

Amber Rose Mason

Daniel Schindler [00:00:07] So this is interview with Ambrose Mason on August 11th at 9:16am I Amber?

Amber Rose Mason [00:00:17] Hi.

Daniel Schindler [00:00:19] Thank you so much for sitting down with me this morning. This is great. Can you tell us a little bit about how you're associated with the Players? And I know you're one of the true locals around here and how you're associated with the area.

Amber Rose Mason [00:00:34] Yeah. So I grew up in Nevada City and my family's been here for like four generations. I think I'm a fourth generation. And I started doing the opera House in 95, and I worked there or volunteered there for 11 summers. And then I transferred over and I worked at the brewery for three summers after that. I started out as like a child actor. They needed they need some children to be in Rip Van Winkle. And my friend had been in a play prior to that. And so I was like the shyest human being on Earth. I don't even know if I could say my name out loud. And so I obviously did not get cast with lines, but I got to be the lead dwarf. And I also got to be the child that ran across the stage with the dog. And so that was really special to get to have BJ's dog and go across the stage. I really loved it. Anyway, so that started my love of acting because I didn't have to be shy anymore and I could just it could be larger than life. And that really helped me as a child. And and then, yeah, so I worked for B.J. and then I worked for Peter Walther hired me. And then that my last year at the Opera House, I was working for Stacy Gordon and Greg Johnson.

Daniel Schindler [00:02:09] And then you shifted.

Amber Rose Mason [00:02:10] And then I shifted to the Brewery.

Daniel Schindler [00:02:13] How did that happen? How did you get... there are a lot of people I've interviewed. Well, I shouldn't say a lot. There is a very select group, actually, that has done both houses. So, you're one of those as well.

Amber Rose Mason [00:02:22] Yeah.

Amber Rose Mason [00:02:23] So I think growing up in Virginia City, watching the brewery, you know, that was the and the risqué show. And, and I never really thought that I could do that because I didn't really find myself I didn't think I was very comedic and I was definitely not a strong singer. And so I had two friends that were working at the Opera House with me, and they fell in love with the Brewery, and they kept talking about working for the Brewery, and it just kind of planted a seed in my brain. So they had auditions in Missoula. And I went and auditioned for them and they actually didn't give me a callback because they thought I was going for the Shakespeare company because my Shakespeare monologue was pretty strong. And they're like, she's going to the Shakespeare company. We're not going to call her back, you know? And I walked in and I was like, Why didn't you guys call me back? They're like, we didn't think you wanted to work for us. And so, yeah, I crossed the street and it was really, really fun, really amazing. It was incredible to go from doing three shows a summer to just doing the one show that was kind of a mental shift. But but I really loved working at the Brewery. It was fun. Yeah

Daniel Schindler [00:03:32] What about it was, I mean, I. I know what's different about the formats, right? But how is that different from from an actor's point of view.

Amber Rose Mason [00:03:40] Well, I think the biggest thing was I love playing with the audience and getting to interact with the audience so much more. Like at the Opera House, you interact a little bit, but there is still the... for the most part, there's a fourth wall and you've got to learn your lines. And at the Brewery it's kind of a free for all. Once you learn your established acts, you get to improv, you get to do whatever you want. And it's so interactive. And I really I really enjoyed playing with the audience and that was fun. And every night it was really different and it was really fun to. I mean, at the Opera House, you kind of had your standard audience. They'd clap, they'd laugh the same points all the time. But the Brewery never knew how the audience was going to take it and trying to play with the audience and trying to get them to play with you if they weren't like we did a lot of matinees and it was so challenging. And the first time I was there we were the matinee group, so we just did pretty much all matinees except for like Monday and Tuesday night or something odd like that.

Daniel Schindler [00:04:42] That was a year where they had to, to cast, right? Yeah.

Amber Rose Mason [00:04:46] So I didn't work with Mike the first two years. I mean, he was our director, but I was with Don and Cal the first year. So it is really interesting. There was a big shift to go from the Opera House to the Brewery.

Daniel Schindler [00:05:05] What is it like? I mean, what is it like growing up in Virginia City and like, seeing the players from the time you were small and then being part of that troupe.

Amber Rose Mason [00:05:15] So growing up, my family would take me to see the Opera House like, you know, a couple times a year. And and it was a little bit like the gunfighters that used to be in Nevada City. My eyes were always like, my gosh, these people are the most amazing human beings on earth. I just knew immediately that that's who I wanted to be hanging out with. My mom would always have to go down and pick me up from Nevada City because if I ever wasn't on like unsupervised, I'd be running down to the gunfighters to hang out with them. She'd be like pulling me by the ear back home. But they they were icons in most everyone's eyes in Virginia City, but especially little children's. And we go. And they'd let us come in for the ollos or for the variety acts at intermission. And they'd let us sit in the back and watch. And I bet you I spent. Half my summers in that building watching those variety shows. So to get to watch everything and then getting a chance to be a part, it was like it was truly a dream come true. I mean, especially for such a shy person. That was really incredible.

Daniel Schindler [00:06:28] I'll have trouble believeing you're shy.

Amber Rose Mason [00:06:29] I know, I know. I've become I've. I've learned to become an extrovert, but it's taken a long, long time. But growing up here, you know, we were really it's such a close community and it still is. But we really ran the town. There was five of us girls that were all the same age and we were hooligans. We just ran around like wild and we'd be riding our horses absolutely everywhere. I'm sure we caused a lot of chaos. I'm sure we gave a lot of people heartburn, but we just had free rein and our parents really didn't. They knew we were horseback or, you know, hanging out at the Opera House. So they didn't worry.

Daniel Schindler [00:07:10] I was going to say, and I just recorded this. That's the first time I remember meeting you was when you guys rode by your horses. And you'd ride by every day.

Amber Rose Mason [00:07:17] All the time.

Daniel Schindler [00:07:17] We'd be on breaks, and we'd be sitting outside of the Brewery and and there they would go.

Amber Rose Mason [00:07:22] Yep, and I think it was one of our favorite things was like to see who was in town, especially when you guys first got there was like, Ooh, who's here? Who's back? Let's go see. Do we know anybody.

Daniel Schindler [00:07:32] Now as a kid? Did you come to the Brewery?

Amber Rose Mason [00:07:36] I don't think I was allowed to the Brewery till I was like, I think I was probably 12 when I first came. My mom definitely did not go to the brewery. It's not her cup of tea. She did come every time I was... I mean, she, she, she never missed a show. I did. So she always came.

Daniel Schindler [00:07:58] So you become a legitimate actress in major films. How did did that sort of working in little Houses in this town shift over to that?

Amber Rose Mason [00:08:10] Yes. So I started out and when I was 12. B.J. cast me as Tobias in Sweeney Todd, and I got to play a boy, and I cut my hair. And that was the first moment I remember realizing that you could do this as a profession. I was like, Wait, what? I could do this. And then they let me be in an olio and I got to be in a side part in She Stoops To Conquer and like, it just kind of started building this really big love in me. And I decided then that I wanted to be an actor and I wanted to go to University of Washington because a lot of people were from University of Washington, and that didn't work out. I didn't make it there. But, I went to school in Missoula and got a BFA in acting and costume design. I've never used the costume design degree, but I have continued acting. I have. I got my equity card and did national tours with the Montana Repertory Theater. And I've been to like 40 states, performing all over. And then now I'm SAG-AFTRA. And yeah, it just led into this love of acting. And when I started in college, I really wanted to be a Shakespearean actress. That was my goal. I wanted to work in regional theater and mostly, like probably Oregon is what I kind of my goal was. And then by the time I got done with school, I had totally morphed and wanted to just be a theater or a film actress because I had my costuming Professor was from L.A. and she was like, You need to go to L.A. And it just... A whole thing shifted in me, and I started doing all these short films in Missoula and really learning the etiquette of film and how small it is. And I went from being so big and, you know, like really so big in both the Opera House and the Brewery.

Daniel Schindler [00:10:20] Yeah, the personas are... You have to be strong.

Amber Rose Mason [00:10:23] Yeah...and you have to at that back row or, you know, your characters are larger than life and all this stuff. So then when I got to do film acting and I realized how my minute it was and how small and quiet. It became this new challenge for me because I had to totally shift gears and, and I started to really love it. And then I started working on this ranch. And and then I realized, yeah, here after I graduated, I came back. My mother was dating one of the owners of the ranch. And so and I fell in love

with one of the ranch hands. Long story short, I'm still there 17 years later. But I realized that doing theater was really difficult here in Montana, especially being an equity actor like you can't be an equity actor in Montana.

Daniel Schindler [00:11:12] There's only so many places.

Amber Rose Mason [00:11:14] And there's it's like it's like one now because Montana Repertory doesn't hire equity actors anymore, and the only one I know of is in Whitefish, and they do all musical theater, and I'm not really a musical theater person. So the film industry just fit me. And so, like, I can go away for two, you know, two weeks, a month, a week, a day, whatever it takes to do a film because it's so short. And so that just kind of started to fit my schedule more. And so, yeah, so I graduated, went to L.A., worked, you know, did the auditioning game for three winters. It was a blast. I did love it.

Daniel Schindler [00:11:55] You did?

[00:11:55] I did. I really loved it. And when my mom got sick with cancer, I came back home to be with her. And I needed a job that I could do that would bring me bring in money. But I wasn't, like, beholden to a 9 to 5. And so I started starting colts, training horses for people. And so now pretty much I train colts, I work on this ranch, and then I act whenever possible. Whenever anything comes through. I'm auditioning. I audition. Like I had two auditions last week. I had two auditions the week before. So I'm kind of trying to keep my foot in the acting world but not have to live in the rat race.

Daniel Schindler [00:12:36] Right? We have a very unique set of skills.

Amber Rose Mason [00:12:40] Yeah, I do now.

Daniel Schindler [00:12:41] As a horse horse person.

[00:12:43] Yeah! Yeah.

[00:12:43] That can handle horses and ride and all that stuff you would want in any given Western.

Amber Rose Mason [00:12:47] Yes. And I've wrangled films for, you know, I've been the head wrangler on several films, short films, TV shows. And it kind of breaks my heart to do that because my horses are for a certain set of skills and having dudes ride them is not ideal. So I kind of backed off of that idea. But yeah, it's really fun. It's a really fun set of skills to get to use.

Daniel Schindler [00:13:16] Very eclectic.

Amber Rose Mason [00:13:18] Thanks. But both skills started in Virginia City, Montana.

Daniel Schindler [00:13:24] Right! Which is fascinating to me. Really, really fascinating. So here's a question I've asked. I think everybody interviewed with it, and it's something I've thought about because I fell in love with this place. I grew up in Montana and went to Montana State and Rocky Mountain College and ended up here for seven summers. What do you think the Players mean to the community in the town? Because there's a lot of places that theaters open, the theaters close and run a few seasons then close.

Amber Rose Mason [00:13:54] Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:13:55] Here. This place has run for 76 years. And it can't just be because a lot of tourists come through in the summer. I don't buy that.

Amber Rose Mason [00:14:01] Yeah, that I think, I think for me, especially for me. I think, I'm going to get teary eyed, I think that the Opera House is really the lifeblood. The theaters, both theaters and now the Brewery too are lifebloods of Virginia City. So many people come year after year after year after year just to see those. Now, of course, the train and the candy store make a lot of money. But I think that for a destination, people really come for that culture and something different than you're going to get anywhere else in the world, really. And. I don't know. I have a... I've always fought with this growing up, having been with B.J. first and then crossing over to Peter and then crossing over to Stacy. I've had three different experiences with three different directors and and their integrity and what they want to bring to the community and what the theater means to them. And and it's really interesting how each one of them changes. But at the end of the day, they all service that community. And I think that. Good, bad or otherwise. They're all the lifeblood for Virginia City and they really help them.

Daniel Schindler [00:15:25] That's great. That's a good answer.

Amber Rose Mason [00:15:28] I've thought about it a lot. It's like there's been a lot of moral. I've had a really tough time morally with, you know, going through all three different ones.

Daniel Schindler [00:15:41] Explain that.

Amber Rose Mason [00:15:42] I know I don't I don't want to get too... So when B.J. was there, it really instilled in me this sense of what The Opera house, how the Opera House was started through her Dad. And of course, I didn't know, Larry, but but I knew of him through all the stories and my mother telling stories. My mother told story after story about the opera house when she was young. And so I kind of grew up with this image. And, you know, listening to B.J. of what they wanted to portray, of how they wanted to portray the theater and what the melodrama was, because nobody really does melodrama anymore. And then when Peter took over, there was a... I had a really hard time with it. I had a really hard time with... He did a lot of Disney fairy tales, and there was nothing honoring the melodrama anymore and it was over the top and the acting was ridiculous. And it wasn't. It wasn't about staying true to form anymore. It was just about simply entertaining people. That's how I felt. Of course I was young, but that's how it felt. And. And I did, I really came to appreciate Peter and what he brought and that kind of needing to, you know, maybe him feeling like he needed to change it up a bit, I guess. But I still always go back to... I believe in tradition and I love that tradition of what B.J. brought and kind of wanting to honor that melodrama and what it started out as. And so when Stacy came on board, I was really excited and I was hoping that we kind of get back to the maybe a little bit more of the technical aspects of the theater. I don't think that they really had it long enough, or at least I wasn't there with them long enough to see if they kind of were able to do that. I think it's really hard, especially in a tourist town, to honor anything traditional, but to also make money.

Daniel Schindler [00:17:44] There is that.

Amber Rose Mason [00:17:45] So. And, you know, Virginia City, you went through a pretty good lull there for a while. They went from the Bovey era when they were making tons of money and it was full every weekend to I mean, it got pretty dismal for a while just because the state wasn't promoting Virginia City. There weren't a lot of people coming. Maybe the show's integrity wasn't as good as it used to be. And so it's kind of gone through this wave... Shift.

Daniel Schindler [00:18:13] Yeah. How does how does that feel shifting from. Because I was here. The year that they shifted to private, when Bovey sold the town basically to the state and they started privatizing all of the or everyone had to get a private license to run.

Amber Rose Mason [00:18:31] Yeah, right. Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:18:33] And so it went from sort of a company town.

Amber Rose Mason [00:18:36] Right.

Daniel Schindler [00:18:36] Which is what I remember when I first came here, everybody like the cook staff and the wait staff we all sort of needed each other.

Amber Rose Mason [00:18:42] Eating at the Fargo.

Daniel Schindler [00:18:43] Eating at the Fargo. And we're like one big crew and we would hang out together. And then and then it became very separate.

Amber Rose Mason [00:18:49] Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:18:50] Could you feel that?

Amber Rose Mason [00:18:51] Absolutely. As a child, it definitely felt like the end of an era. Like it was definitely like a closing. And of course, everybody panics and it's like, no, everything's going to get shut down and nothing's ever going to work, you know, because everybody's on their own. But it did sort of itself out. But it was a very segregated community for a while. I feel like it still is now. But yeah, there was such a beautiful camaraderie and togetherness at that point. Now it's fighting, everybody's fighting for their living right now. And that's and that's tough. It's a tough go.

Daniel Schindler [00:19:30] If someone was going to come here and say, I want to work at theaters in Virginia City, what would you tell them?

Amber Rose Mason [00:19:39] Gosh, I don't know. I feel like what I got to experience was so unique. I was hired as a full time actress at 14, and so I ended up doing all the shows and all the vaudeville and all that. But I don't know. This is a really honest answer. I mean, I think it's incredible if somebody gets to come here and experience it. I don't know. I don't know. It's a great question. It is a great question because I just everything's morphed so much since I was young and I feel like I was really blessed and honored to get to be a part of it all. I don't know. I feel like the Opera House has gotten a little campy. It's terrible to say. So if that's what you're, if that's what you're into and your into like community, theater and musicals and like that kind of world. I mean, it's perfect and it's a great stepping stone. I feel like if you're a little bit more, you want to be a little bit more dedicated about craft. Maybe it's. I don't know. Might not be the best place to spend the summer because it can get a little debauchorous. Or at least it has been when I've been around

Daniel Schindler [00:21:00] It has been described to me as summer camp with beer.

Amber Rose Mason [00:21:03] Yeah, uh huh. Yes.

Daniel Schindler [00:21:05] I don't think that's far off.

Amber Rose Mason [00:21:07] It's not. Not at all. No. And I think I had a very different idea of it as well, because I'm living here. I wasn't here on vacation. I wasn't coming into a community and nobody knew me. So I didn't really need to mind my P's and Q's. I grew up here and my grandmothers were in town. You know, like everybody knew my mother. So if I did anything wrong that was going to go back to the headquarters and I was going to get in trouble. So I always had like three jobs. I had 2 or 3 jobs. I worked for Fairweather at nights doing laundry. I worked at the bakery for Sherrie Jarvis, and actually she had a bakery in Virginia City, and I worked for her for seven years. And so, like, I get up and go in at 4 a.m. and then do my shift. And then, if we were rehearsing, I would get a little break and then go to rehearsals and then do the show at night. I don't know what was wrong with me. I've pretty much worked nonstop. It's a lot. Or I'd get off shift at the at the Opera House and then I go do night shift clerking at the hotel and do laundry all night. Anyway, it was it was insane. It was ridiculous. But I think a little bit of that was because it wasn't a vacation for me. It wasn't coming to summer camp for me. This was home and I needed work and I was a workaholic.

Daniel Schindler [00:22:39] Yeah, I get that.

Amber Rose Mason [00:22:43] When I was young, they hired me to help the costumer. I think I was 12 and they hired me to help the costumer. And so I would you know, I had to wash boots because they were all in costume shop for two weeks. Her name was the Leanne. Okay. Can't remember. Leanne Smith or something like that. Anyway, I, you know, learned to do hands, you know, just anything simple. That was my task. And so that kind of started my love for costumes and that carried me into costume design work. But then also there was I think Mo was her name and she was doing sets. She was painting backdrops. And I got to go in a few days and help with that. So when I was in college, I actually took a minor in scenic art painting, scenic art. And so I think both of those led into my choices in college. Clearly all three led into my choices. So that's really interesting.

Daniel Schindler [00:23:50] Now, how old were you when you were doing that?

Amber Rose Mason [00:23:53] I think it was all when I was 12. It was BJ. BJ was amazing for like she really fostered me through that beginning couple of years of like, this is what how the theater works and you can be a part of all of it. Like you're not just an actor or you don't have to just be a technician and she kind of showed me the whole realm of it. And, you know, I'd help with changeovers and all of that. Anything, anywhere I could help. She let me she let me come in and learn.

Daniel Schindler [00:24:21] That's fantastic. Yeah, that's great. That was sort of some of my experience coming up to, people say, you want to do this, come do this.

Amber Rose Mason [00:24:30] Yeah, come learn. Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:24:32] That's right. Thanks.

Amber Rose Mason [00:24:34] Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:24:37] Thank you so much. Yeah. Making time for this. Is there anything else you would you would add that you would like people to know about your city over the players or... how this funny little vortex happens here?

Amber Rose Mason [00:24:51] I don't know. It is an odd little vortex, and I think it's one of the most magical, beautiful places. But you can get stuck really fast. You can lose track of what you're doing or where you're at really fast. But. It's I don't know. It's so unique. And and like you said, a lot of the theaters do close down and they shift and they morph. And Virginia City's just kept rolling with the times. It just keeps changing and morphing and rolling. And that's that's really beautiful that people can hold that idea alive. Still, no matter how difficult it gets to advertise or entice people in to see your show. But they just keep morphing and that's beautiful.

Daniel Schindler [00:25:43] That's great. Thank you so much.

Amber Rose Mason [00:25:46] Yeah.

Daniel Schindler [00:25:47] I think that's about it.

Amber Rose Mason [00:25:49] Gosh. So many memories. It's wild. It's so wild. They just... I haven't thought about it in such a long time.