



Digital Folklore

S2E1 Mark My Wizard (Research, Learning, & Inclusivity)

Mark Norman, Daisy Ahlstone

<https://digitalfolklore.fm>

[Dial-up modem and connections sounds]

Welcome... you've got *Digital Folklore*.

[Peaceful outdoor sounds... van engine rumbling...]

Perry Carpenter:

Hold on to your butts!!! HERE WE GO!!!

[sound of Perry, Mason, & Digby screaming as the plummet downward]

Yep, that is me. My name is Perry Carpenter. I'm a cybersecurity professional, a published author, and right now I'm in a heavily modified 1965 Chevrolet G10 van plummeting off the side of a mountain road with an audio engineer riding shotgun and a talking raccoon in the jump seat on Christmas Day. You're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation. It's a bit of a long story.

[Tape rewind sound]

It's late 2021. I teamed up with Mason Amadeus, a former audio engineer turned podcaster with an knack for sound design and we started this show, Digital Folklore. We didn't know quite what we were getting ourselves into. We bought this van, the Volkswagen all kitted out for recording on the go, and we did our best making our way through the first season.

At the time, we would often remark about how broad the scope of folklore is and how it encompasses much more than we had expected. Little did we know that we had only seen the tip of the iceberg. I should have known something was off when this hook handed man showed up on the roof of our van when I ran him over, when nobody seemed to care. When a VCR we purchased started spewing black flames after visiting a pawn shop and suddenly returning home with no memory of what happened. So many moments that I could have stopped to question, but I didn't. Not even when Mason's pet raccoon Digby came back from the vet with implants that let him talk.



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It's a bit like that saying about a frog in boiling water. If you heat it up slowly enough, it won't jump out. Anything can be made to feel normal if it happens gradually enough. That frog thing, that's an urban legend by the way. Not true, but what is true is that it is very easy to ignore the small signs that something in your life isn't quite right until it's too late.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. The story that I want to tell you starts between season one and season two of digital folklore. We had just finished moving into a new studio complex, something much more suitable than the ramshackle warehouse we had been working out of. It had taken far more time than we had planned and we were just scrambling to get season two ready to publish.

Mason Amadeus:

I don't know why the audio isn't working.

Perry Carpenter:

Is it a driver issue?

Mason Amadeus:

No, I already checked. Latest drivers, latest Windows update. It's got to be-

Perry Carpenter:

Speakers aren't plugged in.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, well that'll do it.

Perry Carpenter:

There's your problem.



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Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, I mixed it all on headphones. I guess I never tried to play it out loud. Anyway, this is the new theme mix.

[Theme song plays]

Perry Carpenter:

I am Perry Carpenter.

Mason Amadeus:

And I'm Mason Amadeus.

Perry Carpenter:

And this is Digital Folklore.

Mason Amadeus:

Pretty cool, right?

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I like it. So what about the first episode? How far have you gotten?

Mason Amadeus:

It's going to be great.

Perry Carpenter:

You've not started?



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Mason Amadeus:

It's just it's, it feels a lot like the same things we did in the first season. We need something fresh and I don't know what it is.

Perry Carpenter:

We can always just let the interviewees kind of guide the episode and go from there.

Mason Amadeus:

But then I'm really scrambling last minute to get each one put together. I want to have a plan of some kind.

Digby:

Why don't you guys just talk to someone who's been doing a podcast for longer?

Mason Amadeus:

Digby, did you finish tearing out that carpet?

Digby:

No, there's like half of it left. My teeth hurt. I'm taking a break.

Perry Carpenter:

That's not a bad idea though.

Mason Amadeus:

I mean, there is The Folklore Podcast. I think that's Mark Norman.

Perry Carpenter:



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Oh, yeah. We've messaged back and forth a few times. He is really nice. I think he'd talk to us.

Mason Amadeus:

We could set up a Zoom chat or something. Pick his brain.

Digby:

Why don't you just go visit him?

Mason Amadeus:

Because I'm pretty sure he lives in England.

Digby:

No, he lives downtown.

Perry Carpenter:

What?

Digby:

Yeah, right off Waller Ave.

Perry Carpenter:

How'd you know that?

Digby:

I just Googled it.

Mason Amadeus:



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How?

Digby:

With my brain.

Perry Carpenter:

What?

Mason Amadeus:

I'm sorry. What?

Digby:

I mean it took me a few searches because it kept trying to pull up Mark Normand, the comedian, but you can find anything on the internet.

Mason Amadeus:

No, I get that part, Digby.

Digby:

Okay.

Perry Carpenter:

You can Google things with your brain?

Digby:

Can't you?



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Mason Amadeus:

No.

Perry Carpenter:

No.

Digby:

Oh. Yeah. I thought it was weird that you two seem to love sitting at desks so much. This makes sense.

Perry Carpenter:

Do you have full internet access in your head now?

Digby:

Yeah. I mean, I think so.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh my God.

Digby:

You're telling me. How do you two even survive if you can't play flash games when you're bored or waiting for something?

Perry Carpenter:

Digby, they got rid of flash like in 2021. It's riddled with security holes.

Digby:



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I don't know. Still works for me. I've got a really cool level I've been making in the OG Line Rider for ages now.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, is that what you're doing? When I walk in a room and you're just staring off into space?

Digby:

I wonder if there's a way I could show you guys.

Perry Carpenter:

Right. We can figure all this out later. Let's just go to Mark's place. How do we get there?

Digby:

It's at the end of Waller. It's that side road behind the grocery store. It doesn't have a name. It looks like the only thing on it is his house at the end.

Perry Carpenter:

Cool. Let's roll.

Mason Amadeus:

It's really funny how cities have all these disparate little places so close together.

Perry Carpenter:

I don't remember this being here at all. We're like a quarter a mile from the main drag.

Mason Amadeus:

Right. I never noticed this and it's basically in our backyard.



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Perry Carpenter:

No, I know. I've been here before. I've been over this way before and it wasn't at all like this.

Mason Amadeus:

Maybe it's construction.

Perry Carpenter:

That'd be one heck of a job.

Mason Amadeus:

I don't know. Sometimes it's the places that are most familiar that you notice the least. Right? Memory's weird, man.

Perry Carpenter:

What the... Mark lives here?

Mason Amadeus:

That's what the GPS says.

Perry Carpenter:

No. No, there is no way. I think I would've noticed a straight-up wizard tower behind the Kroger.

Mason Amadeus:

That's what I was saying, memory can't be trusted.

Perry Carpenter:



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I guess.

Mason Amadeus:

Hey, that's got to be him.

Perry Carpenter:

Is he dressed like a wizard?

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, it kind of looks like it. I think I'm going to like this guy.

Mark Norman:

Hello. Hello. Great to see you both.

Mason Amadeus:

Hey, is this an okay spot to park?

Mark Norman:

Yeah, you should be fine.

Mason Amadeus:

Cool. Not that there are many options given the sheer drop into the moat.

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, Mark, right?

Mark Norman:



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Yes. Mark Norman. Yeah. Great to meet you.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, Perry. Great to meet you too.

Mason Amadeus:

Mason.

Mark Norman:

Brilliant. Oh, by the way, I love the whole mystery machine aesthetic you've got going on there.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, thanks.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, we kind of leaned into it.

Mark Norman:

Believe it or not, I'm actually working on a book right now about the folklore of Scooby-Doo. When I saw you rolling up in that, I figured you were either here to serve me a cease and desist or one of my friends is playing a trick.

Perry Carpenter:

Folklore of Scooby-Doo, eh?

Mark Norman:



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It's quite fascinating. Actually. Look, let's go inside. We can sit down and have a proper chat. If you don't mind kicking your shoes off.

[Large ancient door screeches open and slams shut]

Perry Carpenter:

Wow.

Mason Amadeus:

Wow, this place is cool.

Perry Carpenter:

Is this your house?

Mark Norman:

No, it is just an apartment complex. A weird one though for sure.

Perry Carpenter:

This is straight out of a video game.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, this is absolutely where Merlin or something would live.

Mark Norman:



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Yeah. Well the property managers seem to think so. The way they take care of this place, they must assume we heat our water with magic. I'm top floor. I'm lucky if I can shower after 07:00 in the morning. Come on.

Perry Carpenter:

So I didn't want to ask this at first, but I do have to know, are you dressed like a wizard on purpose?

Mark Norman:

Oh, sort of. Robes are comfortable.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah...And the hat?

Mark Norman:

Oh, I just think that's funny.

[Door of Mark's apartment opens... the gang enter... and the door closes]

Feel free to make yourselves comfortable. I'll get the kettle on.

Mason Amadeus:

Are you absolutely sure that you aren't a wizard? You have a lot of knickknacks.

Mark Norman:

Are knickknacks a symptom of wizardry now?



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Mason Amadeus:

Well, I mean sort of, right?

Mark Norman:

I just have a wide range of things I'm interested in and I like to keep artifacts of that.

Perry Carpenter:

So you've been running The Folklore Podcast for somewhere around a decade now, right?

Mark Norman:

Yes, almost a decade. Eight years now.

Mason Amadeus:

Eight years?

Mark Norman:

Mm-hmm.

Mason Amadeus:

So we did one season and I'm feeling hesitant about covering the same things over and over again or trying to make sure that we're keeping it fresh. How do you find enough stuff to talk about for eight years? I mean, I know the subject is broad, but it feels like it's almost too broad, at least to me.

Mark Norman:

Well, I mean I guess yours is slightly narrower because you are only dealing with the digital realm.

Perry Carpenter:



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Supposedly. Yeah.

Mark Norman:

Okay. Yeah. All right. Supposedly you are predominantly dealing with the digital realm, whereas I stupidly called it The Folklore Podcast, which means I can deal with the entirety of folklore across all time and space. Stuff will come around more than once. It's bound to because stuff comes and goes into people's areas of interest when you've been running a show for as long as I have. I guess as well, topics find you just as much as you find topics. So I get a lot of contact from people who want to promote things, people who want to talk about what they're interested in, which is great.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, we've kind of had the same thought every now and then that everything, even when it's, quote, unquote, offline folklore right now, there's an online application to almost everything. I mean, regardless of anything, if we talk to somebody, we've recorded it online. So at that point it's digital.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, I guess there's a loophole.

Perry Carpenter:

There's a loophole for everything.

Mark Norman:

I mean, the whole thing is really blended these days in the same way as everything else. It's post COVID, I suppose.

Mason Amadeus:



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How would you describe for the people who hadn't heard it, The Folklore Podcast? I mean, it does what it says on the tin, but...

Mark Norman:

It really does, and it's original kind of strap line with something along the lines of recalling our forgotten history and recording the new, so it looks at old customs, old traditions, old stories, superstitions, all of those things that when you say to a lot of people folklore, they go, Oh yeah, that's that old stuff, right? It is that, but it's far more wide-ranging than that and there's plenty of modern folklore. Everybody has an interest in folklore whether they realize it or not, because folklore resonates with everybody day to day because they interact with it day to day. They just don't realize that they're doing it. If you walk around a ladder rather than walking underneath it, if you avoid a cracking the pavement, if you salute a magpie, if you chuck a bit of salt over your shoulder, if you spill it, you are interacting with folklore. And the same applies even in the home.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, we even had somebody on our discord server ask last night, can family recipes be folklore? And somebody else chimed in immediately and said absolutely. So I'm wondering, since you've been doing this over eight years, if you were to go back and talk to Baby Mark Norman who started this eight years ago and then look at yourself now, has your perspective on folklore changed or evolved at all?

Mark Norman:

I don't think my perspective on folklore has necessarily evolved. What has probably evolved more is my view on how people engage with the subject. This was supposed to be a hobby at a time when podcasting wasn't the big deal that it is now. Eight years later, it's like, how does this happen?

Perry Carpenter:

Right. Did you have a background in folklore when you started?



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Mark Norman:

No. My background was actually in television originally. I trained to work in television, so my background was more media-based, which is kind of handy for the content creation aspect. And at the time that I studied to work in television, there were no degree level courses in that subject. So I took a different type of qualification and when I stopped working television and thought I should go back and get a degree, I then studied social science with a media element. There was a kind of crossover between the two because I was interested in social science, but then also I had had a long ranging interest in the paranormal and there's only a sure leap really between the paranormal and folklore, particularly if the bridge is social science, which mine was. And I try and approach the podcast in the same way that I try and approach my writing.

And that was an important link actually between the two because at the same time that I started this podcast, I also had my first book published, which was Black Dog Folklore and my writing style and my style on the podcast a very similar and that is that I try and bring that academic rigor, if you like, to the subject, but in an accessible format. So I'm not an academic, I don't hold a doctorate. A lot of people in academia would call me an amateur folklorist. I have a one person soapbox against that term because until academia decided that folklore was a subject that should be studied as an academic discipline, there were still folklore and people studying the subject. And I don't think it's a hardened fast subject in the same way as some others are.

There is certainly that approach to it and I not denying that and I'm not doing that down either. But equally, I don't believe that people who are independent folklorists or independent researchers, which is the term that I prefer, are amateurs. There are certainly fellow folklorist that I could name who like me, are not affiliated to an academic institution, do not describe themselves as academic, but are among the leading folklorists in the world in particular areas.

Perry Carpenter:

I think I've noticed a trend. So you may be starting something or having an impact because several of the conferences and other things that I've seen recently have had titles for people that have said independent folklorists. And then also there are a few notable folklorists out there who are working in



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departments that don't necessarily have a recognized folklore degree, but they do blend social science and media studies or English or another discipline and then just put a folkloric emphasis on it.

Mark Norman:

And in fact, some countries do it far better than others. America has some very good folklore departments within institutions. Over here, Ireland and Scotland do folklore pretty well. England we're rubbish at folklore now from an academic viewpoint, I think that there is one master's degree available, one that Owen Davis and Kerry Holbrook run at the University of Hertfordshire, which is good. But outside of that, all the other institutions in England certainly that had folklore as a subject ditched it years ago. And now if people want to do a PhD in a folklore related subject, they often will get bounced from pillar to post between departments trying to find a supervisor because everybody says, no, it's not me, it's English. And English will say, well, I'll talk to anthropology.

And I've seen prospective PhD students tearing their hair out over trying to get a supervisor because of that. So a lot of places do it far better than we do unfortunately. I think everybody goes, yeah, there's all this interest in folk. There's all this interest in folk horror and these kinds of associated topics. That's great. And then nobody actually takes that step further and goes, Do you know what? We should do more with this. They just kind go, Yeah, everyone's really interested. Cool. What should we do now?

Perry Carpenter:

Isn't that nice?

Mark Norman:

Yeah. And there needs to be more, I think. What you guys are doing as well with your podcast is great because it's showing people that there is this other side to it as well, this whole kind of modern folklore, digital aspect to it. So yeah, kudos to your first season because I think it's really opened a lot of eyes and you definitely need to keep doing what you're doing for sure.

Perry Carpenter:



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There are several other small dedicated folklore podcasts that are thinking about this from a discipline perspective. What advice would you give to us and everyone else out there really trying to bring the more of the academic lens or more the discipline lens to the world?

Mark Norman:

I think you've got to recognize that the majority of your audience are going to be interested in that academic lens that you are shining on it without necessarily being academic themselves. You've got to be very careful not to dumb down the subject, because that doesn't mean that people are not intelligent. An academic approach is very different. If you pick up an academic textbook on a subject and then you pick up a general interest book on the same subject, the writing style will be very different. For example. That's the key thing I think, is to try and do what I've tried to do, which is to put that academic rigor in. Make sure that what you are talking about the subject, the people that you are talking to know the subject, but make it accessible, make it interesting for people, keep people's interest, which is, I know you had a mixed response when you started your podcast to the narrative style-

Perry Carpenter:

Yes.

Mark Norman:

... but I think it engaged more people than it drove away.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I think right around episode six or seven people came to it knowing what to expect rather than being shocked. And so that problem largely addressed itself.

Mark Norman:

Sometimes you've got to take that gamble. A new project will always take some time to bed in. You'll always lose some people. You might lose them for a particular episode, you might lose them for the



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entire show. It happens, but at the end of the day, you will, if you're doing it right, gain more than you'll lose over time.

Perry Carpenter:

Exactly.

Mark Norman:

There's an unhealthy obsession within podcasting around numbers as well. And this is particularly true, I think amongst ironically, smaller shows, there's this obsession with how many downloads an episode gets. It doesn't matter. If people are enjoying what you are doing, then that's what's important.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. I definitely don't look at the numbers and think about them at all, ever.

Perry Carpenter:

No, we never do that.

Mark Norman:

You should really go about it the same way as I go about reviews for my books, and that's just to not care.

Mason Amadeus:

Actually, since you mentioned books, you did say that you're working on a book about the folklore of Scooby-Doo, and I've been puzzling on that this whole time, knowing nothing but those words in that



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order. And I'm curious, what is the angle that you're going to take in that book? Because thinking about it off the top of my head, Scooby-Doo obviously covers a lot of monsters and spooky things that definitely dovetail into folklore. Is that sort of the angle or what [inaudible]-

Mark Norman:

So I will not give too much away because I am writing this book at the moment, which I didn't title actually, my publisher titled, and it's called *Zoinks, the Real World Folklore of Scooby-Doo*. The book looks at folklore and Scooby-Doo in both directions actually. Scooby-Doo has been dealing with folklore as a subject area for well over 50 years. In a lot of later iterations of the show, the monsters are perhaps based on real world folklore, but are creations of the show's writers because they thought that was a silly idea and it would be fun. The original iteration and some other iterations of the show, they deal very precisely with particular things. Witches, ghosts, certain cryptids, these sorts of things, real world mythology. Really, the Scooby-Doo aspect is a springboard to look at the folklore. So the book looks at all the different ways that monsters, for want of a better term appear in the show.

And then it looks at which of these things are drawing from real world folklore and what are they drawing from? What is the origin of the witches' broomstick? What is the origin of the green skinned hag or whatever? Where is it right and where is it wrong? It also looks at where the show does things well and where it does things badly. So for example, the Sticking with witches, there are various episodes in different iterations of the show that look at persecution. They look at the way that women are treated and all of those things that underlie witchcraft accusations and the witch hunts, and whether it's Salem in the US or whether it's Matthew Hopkins in the UK and those sorts of things. But then it also looks at the way that Scooby-Doo has influenced folklore in the real world in the other direction, because that's happened a lot.

There are particular phrases which are stereotypically Scooby-Doo phrases, zoinks is one of them, jinkies is another. All these sorts of things. There are a lot of urban myths surrounding Scooby-Doo. There's obviously the drug references of Shaggy in particular. How much of that is accurate? How much of the other urban myths about the show might or might not be true? Did Scooby Doo's name actually come from the Frank Sinatra song, which everybody believes that it did?



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Mason Amadeus:

Wait, what? I don't know that one. What?

Mark Norman:

So it said that Scooby is named after the scat style of singing, which Frank Sinatra employed in some of his songs. And Fred Silverman, who was one of the executives who worked on the show early on, was listening to Sinatra on a plane flight. But I question whether that is actually the case or whether there might be one or two earlier references that people don't necessarily know about. There are other ways that the show has influenced the real world, like Scooby's speech impediment, for example. Scooby's speech impediment is unique to him as a character. There is no real world speech impediment, which works in the way that his does, but a real world speech therapist has named his speech impediment in the real world based on other forms of speech therapy and other types of speech impediment, which have similarities around the use of the sound R within words, which is called rhotacism. So yeah, far more than you think when you think about what a book about Scooby-Doo might actually be about.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. Yeah. And that's really interesting too, because that in a way in itself is a time capsule of the opinions of the times, I guess, of the writers technically, but largely influenced by cultural understandings of all of these things.

Mark Norman:

Yes, absolutely. Yeah. And it's been really important to me that that is accounted for. So I have as far as possible, tried to interview people who've worked on the show over the years to get their opinion. Why was this particular version written in the way that it was? Why did somebody think that Scrappy-Doo was a good idea? These sorts of things.



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Mason Amadeus:

People wonder.

Mark Norman:

Yeah, yeah. Well, I interviewed John Semper Jr who was a writer in the Scooby and Scrappy era. He was responsible for the creation of the animated Spider-Man, loads of other [inaudible]. He is a big deal in the cartoon world. And I spoke to him about that subject and he said, you know what? He said Scrappy is my favorite character.

Mason Amadeus:

Interesting.

Mark Norman:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

Interesting choice.

Mark Norman:

He had his reasons why, and they were perfectly valid reasons. I couldn't agree with them because I don't like Scrappy as a character, but there you go.

Mason Amadeus:

What's the status of this book? When's it coming out? Do you know?

Mark Norman:



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I don't know, because my publisher for this book very stupidly, didn't put a deadline on the manuscript. So as it is at the moment, I have written approaching 40,000 words, so it's just over the halfway point. But I have been working on a lot of other projects alongside it, a lot of which are now done, and my main focus in my writing at the moment will be finishing this book now.

Mason Amadeus:

Cool. Yeah, I'm excited for when it comes out. We should probably get moving. We don't want to take up too much of your time.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, it was great to talk to you though.

Mark Norman:

Oh, likewise. And I'm very interested in what you two come up with next, so if you ever need any help, don't hesitate to reach out. I think you Americans say.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, absolutely.

Mason Amadeus:

Definitely. I'm sure we're going to come up against a few things that we need your insight on.

Mark Norman:

Oh, it just occurred to me, my friend Daisy lives three doors below. They run a show called Folkwise, and they're doing some very cool stuff to bring folklore studies to a younger crowd online. They're usually wrapping up right around now, so if you have time, you should pop by and meet them. I bet they'd be interested in what you are doing too.



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Perry Carpenter:

Oh, cool.

Mason Amadeus:

You have, why not? That'd be fun. Thanks Mark. Yeah, of course.

Mark Norman:

Take care now.

[Door opens and closes... large hallway... footsteps]

Perry Carpenter:

Well, that went great.

Mason Amadeus:

It did. Mark is awesome.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, and I think it's great to meet other folks working in the same field as us. It's also going to be really helpful to have somebody like him to bounce things off of.

Mason Amadeus:

Which one did he say was Daisy's?

Perry Carpenter:

Three down. So yeah, that one.



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Mason Amadeus:

I guess the numbers just don't go in order.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, I guess so.

[... as they approach Daisy's apartment, the begin to notice loud noises, crashes, and other random and strange sounds...]

Mason Amadeus:

So this is the one.

Perry Carpenter:

Mm-hmm.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, I don't know. It sounds pretty intense in there.

Perry Carpenter:

Mark said they should be free to chat about now. Let's just knock. I mean, worst case we come back later.

Mason Amadeus:

All right.

Daisy Ahlstone:



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Yes.

Mason Amadeus:

Good. Hello? Hello. We were told to come see you.

Daisy Ahlstone:

[distantly]... gimme one second

[Massive door opens and Daisy greets their unexpected guests]

Daisy Ahlstone:

Hello, I'm Daisy. Daisy Ahlstone. You are?

Perry Carpenter:

Hey, Daisy. I'm Perry Carpenter and this is Mason Amadeus.

Mason Amadeus:

Heya.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Nice to meet both of you.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, nice to meet you too. Mark said that we should come talk to you about doing research and stuff, but if this isn't a good time...



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Daisy Ahlstone:

No worries now it's fine. Now it's fine. Come on in.

[Massive door closes behind them]

Mason Amadeus:

Oh...

Daisy Ahlstone:

Huh?

Mason Amadeus:

It's like... it's like spotless in here. What was all that noise like a second ago?

Daisy Ahlstone:

That was just sound effects.

Mason Amadeus:

Oh.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yeah. I just had the game audio up kind of loud. I was wrapped up in a live stream, and actually this is perfect timing. This is perfect timing. What's up?

Mason Amadeus:

You're a live streamer?



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Daisy Ahlstone:

Yeah. Well, I stream every single Tuesday night and sometimes on Thursday nights on Twitch. At twitch.tv/folkwise. Have you ever heard of Folkwise?

Perry Carpenter:

I have.

Mason Amadeus:

I'm in the Discord.

Daisy Ahlstone:

No way. Oh, great. Well, welcome to the community. For those of you who haven't heard of Folkwise before. Folkwise is a live Twitch stream that I run with my cohost, Dr. Dom Tartaglia, who's the current Florida State folklorist. We talk about folklore, we play video games, but sometimes we play folklore and talk video games. That's really fun too. We invite experts who are folklorists, they're storytellers, they're musicians, they're artists. They're an eclectic group of humanities thinking people who like to study tradition and culture and creativity in everyday life. We play games like The Wolf Among Us, which is a great fairytale, urban legend crossover game where urban legends end up in Fairytale World. And we invited on Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman from The Carterhaugh School to talk to us about folklore and fairytales. We use video games as kind of a launching pad for conversations that are just emergent about the lore that our different guests are experts in.

Mason Amadeus:

That's really cool because especially with a platform that is designed with interactivity in mind like Twitch, it feels like such a fitting place for discussions around folklore, especially crossing communities like this.

Daisy Ahlstone:



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So we in our community get to make folklore in real time. Our number one most used emote on our channel is ladders because of some very, very early lore of Folkwise. In Zelda, Breath of the Wild you can climb anything. We did a super, super long, 11 hour stream of it and somehow this observation came out as everything is ladders, which ended up sort of meaning you can climb anything, we could conquer this together. And so it kind of became our calling cards. So in our chat now, when subscribers get access to our emotes, they actually make ladder towers in the chat.

Mason Amadeus:

That's great.

Daisy Ahlstone:

If that makes sense. That stuff is totally emergent. We're both talking about folklore, we're learning about folklore in a very specific context depending on what the guest's interests are, but then we're also making folklore together as the folk wise community. Maybe this is the meta folkloristic thing that we get into where it's like we're really doing folklore of folklorists.

Mason Amadeus:

Well actually, is that what meta folkloristics is? Because I saw that word and I can pull it apart into all of its component pieces, but I can't quite understand it holistically. What is meta folkloristics?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Well, so that was interesting because I was put on a panel with other folklorists at the American Folklore Society Conference, something meta folkloristics kind of broadly. It was really about what does it mean to be a folklore and what does it mean to do the work of a folklorist? So rather than focusing on a quote group of people, the folk or a piece of lore or whatever, and all of those contexts in between. And so the meta folkloristics panel was all about us looking inward at the practices of what it means to do work as a folklorist and then how does that work actually get enacted into our field.



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Mason Amadeus:

Would it be accurate or missing a big aspect of it to summarize meta folkloristics as the study of the study of folklore?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yes.

Mason Amadeus:

Is that?

Daisy Ahlstone:

I think so.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah?

Daisy Ahlstone:

I think that that's a fair way to put it. It's the reflective part that improves the way that we teach other folklorists how to do folklore, and also helps us keep in check with ourselves, especially because so many folklorists are the folklorist at their giant institution because there's not that many of us.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yeah, I would love to see more community engaged research practices, which is a whole other subfield incorporated along with folklore studies more.



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Perry Carpenter:

I mean, it sounds like one of these things where you're like, would you consider folklore a discipline? And almost everybody would [inaudible]... Yeah, there's a discipline to folk course. Well, how do you apply the discipline? Where's the discipline? And the discipline?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Right. Actually, Lynne McNeil had a great comparison to this. She always says you're at a party and somebody's like, Well, what do you do for a living? And you're like, I'm a folklorist. And they're like, that's really cool. I bet you're a really good storyteller. She's like so if a criminologist were here, would you ask them if they were good at committing crime?

It's a little bit similar to that, and that's not to say that there aren't folklorists who are great storytellers, but it doesn't always necessitate. The other thing, a lot of times people say that to do folklore as a researcher is to do ethnography, which is the practice of writing and studying people, like how families interact, which is something that Dr. Chrissy Widmayer does, for example. Or maybe you're looking at the macro scale. There's lots of different scales that you can do this work on. But I think at the heart of it, we're trying to make sure that the people that we work with as subjects are fully seen as they want to be represented. Now what does that mean? Am I the person who is part of that group initially? Am I an outsider or am I an insider? What's the step-by-step process of ethnography?

Is it you the researcher saying, I think this is really cool. I'm going to highlight that. We've had a long history of people doing that and doing that bad. So I'm interested in saying, okay, we have ethnography and that's not a bad thing, but we got to get really critical about what it means to do work with communities not next to communities or of communities or for communities. Because if we're going to disrupt systems of research methods that have perpetuated inequality intentionally or unintentionally doing work with the community and actually talking about how that happens, I think is a really important step for getting to improve practices that actually serve the people that we want to serve.

Mason Amadeus:



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I found your bio and one of the sentences, and it was, talk to me about participatory action research, and I'm wondering if that's what this is. I looked it up briefly and it was research done by people who would be affected by the subject of that research. Yes. I came away from reading a little bit about it, thinking I have a vague idea, but not a very good idea. So what is participatory action research?

Daisy Ahlstone:

So this is another one of those examples and is similar to what I said earlier, like ethnography. Think of all these little things as like toolkits. You can get a toolkit, and this toolkit is participatory action research. So I always like to think, okay, what question am I asking and what do I want to know? And usually folklorists say, I don't know. The people are going to tell me you don't have an idea going in what the answer is. But that's not how a lot of other disciplines work. A lot of other disciplines have an idea of what they think the answer's going to be. It's like you're thinking backwards about what you actually want to know.

Mason Amadeus:

Because you have an assumption?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yes, because you have an assumption. So you might say, my assumption is this, and then the research proves it or doesn't. Both are important, but for participatory action research was developed in a context that noticed a lot of people, particularly in mass health or social sciences studies that were being used for research that were not part of the design process of the research. So that would be like you receive an email that says, take my survey. Your X, Y, Z category of person will send you 50 bucks. That might work on a mass scale. You can generalize from that data. There is a space for that in the world. But what that research doesn't do is let you, the person who got the email, have a lot of input on how they're interpreting that data. So what participatory action research does is says, Hey, I want to do a study on our city, and you are a person who lives in our city.



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Come talk to us about how we might answer a question about access to clean water in our city. Have them actually be part of the design process. And I'm very much simplifying it, and there's all these complicated questions about how people see you as the researcher and the expert in trying to undo some of those assumptions and then what that might mean for people to be able to suggest certain designs or not for research. But the important part about participatory action research is that the people who are actually contributing data are engaged in the way the data was formed, collected, interpreted, and then stored. So that I think is a great method for folklorists to use.

Mason Amadeus:

Trying to minimize outsider bias, right?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Well either minimize or just note it.

Mason Amadeus:

Right.

Daisy Ahlstone:

It's not bad to say this person doesn't know that. For example, Dr. Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth from West Virginia, he did a whole violin making, instrument making project with people who actually make instruments as an apprentice. He was put in that very nice inverse role of being the not expert. He didn't know how to make an instrument. So for that scenario, that's a method that actually worked really well where if you're trying to take folklore as a practice and scale it up in any level, so rather than just a family or an individual, if you want to say my community, first of all, who's in that community? That's my favorite question. If you're going to try to scale up that data, how do you include enough people through a participatory model?

Mason Amadeus:



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So this makes total sense to me in the context of conducting research. I have a weird question and I'm going to try really hard to articulate it properly, but I'm going to have to just work down this pathway. Okay. I'm wondering how people in a position like the three of us on this call can use this framework and way of thinking in the work that we are doing. How does that look? Because we are a level abstracted from the research because we are people talking to folklorists about things. What are some ways we can act on this in what us three are doing?

Daisy Ahlstone:

Well, you're already doing a couple of good things. One, you're kind of doing meta folklore, you're interviewing people about folklore, but you're also part of this community, so you're doing kind of an interview style. You're not doing ethnographic interview also, which I think is interesting. And we say that on our show too at Folkwise. We don't do ethnographic interviews. Because sometimes folklorists are like, is this ethnography? And we're like, no, no, no, no. We're doing a kind of journalistic interview. We're trying to make you look really good and funny is what we're trying to do.

Perry Carpenter:

Oh, yeah. We think about how to engage with folklorists and present folklore related ideas to non folklorists. We're always trying to figure out how do we do this in a reflective and responsible way?

Daisy Ahlstone:

You also have to think about who gets to call themselves a folklorist, who is aware of that word and that there is a discipline connected to it. Dom and I, we quote our friend James Bell, who is always in our chat on Folkwise, and he describes folklorists as enthusiasm enthusiasts. We love when people are really excited.

Perry Carpenter:

That is awesome.



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Mason Amadeus:

I love that. I love that. That's so great.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Is that so?

Mason Amadeus:

I don't think I'll ever pin the badge of folklorist to my name, but I will always pin the badge of enthusiasm enthusiast.

Perry Carpenter:

Yes.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yes. I do think that people who are interested in the field of folklore, who are interested in the stuff that people do just on a daily basis, that brings them joy. Baking with grandma, taking kids to the zoos to talk about dinosaurs. Why do kids like dinosaurs? What's that about? All of that. I'm enthusiastic for the kid who's really into trucks, and I want to know cognitively, who told you about truck? The enthusiasm enthusiast is a great way of beginning that inquiry into human behavior.

Mason Amadeus:

Completely agree.

Daisy Ahlstone:

There's a lot of people who are interested in folklore who don't call themselves folklorists. That means that our scope of guests is skewed academia, which can be alienating to a lot of people. And then what does academia mean? It prioritizes usually white people, usually people who have more money. I do



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think more and more queer people are into folklore as a discipline or as a school of thought because it is an open way of thinking. It allows for a multiplicity of thought at once, and a lot of people who don't ascribe to binary identities like myself or many of my friends, I think folklore is a way of talking about the community that we have always recorded and documented in the basements of houses and on the streets and in these places that were marginalized, like Zora Neale Hurston, amazing example from the early 20th century as a folklore documenting marginalized communities that she was part of because there were other disciplines that made that really difficult for her.

There's an opportunity for many things to be true at once in folklore and have it be okay. Just tying back to urban legends, contemporary legends. The idea for folklorists that something is or is not real is less interesting than why people are believing it in the first place.

Mason Amadeus:

That's a really interesting way to put that.

Perry Carpenter:

It is.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:

I like that.

Perry Carpenter:

Traditionally, the folklore stance when studying things has been to be very non interventionist in today's political social climate. There are things that we might study as folklorists, like QAnon that it's



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hard to stay detached from. Is folklore wrestling as a discipline in this non interventionist stance right now? And what do you think folklore looks like a decade from now because of that?

Daisy Ahlstone:

So a lot of folklorists are activists. They come to folklore because they care about the communities that they're involved in, that they're advocating for whatever, and then that I think has been beat out of them a little bit because of academia. Activists are unwieldy or they're too passionate and it blights their view of the subject, which I think is not a great interpretation of that. There's been a longstanding tradition of activism and folklore and activists tend to be interventionists. Not always. Sometimes they're documenting the intervention that their colleagues are making, but I don't know. I think if you are silent in instances of oppression and you have the expertise to know what's going on and you don't say something, you're part of the problem.

I think that all of those are opportunities to have conversations. I think being invitational to different ways of thinking is the framework to choose. I think most of the time being invitational or being curious about somebody's belief is what makes us interested in the first place. We want to know why somebody would say something like that, but I also think there are times to just say, come on, you know better. What are we playing here?

I don't think it's a problem to be interventionist. I think that you're a person who wears a lot of different hats, and so to intervene and say, do that or do this, I think is sometimes not appropriate, but an invitation to the conversation I always think is appropriate.

Perry Carpenter:

I love the invitation to the conversation way of thinking about this.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Yeah.

Mason Amadeus:



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Yeah. I think that's a great answer. Thank you so much, Daisy. This has been so awesome.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah, we've loved coming on...

Mason Amadeus:

This was great.

Daisy Ahlstone:

Of course. Come on Folkwise. We'll do it. We can do a double interview. We've done that were-

Perry Carpenter:

Oh, we should. Yes.

Daisy Ahlstone:

... we had two people on. Wouldn't that be fun?

Mason Amadeus:

That'd be wicked fun. I'd be super down.

Daisy Ahlstone:

We did that with the Cartherhaugh School, the Cartherhaugh twins.

[transition to Perry and Mason driving back in the Volkswagen]

Perry Carpenter:



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Well, today was an adventure.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah.

Perry Carpenter:

So I'm actually really excited about this. I mean, those two folks got my gears turning on new ideas, things that we can explore for the show.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, yeah. Same.

Perry Carpenter:

What's got you sucked into phone land over there?

Mason Amadeus:

Oh, I found this thing. When we were talking with Daisy about participatory action research. It really stuck in my brain the idea of participating in something. So I just found this convention that's happening in a few months. It looks like it might be neat.

Perry Carpenter:

Okay. What's it about?

Mason Amadeus:

It's like a meme conference.

Perry Carpenter:



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Yeah?

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. It's the *Meme Enthusiast Mega Expo*.

Perry Carpenter:

That actually does sound like it could be interesting.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah. MEME. It looks like something we get a lot out of, but some of it seems a little cringey though. Like the tagline for it is don't let your memes be dreams and there's like a hundred Pepe frogs all over the place.

Perry Carpenter:

No, that would be perfect. I mean, even if it was entirely cringe stuff, I think that that would be worth it.

Mason Amadeus:

What, the folklore of cringe?

Perry Carpenter:

Actually it could be an episode.

Mason Amadeus:

It could.

Perry Carpenter:



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No. I mean, we wanted to do some episodes about memes, but that topic is so broad we never knew where to start. This might give us an in.

Mason Amadeus:

That's a good point. This could be a good way to get into it. Just whatever we'd run into, we'd make it into an episode.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. How much for tickets?

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, that's why I wasn't bringing it up right away. They're big expensive.

Perry Carpenter:

So the way to get around that is we sign up as speakers.

Mason Amadeus:

What?

Perry Carpenter:

That's the way you get around all these big conference expenses is you sign up as speakers, they waive the fee for you and kind of treat you like royalty.

Mason Amadeus:

Yeah, but we would have to do a presentation then. What would we talk about?

Perry Carpenter:



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That's all just details. We can figure that out later. Let's just get the application in now. That way we have the timing advantage.

Mason Amadeus:

Okay. Yeah. I'll get that filled out and just sort of, I don't know, be vague enough and hope that that makes them intrigued and want to pick us.

Perry Carpenter:

Yeah. Perfect.

Mason Amadeus:

Thanks for listening to Digital Folklore and thanks to our guests this episode.

Mark Norman:

My name's Mark Norman. I'm the creator and host of the Folklore podcast, which you can find online at www.thefolklorepodcast.com.

Daisy Ahlstone:

I'm Daisy Ahlstone and I'm one of the creators of Folkwise, and you can follow us on twitch.tv/folkwise. We are on Instagram @folk_wise.

Mason Amadeus:

Our new theme music was by Eli Chambers. You can find him at elichambersmusic.com.

Perry Carpenter:

Check out the show notes of this episode, links to all of our guests and voice actors work, as well as a transcript for this episode.



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Mason Amadeus:

You'll also find links to our website, an invite to our Discord server where you can talk to me and Perry, as well as other fans of the show, a link to our Patreon where you can help support us, send a whole bunch more.

Perry Carpenter:

Digital Folklore is a production of 8th Layer Media, which is really just Mason and me.

Mason Amadeus:

And Digby.

Perry Carpenter:

...still not paying Digby.

Mason Amadeus:

If you have a moment, now is a great time to leave a review for our show on Apple Podcasts or tell a friend about Digital Folklore.

Perry Carpenter:

If you want to help us be successful, spread the word. It's that easy.

Mason Amadeus:

Thank you so much for listening, and we'll see you again soon.

Perry Carpenter:

Soon.



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Mason Amadeus:

Soon.

Perry Carpenter:

Soon.

[music ends... Digby scampers in]

Digby:

I just wish this dumb implant came with an ad blocker.