

## **SMFA Summit Interview with Desirée Mee Jung, premiering 23 May 2021, 11am PDT**

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Everyone, I'm so excited to bring to you one of my very favorite people. It's Desiree Mee Jung. Hi Des.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

Hello. I'm so happy to be here with you.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Oh, it's just such a pleasure to get to spend time with you always. But especially as we're having conversations around creating the Hollywood we want, which is of course our theme here, I want to talk to you... I'm gonna... I'm gonna go right in. Like I'm not even gonna go, like, "How do we know each other and tell me your background," because whatever. The bio's there and nobody cares how we met. Let's, let's dive right in on.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

You are a part of a very underrepresented population when it comes to Hollywood, and you find yourself, which you can speak to exactly where... how... this is playing out for you, you find yourself now being not only offered a seat at that table, but the head of the table. Being looked to for leadership in what representation and inclusion needs to look like. How, how do we go from zero, or 1%, of the attention to all spotlights and eyes are on you and "please lead us through this very complex maze that we created"?

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

Yes, it is a bit of a mind fuck, if I can swear.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

You can.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

Because, one, you're so so excited to get the opportunity and really eager to tell your story. And then at the same time though you don't necessarily have the strongest muscles to to navigate all of a sudden the pressure at that you're given and the opportunities that you're given. Specifically, for me, I, I grew up, I, I am adopted. I was adopted and I was raised by two white parents, and I was raised in a very white community, and so it's very strange, because for a long time I didn't, I didn't want to be Asian. I didn't like that I was Asian. I really wanted to look like all of my friends and I didn't quite understand what was happening; I just wanted to belong. But you know I navigated that as it was. And as I started to pursue my creative path, what I

started internalizing was any kind of rejection that I was getting had to have something to do with Desiree, because I grew up in a white community in a white nuclear family that loves me. So, it couldn't have been... it couldn't have been my, my race, not at all. It had to be "Desiree was not doing something right. Desiree was not good enough. Desiree needs to practice more, develop more skills," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And then here we are today, recognizing, "Oh wait, there might have been other factors involved in some of those things," right? And so, it's like okay great, we're gonna tear those away and now. Great, because who you are, you get to do all this. Well, it's funny. We constantly talk about building muscles and I just have not built those muscles and so there's this constant internal kind of conflict that I'm having to work out. As, as I'm very excited to get all these opportunities, and then also feel a lot of like, I'm, I'm not used to being looked at like this.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

And knowing what to do with that and knowing how to process all the feelings that come up with all of a sudden being looked at for the things that I wanted to get rid of growing up.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah, that juxtaposition of energy.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yes.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Can be a lot. What do you do to fortify your enoughness? Where does it come from, for you?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Well, this is gonna sound so... but you. A lot of the things that I've learned with working with you. You've given me so many great tools that... I mean, I don't I know, that sounds like an overly simplified answer but yes. I have I have so much to thank. I have so many resources to use because of you. Yeah.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

I like sharing my toys. When I find things that work, I really like going, "Y'all, this works. Try this." You know that's one of my favorite things.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

And you're constantly encouraging me to... but the little nudges to improve incrementally, right? Because of the, the, what is it the 10%? The brain is not gonna recognize anything more than 10% different.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Let's let's explain what that is for people who are not a part of that conversation. This is in our Expansive Capacity mind-body enoughness mastermind. The brain outright rejects anything that's more than 10% different from what its beliefs are about what is true and what is possible. And what that means is, when you're a child and you see someone, you know, remove their thumb or whatever the magic trick is, it breaks your brain a little because you just saw something that your brain thought was not possible. Then you learn, "Oh, that's magic. I understand magic lives in this category of deception, illusions, sleight of hand. Got it," and it allows you to grow past that tolerance level.

But when it comes to success in our lives, love in our lives, money in our lives, all the upper limit problems stuff, we have a cap on what we believe is possible, and when we see success come in that is more than 10% different at a time, it breaks the brain, in much the same way as the child seeing magic for the first time. So, we do incremental work to make more success feel more natural and within that tolerance of 10% and then we keep pushing that percentage. Keep pushing that ceiling put keep pushing that cap. Yeah. So how so what is that that incremental process like for you, just as you navigate your day?

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

Sometimes it comes in little mantras that you have said that will pop into my head as I am about to do something that there might be a little bit of friction to engage. And it's like, "No, you are safe. It's gonna be okay." And then, acknowledging after I do it, "And you didn't die."

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Big player. I love that one.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

And so, it's just, I, I've been working on something with you over the past, I don't know, six or seven months, and how to encourage that muscle and nurture the muscle, as it expands and contracts. Those tools have been... I don't know, it's very interesting, I'm still in it, but I just feel myself getting more and more comfortable or feeling less friction when I'm about to do the thing that six months ago I was like, "Okay, here we go. I'm gonna get my unmute ready. I'm gonna, I'm gonna tap underneath my, my computer before and I feel this extreme amount of heat rise up, but Des, you've got to do it because this is the muscle that you need to work out." And now, it happens without all of that extra energy around it, whether or not it's successful, and I don't, and maybe have a couple other things to deal with afterwards. But again, I just have already noticed that those beginning things are less and less present as I continue to feel stronger in this new, this new world that I'm in.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

And this new world is, in fact, and I know we can't get incredibly specific but it is in fact, rewriting the rules for how entertainment is created in many ways. Can you can you share a little bit about what it is that you get to do these days?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah. It's funny. During the pandemic has afforded me opportunities to step into some real big leadership shoes. To varying degrees. And so in varying degrees of intimidation and imposter syndrome. But you know I was elected, so that kind of feels, you know like "Okay, you you're, you deserve to be there."

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That one's legit.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Right. So, as I sit in the room, I am surrounded by brilliant minds. Brilliant minds who have been doing this kind of work for a really long time. Now, the thing is, they've done the work from their experience. And my experience has not necessarily been represented in that room. And so, I... What we're working on is trying to create different policies to really have equity in our industry. And it is, it is a slow, slow process. And I have to remind myself that the impulse to have things done now, to get the change implemented immediately is a result of this expectation that the culture has sort of conditioned me to have that if it's gonna, if, if it's worth doing, it's going to happen now, and if not, then you have failed, which I don't think is true. We talk about this a lot, that we're, we're trying to correct a system that is very old, so it's not going to change overnight. And we have to change minds first before we can necessarily. Well, the minds of the people who are changing the system to then change the infrastructure.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

I love that that progression: Change the minds of the people who are then going to change the, the systems, because if the minds are still closed or regimented in how things have to be, they don't have that more than 10% difference.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Exactly, which I also find... something that I, I really enjoy is really is having one on one conversations with people. Getting to know people, because that is really where you can get people to expand their thinking. Not by standing up at a podium, shouting why your side is better, or why, why you're more right. Though that does have its place. I don't think that is the kind of leader I am.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

How, how long did it take you to own that label you just used for yourself, leader.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

I mean, in this context, probably, almost like right now, because I said it?

**Bonnie Gillespie**

"Actually, can we check the tape? Did I actually say leader?"

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Because I understand as an artist, I am a leader because we are creating our path as we go through it right? No one else is going to necessarily have forged the path that we will exactly follow, so we are a leader in that way. And so, like, yeah, of course, of course. And I always, in college, I took leadership roles. I had a scholarship as a leader, so it's like, I always knew that I was a leader in other people's eyes, but not necessarily in this way did I ever see myself as this kind of leader. A leader that pursued participation in a government structure.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah, yeah. And when we do think about systems and structures and the speed of change, I often use the analogy of the, the very large cruise liner out in the deepest kind of water, and how many engines have to be firing how hard for how long to get even the slightest amount of change in direction, versus, "We're artists; we're sailboats; we want to change directions, just throw up that sail. Oh, you want to do something different? Turn it. You want to do something else different? Take it down." Like, we're nimble.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

My God that analogy is brilliant. It's brilliant. Because also as an artist, you're used to, I don't like that I don't want to do that, that's kind of the freedom. So then when, when you then move into that massive frickin' cruise liner and want the ability to change, and you're like, "Well, I want to go, I want to go over there. Why can't we?" And no, you have to like talk, make sure you talk to every single engineer, make sure you explain to them why you want to go over there, orchestrate the time and place where they all can turn left so that we can go over there. It is a muscle that is very, very new to me.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah, yeah, because having to check with committee and have them do you know calculus around can we do this move? And is it the right time? And let's get all the approvals and stamps on all the paperwork from all the people before we can even talk about firing up engines is so different from even the even midsize theater that we're used to where we're putting on a show and it's like, "Oh, we want to change that. You know what, we're gonna change that," and then it's done.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yep.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Is there space for nimbleness in systems and structures and governments?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

I don't know the answer to that question. Yeah. I don't know.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Okay. I'm glad, I'm glad it wasn't a hard, "No, no place."

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, there's a little bit of hope that I could maybe say, possibly.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That's great. I'll take it because that's how we get that incremental growth right? That's how we do it.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Exactly, exactly. Yeah.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

I want to shift gears a little bit. You have a not-so-secret superpower around money and money mindset, and brilliance in taking care of yourself as an artist who may have a not so healthy relationship with money. Tell me about what you do with this superpower, because that's so intriguing and so not typical of the artist mindset that there's this love affair with money and how it operates.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Oh, my goodness. Well, you are so kind to say that I have a superpower because to me it just feels like this is just what I do, which I guess is the definition of the superpower. "Ain't no thing"?

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Pretty much. "It's what I do."

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Well, just to give a little bit of background, I... My freshman year of college, I had declared my theatre major, and a computer science minor, I really don't know what I was doing with that.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Interesting. Okay.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

I thought, "Oh, that'll be, that'll be productive," is what I probably thought. "That'll be useful." And I went home during Christmas break and I bussed tables at a theater. During the summer and during... at the dinner theatre, and over Christmas, there were rumors that this theater was this dinner theater was for sale. And something clicked and I was like, "Oh my God. I... how cool it'd be to buy it." So I was just talking to my dad and my dad entertained the idea for like, I don't know, a conversation. He was never serious, but what he said to me was, "Well, if you really want to do that, you need to go get a business degree." I said, "Okay, well I'm not changing majors." So, I went and talked to the college counselor and as I was like, "Well I'll just add the minor." Well then, as I was looking at adding the minor, because it's such different schools, the requirements were still so significant that I might as well just do a double major. Other... because there were just so many other classes. So, I was like, "Fine, I'll just I'll just do a double major." And then I went to school year-round, and graduated with, you know 100 and friggin 90 credits when you only need 120 to graduate. But what I found was I loved it. I loved all my business classes. I loved talking about numbers and you know there's more stuff than that, but just my brain works both of those equally, and I enjoy them equally. Anyway, so my thing with money. I also had a lot of great money habits from my family. I also went to a very inexpensive school. And the moment I declared a business major, all of a sudden school was paid for. Right, I mean I was getting scholarship after scholarship. Also, because you know I'm a Capricorn I got all A's, all the time.

### **Bonnie Gillespie**

Of course.

### **Desiree Mee Jung**

So, I have, I had great money habits, as well as a not a lot of the same burdens as other people. So, and then I also didn't take the traditional route with acting or traditional I don't want to say traditional but what usually people do is they take gig jobs. I then decided to take a job doing nonprofit management, and was doing that for a really long time and figured out how to use a full-time nonprofit job to supplement my creative life. And just kind of figured out how to negotiate, instead of salary increases time flexibility, as I as I continued to do both for a while. Oh, my goodness I feel like I'm getting slightly off topic here.

So, anyway, also during this pandemic, with your wonderful prompts and guidance. I created a money coaching business because I was also having conversations with my friends about like what are we going to do during the pandemic, you know, theater is shut down... da da da da da... how to pitch... I was having money conversations with friends. And I was starting to hear these weird ideas about money that I'm like, "That's, that's not true." Kind of like, like lot myths about credit cards and how you use them and all of these other things and, and tracking... I don't know. Just all of these things that I do on the regular, none of my friends were doing and I'm like, "You need to do this because, as actors we are businesses." Let's, let's let's add that layer on of what we're doing. We're all entrepreneurs. We all need to run a business. And so, I've just

been helping fellow creatives work through some of their money, their money, relationship issues, as well as then starting to have the starting the starting to get them to build habits that are going to allow them to sustain themselves longer in our business.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That just sounds like a hug, right there. I mean, who doesn't want that? Could you mention a couple of habits that you think are maybe not universal, but are largely applicable to artists watching that just... habits they could start right now that might make a difference?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

I mean, I think, I mean it sounds small, but some people just never look at their money.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Monster under the bed.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, and, and it doesn't make it go away. So, I also, I find it very similar to, you know, working out and wanting to eat healthy. That you have to.... What is my... What am I going to say? It's not going to, you're not going to change overnight, again, incrementally, but also it needs consistency. Money is just part of our world. And so, to ignore it, it's going to eventually create pain in other parts of your life. So yes, looking at the money. Also starting to track where you spend your money.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

I think a lot of people have no idea where their money goes.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah. And, and what's interesting is that you really need to be honest where you spend your money, to see if they align with what you value in your life. And just getting honest about... getting honest about that. Like if you say you know I, I really care about eating healthy. But then you start looking at where you're spending money and you're spending money at not the most healthy places, then clearly your habit is stronger than your, your wanting... the belief that you want to have and the value that you say you have. And habits are really hard to change but habits are so powerful in creating a solid foundation.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Totally agree. Yeah, and I love that one because I think there's a saying that if you want to show me who you are. Show me your your bank, your bank statement, and your calendar.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, yep.



**Bonnie Gillespie**

That these two things tell me everything I need to know about what you value in life and who you want to be. And if you've got stated goals that are counter to those two documents, fix those documents.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, exactly. And you got to be honest with yourself then.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

So, what happens if I'm honest with myself and suddenly I go, "Oh my god, I thought I was doing so much that's right for myself and now I realize I have some really not-great spending habits that are counter to my stated goals"? What's the next step, other than working with you, obviously? Forgiveness, tapping, like... where do we start?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah. I mean I do think... I think, I think absolutely don't judge yourself for, for, that there's a slight disconnect. Just acknowledge that. "Okay. I have valued where I spent my money. I say this is where I want my values to be." And slowly getting them to align, you know, like, because if you do dramatic shifts that does not necessarily mean they're going to stay as opposed to building a habit of, like, "I'm just going to spend \$20 less on this thing that I say I don't value."

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That's great.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, and that's... that's kind of, yeah.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

That's... I think the word of the interview is incremental. Making incremental changes in systemic racism and representation and misogyny and all the things, all the isms. And we're making incremental progress with our money mindset, and our, our self-nurturing and care around our goals. Where do you see us... I don't even want to give you a date out in the future, we'll but we'll wrap on this... as, as we get to that Hollywood we're creating... that is, you know, the Hollywood we want... where do you see us landing with everything that's so filled with change right now?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Oh man, I, I'm gonna dream big. And there's no like date... right as we're talking about incremental. I'm like, "Okay Des that's what you keep saying needs to happen. You need to be patient." We don't want to be judged by our most basic uncontrolled features. We just want to be a human telling a story. And so, what I would love it... if we have so many examples of so many different kinds of people experiencing just the normal things of life. Right, like, a lot of

times, you know, the examples of Asians that I had in TV were the sex kitten, the prostitute, or the overly overly sized best friend. And I don't naturally fit any of those. So, for a long time I was like, "Well, I really love acting but I'm just not entirely sure where I fit but I'm, I'm still gonna do it anyway." And I just, you know, I'm just a normal person. I generally kind of fall in line with just average experiences. I don't know and I want to be able to just play those. Yeah, I don't know... did that answer the question?

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Yeah, because I think there's something really, really lovely about this future view, whenever it is. That it is almost non-remarkable, because it is just "I play roles."

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

And that to me says progress from where we currently are. I think we're in the midst of a pendulum swing that's going from, "You get no camera time to get all the camera time in the world and we're going to make sure that you get seen doing all the things even stuff you would never do that just doesn't make any sense and it's going to feel performative and all that."

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yes, yes, yes 100%. And...

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Whiplash.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Right, and it makes the decision-maker feel really good about themselves.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

White savior again.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

100% 100% They have centered themselves somehow in this conversation.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Always really good at that. Talk about a superpower! yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Oh yeah.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

"I will center myself." Yeah. Good job. But there's something really lovely about the idea of a non remarkable actor experience, irrespective of any of this.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Because there's so many of us, so that's great.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Thank you, this is absolutely wonderful. I had no idea where our conversation would go and I love everywhere it went and more.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

I'm totally un- unstopping the recording to come back on... un-stopping the pause" Where can people stalk you... I mean find you, without it feeling stalkerish? Where can people who want to keep up with your journey plug in with you, please?

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Yeah, I am on Instagram at @desmeejung and my website is desireemeejung. Also, my money coaching website is moneycoach.desireemeejung.com.

**Bonnie Gillespie**

Beautiful. All right, thank you, I appreciate that. All right. Thanks, Des. Bye.

**Desiree Mee Jung**

Bye.