no longer willing to allow them to sacrifice that. They deserve to have a father and my wife deserves to have a husband who was home and a full partner in this life.

Bryan Smith: Yeah. How difficult of a decision was that after being nominated for a Tony? And also being a film actor? I think you had just acted in Southie by that point, which one won an award at Siff in Seattle and yeah-

- Jere Shea: It was a difficult one, but I... It was it seemed like a no brainer to me. That said, In a way, I... In all candor, it's like cutting off a limb sometimes, but it has to happen. It can still... As hard as it was to let this go, it was an easy decision for me when I knew what the downside of it was if I have to choose between making a living, doing something that I love and being home with my wife and children, to me it was just a simple one. And I have never regretted that. Deep down I knew that if I ever did go back and sort of my quiet little fantasy of doing that someday, I knew it'd be around the age I am now. And in my fifties, and I knew it'd be a role that speaks to me and that I could really do something with like the one I was giving hang signal sitting on a Hill. So, that's how fortunate I feel that it just kind of happened the way I fantasized in the right time.
- Bryan Smith: What a way to come back in a series like this? I mean talk about larger than life character, Jackie Rohrer played by Kevin Bacon. And just surrounded by incredible actors. I mean everybody in that show, the writing in the city itself was a character. I thought.
- Jere Shea: It is and I'd be interested to know it's filmed in New York. That was the other big surprise. Eventually when everyone was on board, they realized we really need to do this in New York. The pilot was filmed in Boston and already everyone in the show really understood their role and how being a Bostonian informed their lives and their dialect and everything else. What a cast?
- Jere Shea: Everyone just brought a real authenticity regardless of they were even from the United States or not. We had at least two people that were not... Joe Hennessy and Mark O'Brien are Canadian. But they really tapped into it and ultimately we did have the show. The producer decided that they really needed to find places that looked like Boston in 1992. And it was easier to find those places and places like Staten Island and the studios in Brooklyn and also in Yonkers and places around Manhattan. Boston has changed so much as really hard to find consistent locations. Just still look the same.
- Bryan Smith: Yeah. As you watched the show, or you were in the show and seeing it develop, did it resonate with you because you basically grew up in that same era in the Boston area?
- Jere Shea: Yeah. I've told Chuck this multiple times. It was as if someone took... and I'm not, I don't mean to apply that I was involved with any of the storyline was from my life. And certainly is not-
- Bryan Smith: I hope not sure.
- Jere Shea: ... it's from other peoples. That said, it was like my life was put into a blender and mulched up and just blown up into the air and came down. And this thing was built by the just in terms of the colors, the language, the way people relate to one another. The F bombs that you throw at each other, you F you and this

and that. The way people talk even when they love each other is so different from other neighborhoods in this country.

Jere Shea: And that's because Chuck McLean is a Bostonian. He grew up in Quinsy, which is, I guess you call it a suburb of Boston. It's almost another neighborhood in Boston. And the life that he led a life that his family led really influenced him. Again, I'm not implying that he... There is criminals in his background either, but he understood the language and the tone and he understood Boston. He's a real historian himself. So we both came from that same neighborhood. And I think because of that, I was fortunate that the writers placed a lot of trust in me to kind of bring an authentic character to the screen.

Bryan Smith: Yes. It's interesting. It's really interesting to hear the dialect of that part of the country. I've never even been to Boston, but [crosstalk 00:46:24] Oh man, I'd love to. But to hear somebody say in the Northwest, Pacific Northwest where I'm from, if someone says, "Go fuck yourself." It pretty much means one thing, go fuck yourself. But in Boston, go fuck yourself, it can actually be a term of endearment.

Jere Shea: It absolutely is. It often, and often it isn't. And maybe more often isn't, but when you know it's all context. And people are rough with each other because they know they can be and then they... I know that you know. It's a non spoken thing. We are buddies is what we're going to do it.

Bryan Smith: Right. Did you find when you were in the same room with Kevin Bacon that- Because his character was so just out there and over the top that you had to make sure that you didn't get run over basically in terms of the acting or how do you balance that and manage that type of energy in a room with someone like Kevin Bacon?

Jere Shea: I think people have described it as larger than life. I would say, I wouldn't describe it as is Kevin's performance or that character. I think I know what you're saying, but his work in the show is over the top at all. But because I know people in my life, in my... Even with my own family and friends, people I grew up with. Fathers of my friends, everything else that we're this way, we're that colorful, we're that big, we're that audacious and crass. It's. It was, to me, it was very natural that I would have to deal with someone just like him. I never make it about... And I know that Kevin doesn't either like a competition or worry about, G, I'm going to get run over in this one. I just respond to whatever is there and I try to stay true to what my intentions are, what my character's feeling and doing. What's going on inside of me.

Jere Shea: And we just sort of let the sparks fly. And let the people behind the camera worry about G scaling [inaudible 00:48:26] back or pumping this thing up and telling a story. We just tell it from our vantage point. It was always a real collaboration. If someone gives me a real fast ball, I've got to get out of the way or catch it and you return it or hit it over the fence. So we all just sort of

responded to each other and I think it ultimately lifted the show in a really wonderful way. This cast is one of the best I've ever worked with.

Jere Shea: Kevin Dunn they have people like James Remar, Kevin Dunn, Cathy Moriarty, Sarah Shah, in this thing. And she's basically a regular on the show. She is a regular on the show and she's still listed as a recurring role, but she was in nine out of 10 episodes. Like I was.

Bryan Smith: She was great.

Jere Shea: She was [inaudible 00:49:14]. She's unbelievable. To have those people there. Kevin described as, she uses a real murderer's role, look at everybody in this cast. Look what they're doing with the thing. And that's a great way of saying it. Every person brought it, brought a-game to this production.

Bryan Smith: Yeah. One thing that I am still struck by to this day even though it's been a long time since the Soprano's and The Wire hit the scene. But those were obviously game changers on television. And then, and [inaudible 00:49:44] changed the whole landscape of TV and what it could do. But look what's happening in City on a Hill is another example of long form, season long character arcs that just pull you in and you start, just like with Tony soprano, you're sympathizing with someone you should not be. And all of a sudden, you're rooting for Jackie Roar. And you should be rooting for Hank and not Jackie, but...

Jere Shea: And it can, really root for everybody. Anyone's [inaudible 00:50:17]. You're looking at people like Jonathan Tucker, amazing actor as well. Mark O'Brian, these... You're not playing great guys, but you get to understand them in a way that not a lot of productions can do. You linger on them, you follow them home and understand why they make the decisions they do. And then you can judge it yourself. You can judge yourself Brian, if you should be or shouldn't be rooting for these guys. I like to think there's a character for everybody to identify with. And not everyone is an angel and no one's perfect. Hank isn't perfect. He makes his mistakes and everybody's flawed. And that's the fun of it. There's no sort of Hollywood treatment of these characters. They get really ugly. They say nasty, horrible things to each other about each other. They slander people, they attack people and they hate people for based on skin color and everything else. But it's all there and all its ugliness. And somehow there's a humanity in every one of these characters. And that's a credit to an incredible writing team.

Bryan Smith: Yeah

Jere Shea: From Chuck to Tom to Michelle McPhee, who was an amazing new journalist in Boston who writes bestselling books and crime books. She was brought in to write. There are just so many great people involved with the writing that we just sort of took that writing and rode it. We just rode it in.

Bryan Smith: So what are you... How old are your kids now, by the way?

Jere Shea: They're 25.

Bryan Smith: So you have a girl and a boy?

New Speaker: Twins?

Jere Shea: Yeah. I do. Yes, they're twins.

Bryan Smith: Okay. And so are they in the arts?

Jere Shea: They're not. They're both really... They are art lovers. They love music. They love story. They love film TV. They weren't exposed to a lot of acting. It wasn't a showbiz family by any stretch. I left the business at a time that they barely remembered seeing me in something when they were three. And we just brought them there just so that maybe remember me on stage, because I probably wouldn't go back.

Jere Shea: But so they didn't grow up around the business. And they're not Hollywood kids. So I think that's a pretty good thing for us. They grew up around family and... But they do both play music. My daughter writes music. My son actually does too once in a while, but my daughter writes and she sings, he plays guitar, she plays piano and guitar. So they love the arts, but they chose not to make it their thing. The thing that they can do for a living. They do other things and very self contented on. They don't seek the limelight. In fact, they shun the limelight. They don't like a lot of attention. I think most actors I think ironically don't like the limelight. Some do. And there's nothing wrong with that too, but I know so many shy actors. I always have to set the call people and saying, "No, we don't necessarily like public speaking." That kind of thing.

Bryan Smith: So was that as a parent were you kind of relieved in hindsight that they did not try to forge a path into theater or film?

Jere Shea: There've been times where I had been relieved. Yes. it is not an easy life. It is a grind and I speak with parents of aspiring actors all the time. And, every once in a while I still coach when I have time. It is a difficult life and you have to make your self happy in and around that so that you can actually pursue it and sustain a life in the theater or on film TV. But, so I have been relieved from time to time that they didn't choose that path. But that said I would have been proud and happy for them if they decided to really go forward. And I would have just said if either one of them would come up to me in high school or into college and said, "I want to do this." I would say, "Do it, but don't do it halfway. Just don't bother if you're not going to go all in for it. And really go for it, because there are too many great people who live and breathe it and need to do it."

Bryan Smith: Yeah. You're not going to set yourself apart if you're halfway in.\

Jere Shea: Right. Yes. The work is too hard and life is too hard to do... To attempt to make it a part-time job or an advocacy. It's gotta be a real vocation.

Bryan Smith: So, has City on a Hill and your role in that show opened up other opportunities for you that provide other acting roles and opportunities?

Jere Shea: I have discovered that television is a very powerful thing. The nice thing about as in one night more eyeballs will be on your work. You'd be more visible than you may have been in five years of doing theater. [inaudible 00:54:55] looks who am I caring in decades of doing theater. It's a big thing. It's international. The numbers are huge. I think it was three and a half million per episode. The average three and a half to 4 million viewers per episode. I could be way off on that. But there's a lot of people looking at your work.

Jere Shea: So yes, it just naturally is one of those things where over time I've seen that play out. I'm getting meetings that I wouldn't have expected 20 years ago. Getting the quality of the roles, that the size of the roles in film and television particularly have increased. Stage is something that people knew me from any way. But I do love this on camera stuff. I love the minutiae of it. I love being able to get it right and reshaping it, take to take all that stuff.

Jere Shea: So that's really exciting for me to have these opportunities to discuss projects and to take on little jobs that, that not only feed my family, but feed me as an artist. And I was able to most recently do a really cool episode of a show called Blue Bloods on CBS comes out on October 18th. At a lot of work with Donny Walberg. He and I did Selfie together 22 years ago. It's kind of nice, a little mini reunion with Donnie. He was a great guy, wonderful actor, and a great leader on set too. We had a ball doing this episode. So those are little things that just suddenly drop in your lap that make this whole thing really fun and exciting and I intend to do more as much as I can.

Bryan Smith: I see on your IMDB that you appeared with Charlie Hunnam on Jungle Land?

Jere Shea: Yes. It's a film that is... I believe they must've finished post-production by now. Max Winkler, Henry Winkler son is a really talented director and a lovely guy too. I was asked to do this. It's sort of a buddy film or two or three people go across country and this very intense storyline. And they meet a list of characters. There we also do these cameos in. So, it was a really fun little turn and it... I haven't seen it yet. It was really, it's very dark, very fun, funny and warm and moving really unique script that I'm dying to see. I think it's probably going to make the festival circuit this year.

Bryan Smith: Wow. Yes, that's interesting to hear that you acted in a film that you haven't seen. It's just odd to think about this.

Jere Shea: Yes. It's just not the timing of it. Depending on the budget, you can get things out very quickly. And this was when I actually, I had filmed before I started and I

was cast and was sort of waiting to start production on the City on a Hill. It was the fall before the winter we shot the city on a Hill. So it's one that just... Is in, films just to take a little bit longer to get out there and they wanted to put it out in the right time.

Bryan Smith: So jungle land did not come to you because of city on a Hill that happened beforehand then?

Jere Shea: Yes, it happened. Well, it happened before production. I was cast in sitting Hill. We had shot the pilot, come to think of it a year or over a year ago, a year and a half ago. And then we're waiting for it to... We got picked up for season one of City on a Hill. But before we started filming this, I fit this small role, very small role in a nice cameo in this film that fall before we started into the rest of the season.

Bryan Smith: As you look back on your career, starting with Shakespeare and going all the way through Broadway and TV and film and retirement, and now being brought out of retirement to act again. Do you think about anything that you would've done differently if you could go back in time?

Jere Shea: Yes, that's another great question. I think the big decisions I made, I know I did pretty well. That not said, I don't have regrets about things, the big decisions, number one, to go into the business. I know I needed to do that and I knew I needed to leave to be a family man. Those are things I would never do over. I wouldn't give up those years on stage, on camera 20, 25 years ago for anything. The support of my wife and my family. And now I have the support of my wife, my family, my kids as I returned to it. And so it's something that was sort of perfect for me.

Jere Shea: Along the way I think I would've worried less about career and just really allowed myself to enjoy the moments especially early on now I just, I love every day that I get to do this job. But then I worried about, "Gee, am I doing enough to move myself forward in my career? Is this the right role for me?" And I would turn down auditions or little jobs along the way that would sort of, I don't know.

Jere Shea: I think that I worried about the equality and in the end it's like, "You know what, I've seen really kind of shaky scripts turn into something really fun." I think I probably would have said yes more and no less. I think yes is a really powerful word. I had a friend who used to say to me, "Don't be afraid to say no. It's a very powerful word." And he's a very successful actor. Friend who had advised me in this way. And I took that to heart and I said no to a few things and not that they became big star making things, but I just probably would've had fun and learn from those. But I find now I'm at a point in my life where yes is a much more exciting thing. Take the risk, do something, worry about it later. If you're doing it for the right reason, Jimmy, you would be able to do a great job on that. You feel like you're going to be able to bring yourself to it, fully say yes and do it.

Bryan Smith: So if our listeners want to find you, where should they look on social media and in upcoming projects?

Jere Shea: Yes, @JereShea is my handle on Instagram and Twitter. And, whereas and Fam on Facebook is well easy to find. There I have a Facebook... They call a fan page, sort of a business page. So I'm on social media. JereShea.com is a website, although I need it... I need to have someone update that. It's been a while since I've had anybody work on that for me. But I'm very easy to find online if you know how to spell my first name... Actually my second, my last name to J-E-R-E-S-H-E-A is an interesting spelling. Jere Shea. So yes, I'm pretty easy to find out there.

Bryan Smith: And then the Jungle Land movie's going to be hitting festival circuits hopefully soon.

Jere Shea: Yes. That's when I'm seeing Max. I went into loop to do some ADR on that a few months ago and he had said that he expects it will be in the festival loop this year. So it may actually already be submitted. I'm sure he's... I would guess that he has submitted it by now. It's a really fun one. I would say check that out and hopefully people enjoy, I think people enjoy really wonderfully written episode of Blue Bloods coming up in October too.

Bryan Smith: Well, I'll definitely be on the lookout for that show.

Jere Shea: Oh, thanks Brian.

Bryan Smith: Jere Shea, thank you so much for your time and sharing your story.

Jere Shea: Thanks. It's been a real pleasure Brian. Thanks for hanging on. We got this done. I'm glad we did it.

Bryan Smith: Yes, it's been a lot of fun.

Bryan Smith: Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoyed today's episode of the dream path podcast. If so, I have a favorite ask. Can you go to your favorite podcast service and give me a rating and review. Your feedback is what keeps this podcast going. I appreciate your time and as always, go find your dream path.