[Snap judgment]

[*I Love A Parade* song by Harry Richman]

**Glynn:** America loves a parade, whether it's Thanksgiving or Pride, or even Hemingway Day. We love to get out in the streets and tell a story.

[*I Love A Parade* song ends]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Because every parade is a story. A story about community, about the connections in that community, about what the community values. Each new generation gets to choose which parts of the story they're going to tell and which parts they're going to change. Today on Snap Judgment, we send two of our producers, John Fecile and David Exumé, to cover a centuries old tradition and the fight to keep it alive and save it from itself. Snap Judgment.

[countdown for New Year]

**John:** Philadelphia. No city celebrates New Year's like Philly.

**David:** Because in Philadelphia, New Year's Day is Mummers Day.

**Person:** We're here rockin' with the Mummers. We from Philly. It ain't nothing else better to do, baby.

**John:** The streets of Philadelphia explode with color and music and dance.

**David:** Sequins, ruffled feathers, parade floats.

**John:** It's like one week of Mardi Gras condensed into a single day.

[parade music playing]

**John:** I'm John Fecile. I grew up going to this parade.

**David:** And I'm David Exumé. I'd never seen the mummers. Maybe it's because I'm from Jersey.

Everybody, and I mean everybody I have talked to is either a mummer, is like one degree removed from the mummers.

**John:** Trying to explain what a mummer is, is really hard. They're kind of clowns, except they look stunning as they dance down Broad Street in their shiny outfits, some of them with these big, ornate back pieces.

**David:** The parade is divvied up into different sections. Like the mummers in string bands, what you're hearing behind me right now play saxophones, banjos and other instruments while executing choreographed routines.

**John:** There's a division that does comedic sketches, a division that does Broadway-style musical productions.

**David:** They're all competing to win prizes in their respective categories.

**John:** This being a New Year's parade, there's a lot of day drinking.

**David:** Well, morning drinking, really.

**John:** Early morning drinking.

**David:** It's literally 08:00 AM.

**John:** The streets are littered with beer cans. And all the way back to the 1600s, this is how Philadelphia has rung in the New Year.

**Al:** Before getting involved with Vaudevillains, I just thought that, "Okay, you're born into it and that's how you become a mummer," and you're just like, there. Obviously, that didn't happen to me, and it didn't happen to Melissa.

**David:** The Vaudevillains Brigade, part of the comics division, performs satirical sketches about issues affecting Philadelphians.

**Al:** We're going to present these serious topics with all our homemade costumes and this bizarre narrative.

**John:** Al San Valentin is one of the captains.

**Al:** I identify as nonbinary. And Vaudevillains was actually the first place where I felt safe enough to be open and give my pronouns and feel validated.

**Melissa:** This brigade is artists, academics, servers, bartenders, nurses, teachers.

**David:** Melissa MacNair is Al's co-captain.

**Melissa:** And it's a space where everyone is truly allowed to be themselves.

**David:** They've done performances about education funding, infrastructure, but they make it fun.

**John:** Sticking it to the powers that be, very much a part of Mummers Day.

**Al:** So, for example, for education funding, we had a school of fish.

**Person:** Look at those sea creatures.

**Al:** We had teachers.

**Person:** Teacher beavers.

**Al:** Who were beavers.

**Person:** They're doing a school theme. It's called school-- [voice fades away]

**Al:** Then there was like a toxic sludge that was metaphorically cutting off the funding to the school of fish. [laughs]

**Person:** See what you did there, school of fish.

**Person:** [laughs]

**David:** In a way, Al and Melissa represent the new vanguard of the Mummers Parade.

**John:** The millennial and Gen Z Philadelphians hoping to make the parade their own.

**Al:** Spending New Year's Day with 75 people who you love is pretty special. We are all usually in tears.

**Person:** Oh, my gosh.

**Al:** [laughs] We're usually in tears by Pine Street.

**David:** But standing on the street on Mummers Day 2022, one thing was pretty obvious, at least to me.

I don’t see a lot of people that look like me in the parade and I was wondering if [crosstalk] at all.

**Person:** Right. Yeah. I was saying that too. I've seen a few, not many.

**Person:** I ain't going to lie. That was one of my first thoughts, like, "Where is the black people?"

**John:** Now, did you all grow up in Philly?

**In Unison:** Yes.

**John:** Did y'all attend the Mummers Parade as kids? You ever seen it as kids?

**Person:** Yes, we did.

**David:** We went to talk to members of the Philadelphia Elks Lodge. Ivy Palmer, Frank Wright and Greg and Keith Freeman.

**John:** The Elks are a black fraternal organization in North Philly.

**David:** What about when you were younger? Was there any interest in the mummers then?

**Person:** For me? No. [laughs]

**David:** That's what we're trying to get at with this thing, is you can't get enthused for something that for years you didn't think you were part of.

So, why the blackface?

**Person:** Because I like it.

**Person:** Why not?

**Person:** Yeah, why not?

**Television Anchor:** Some mummers wearing blackface is stirring up controversy.

**John:** If you're not from Philadelphia and about the Mummers Parade, it's probably because you heard a story like this.

**Person:** I know it's a shame to be white in Philly right now. Yeah.

**David:** For those who can't see it, this is news tape of two mummers being interviewed on the street wearing blackface.

**John:** Stuff like this happens at the Mummers Parade, not infrequently.

**David:** There have been routines in recent years mocking undocumented immigrants.

**Person:** I think we see space aliens and then illegal aliens.

**David:** Native Americans.

**Person:** The Tomahawk chop, they charge.

**John:** We dig into the history, and it just gets more fraught. I mean, blackface was officially a part of the parade until 1964.

**David:** That's because the mummers bit a lot of their style from minstrelsy. Even the parade's theme song is a minstrel tune.

**Person:** You wonder why blacks don't want to be involved with the mummers? Who wants to be involved with nonsense like that?

**David:** Ivy Palmer from the Philadelphia Elks showed us a black and white picture of the Ovy Cato string band, the last all-black mummers string bands to compete in the parade.

**Ivy:** They got tired of coming in the last place, so they disbanded from being in the mummers in 1929.

**John:** Philadelphia is one of the most segregated cities in the country and the parade's origins are in historically white South Philadelphia.

**Person:** We weren't too much welcomed in South Philly. That was the area you just didn't go to.

**Person:** Yeah. When you come down this part of Broad Street, North Philly, we'll go. [laughs]

**David:** Over the past 30 years, Philadelphia has gone from a majority white city to a majority city of color.

**John:** And attendance at the Mummers Parade has plummeted.

**David:** The parade's route has been shortened again and again.

**Reporter:** The Mummers Parade is on life support as Mayor Jim Kenney rebukes the Mummers organization with his strongest terms yet.

**David:** After those two mummers were interviewed in blackface, the Mayor of Philadelphia threatened to cancel the whole thing.

**John:** Like he was ridding the city of a long-tolerated nuisance.

**Melissa:** For me, I think that the work that needs to be done, needs to be done with the people who participate in the parade and not against them.

**John:** Melissa from the Vaudevillains believes that all mummers, including those behind the offensive performances, need to be a part of the solution here.

**Melissa:** I think that's the way to move things forward, to have a parade that everyone can enjoy and that everyone can feel safe in. That's much easier said than done, but I think it's worth at least trying.

**David:** There are 8,000 to 10,000 mummers in the parade.

**John:** And we talked to dozens of them for this story, including division leaders, string band captains, mummers whose families have been in the parade for generations.

**David:** Like a 15-year-old boy who leads one of the string bands and inherited the job after his dad passed away.

**John:** Everyone we talked to spoke about the need to keep these hurtful and derogatory displays from hitting the streets and to make the parade more inclusive.

**Jesse:** I either wanted to fix this parade or kill it. It means too much to me and it's too powerful. It's too much of a defining characteristic of Philadelphia to be a bad thing. I want it to better or I want it to go away.

**David:** This is artist, Jesse Engaard. He's one of many who have set out to change this parade, to make it as inclusive as everyone wants it to be.

**John:** Here's the thing. He actually kind of succeeded. This all started over a decade ago.

**David:** In 2010, Jesse formed a group called The Rabble Rousers with a bunch of friends he was living with in a warehouse.

**Jesse:** Everybody made their own costumes, and it was just hot glue and scissors. We had like long nights every weekend for months coming up with ideas, making it funnier and funnier and funnier.

**David:** And they came in hot.

**John:** They won first prize in the comics division for a skit that showed city politicians scrapping the Liberty Bell for cash.

**Jesse:** Just to make their budget make sense. So, we melted down the Liberty Bell.

**David:** But in 2013, that same year that Jesse took first prize, he heard about another performance by the Ferko String Band.

**Jesse:** After I saw that video, I was like, "How am I part of this?"

**Anthony:** Music was the deciding factor behind the minstrel theme.

**John:** Anthony Celenza, Jr., was the captain of the Ferko String Band that year.

**David:** The title of their performance was *Bringing Back the Minstrel Days*.

**John:** The entire band wore dark face paint, while Anthony sang Al Jolson's *My Mammy* in front of a giant mirror.

**Anthony:** We weren't insulting anyone. We were paying tribute to somebody's great entertainers. We were doing what they did.

**Ivy:** This guy is going to try to justify them putting on blackface because that's how they used to do it.

**David:** Ivy Palmer from the Philadelphia Elks has seen the video too.

**Ivy:** It wasn't all right then, so what makes you think it's all right now?

**John:** The band's faces were painted purple and orange technically.

**Person:** But otherwise, all the hallmarks of minstrel costumes, the white gloves, the ruby red lips were all there. I mean, they were hoisting cutouts of *the* Jim Crow in the air behind them.

**John:** To Jesse Engaard, the message was clear.

**Jesse:** I don't care if it's purple blackface, it's still blackface. It's like, "Yeah, I know it's a swastika, but it's purple. So, it's not a swastika, is it?" I couldn't just walk away at that point. I had to do something.

[stimulating music]

**Glynn:** When we return, Jesse tries to fix a parade that he loves. But how do you undo centuries of tradition? Who mums the mummers?

[Snap Judgment]

[stimulating music]

Welcome back. When last we left, a blackface routine in Philadelphia's Mummers Parade made mummer, Jesse Engaard, say, "Enough things have to change." But Jesse can't do it alone.

[scintillating music]

**David:** Jesse immediately reached out to the leaders of the different mummers' divisions.

**Jesse:** I just made a few simple calls to change the judging, like to punish racist skits more harshly and to educate people who don't understand.

**John:** His message was simple.

**Jesse:** Your parade is going away if you keep allowing this type of stuff.

**David:** The parade leadership knew this was true. They wanted to protect their tradition as much as anyone.

**Jesse:** As mummers' leaders, we need to be reaching out, making people know that they're welcome and giving them a place in this parade.

**Ian:** They said that they were looking to bring the LGBTQIA+ community back to the Mummers Parade.

**John:** So, the mummers helped put together the Miss Fancy Brigade, a group of drag queens.

**Ian:** Well, my name is Ian Morrison. I am better known as Brittany Lynn, like a Philadelphia drag queen here, born and raised in Philly.

**David:** In 2015, Ian and the Miss Fancies were asked to lead the entire parade.

**Ian:** How could I say no to represent the city on such a big scale? It's their biggest parade. For me, it's for all of the LGBTQIA people that are unable to be their full selves, questioning youth, nonbinary children, adults that aren't able to come out. For them to see us on TV, that's broadcasted everywhere for New Year's Day, that's the big push why I wanted to do this, for visibility.

**David:** That year, the parade's route had been changed again due to declining attendance.

**Ian:** They put us in the very front so we could face the angry people [chuckles] first.

**John:** Hundreds of pissed off mummers decided they would march the old route, which went in the opposite direction from South Philly towards City Hall.

**Ian:** We just came around City Hall. There's cheers, this and that, and I see the brigades from the other side walk in the opposite way.

**David:** These were a type of mummers called Wenches. They're unruly, hard drinking.

**John:** And they wear silky dresses while holding parasols. They're kind of frightening, actually.

**Ian:** We all kind of grabbed hands and kept marching, and they start crossing the street. "What's going to happen here?" I was like, "This is that moment. This is the stonewall moment." I said to all the girls, "Everybody look in your purse and get out what you got to get out to help. [laughs] Anybody got a knife? Who's got brass knuckles?" It was coming down to that.

**David:** For a moment, there was a standoff between the two groups. Then, one of the Wenches stuck out his hands.

**Ian:** "We really want to thank you for what you're doing. You're really keeping this parade alive. We might not agree on the route here, but we appreciate you guys and what you're doing to keep this tradition going." They all took pictures. It was such a moment of relief that I wasn't going to be on the news fighting somebody with my wig on.

**John:** When the Wenches are out there in the street embracing change, that says a lot.

**David:** The next year, 2016, was a big one.

**John:** Because the mummers were now required to attend sensitivity training.

**Jennifer:** Satire and the rules of satire. We're going to start with talking about rule number one. Punch up.

**David:** Comedian, Jennifer Childs, delivered one of these trainings in character as a YouTube persona Patsy from South Philly.

**Jennifer:** 1901, 1910. You can't say hell, you can't say damn. You can't say "Holy G" because it sounds too much like Holy Jesus. You can't say cockeyed or cockamamie or cockatoo or cockatiel or cocka-nothing. But youse could call people mixed, youse could call people whops, youse could call people crowds. In fact, that was the comedy of the day. Cut to now, you could say hell, you could say damn, you could say cocka-whatever-you-please, but those ethnic slurs, you can't say that anymore because it's offensive.

**Person:** It was pretty funny to see that because there was a lot of resistance and people felt like they were being punished by being made to learn about other people's feelings.

**Al:** Now, when you hear sensitivity training, it's almost like implying that, "Well, you're not sensitive, so you need training to be sensitive." So, it immediately invoked this defensiveness.

**John:** Al and Melissa from the Vaudevillains didn't think the trainings went far enough.

**Melissa:** Right. Because if participants in the parade aren't understanding harm that's being caused, then there's nothing--

**Al:** You're not going to convince them not to do it.

**Melissa:** You're not going to convince them not to do it, and they're not going to learn from it.

**John:** But that wasn't the only step that was taken in 2016.

**David:** The mummers decided to go all in on inclusivity and show everyone that the parade wasn't just for straight white people from South Philly.

**Jesse:** I was like, "Okay, this is going in a good direction."

**John:** That year, Jesse Engaard helped bring a whole bunch of different groups into the parade.

**Jesse:** I wanted to invite the Puerto Rican Group, Los Bomberos de la Calle, I wanted to invite the Steel Drum Band that I met, some Steppers from North Philly. I wanted to invite the Carnavaleros to be a part of it.

**Person:** Can you tell me about what we're doing right now?

**David Piña:** This is a parade we're doing here.

**David:** David Piña is head of the San Mateo Carnivaleros.

**David Piña:** This is from the French army, and this is Mexican.

**David:** Every year, he organizes a huge Cinco de Mayo parade with live music.

**David Piña:** A big sombrero.

**David:** Where participants dress up and reenact the Battle of Puebla.

**David Piña:** Red, green, and white color.

**John:** It's a lot like Mummer's Day.

**David:** Which is exactly what David thought the first time he saw the mummers.

**David Piña:** My dream, it was like one day to be part of them, marching over there with my group, my costumes, my tradition.

**John:** So, when Jesse reached out to him about joining the mummers, David was floored.

**David Piña:** I say, "Wow." [chuckles] I was very surprised about it.

**David:** He knew about the racism, but here was an opportunity to perform his tradition for all of Philadelphia and on TV.

**David Piña:** They give us a chance. They give us opportunity to be there. So, why not?

**Jesse:** The idea about it was to celebrate Philadelphia's diversity.

**John:** Ian Morrison and the Miss Fancy Brigade were put together with these new groups in one division that was called The Philadelphia Division.

**Ian:** You know, for all of Philadelphia.

**Person:** It was made up of all of the groups that didn't really fit into any of the other categories. So, what it really was all of the minority groups.

**David:** Drag queens, steppers, people reenacting the Battle of Puebla, all lumped together.

**Jesse:** They put them at the beginning of the parade, which no one watches, and put them in a separate division that was apart from everything else. And I was like, "All right."

**John:** It wasn't exactly what Jesse Engaard had pictured.

**Jesse:** They failed by not giving them scores and calling them not mummers and disqualifying them from the parade.

**David:** The judges had decided that the Philadelphia Division wouldn't be eligible for prizes like other groups.

**John:** Still, they got glowing reviews and the spectators loved it.

**Person:** Happy New Year, guys.

**David:** Okay, so mission accomplished. All the groups in the Philadelphia Division could head home and just kick back.

**Ian:** We had already finished marching at that point, so we were just at one of the bars having a good time when my phone started blowing up.

**John:** Two city councilmen were calling Ian.

**Ian:** "We're sorry about what's going on." And I had no idea.

**David:** Over the phone, the two city councilmen apologized to Ian for a transphobic skit by the Finnegan New Year's Brigade about Caitlyn Jenner. I'm not going to describe it for you, just give it a listen.

[skit playing in background]

**John:** Jesse Engaard quickly heard about it.

**Jesse:** They absolutely dehumanized Caitlyn Jenner for having surgery.

**David:** Videos of a mummer screaming a homophobic slur also made it online. And in Philadelphia's Gayborhood, a man was assaulted.

**Reporter:** John Holtz says he was walking his dog when two mummers in red, white, and blue outfits who were urinating in the alley began shouting homophobic slurs.

**John:** I turned over to the guy just to kind of say like, "Cool your jets, buddy," and his buddy jumped in, clocks me in the face.

**Ian:** It was a big disaster. The city and us put out such an effort to showcase Philadelphia's diversity and the city's commitment to showcasing that diversity, that was all the work that we just did was just everybody just forgot about that.

**Reporter:** The alleged offensive acts didn't end there. Comics Brigade, Sammar Strutters, performed their acts, Siesta to Fiesta, with brown-painted faces.

**David:** Another brigade wore taco costumes and sombreros and painted their faces brown.

**David:** If that makes you happy, then do it. [laughs]

**John:** David Piña shrugged it off.

**David Piña:** It's not me what they doing. It's not me because I'm not a taco.

**John:** The San Mateo Carnivaleros no longer march in the Mummers Parade.

**David Piña:** A lot of immigrants like me and everybody else, we work that day, so not everybody free to be over there.

**David:** Plus, when it comes down to it, David would rather just put his time and money into his own parade of Cinco de Mayo.

**David Piña:** That day, we forgot everything. Only we want dancing, have fun and be happy.

**John:** None of the other groups from the Philadelphia Division march in the parade anymore either.

**David:** After the mess that was 2016, Jesse Engaard was devastated.

**Jesse:** That was my experiment. And sadly, I feel like it failed and that it doesn't speak well for institutions in general because everything is built from white supremacy.

**John:** Once again, he'd called on mummers' leaders to punish the offending brigades.

**Jesse: "**People from your group were spotted violently assaulting somebody in the Gayborhood. How can you not make a big deal about this?"

**David:** They brushed them off.

**Jesse:** I was like, "No, that's not going to fly. If you're not going to talk to them about it and you're not going to make a big deal about this, then I'm gone."

**John:** Jesse decided that the next year, 2017, would be his last in the parade and he was going to go out with a bang.

[scintillating music]

**Glynn:** When we return, Jesse makes the next parade, one that the mummers will never forget. Stay tuned.

[scintillating music]

Welcome back. After trying and failing to make the Philadelphia Mummers more inclusive, Jesse Engaard and his group, The Rabble Rousers, they got some shit to say.

**Jesse:** All right, here comes the best mummer skit that I can imagine making at this point.

**David:** New Year's Day, 2017.

**Jesse:** Well, in 2017, you would have seen a giant toilet rolling down the street with a big poop coming out of it, dancing around, blowing kisses to the crowd.

**John:** Three British-looking judges with powdered wigs on, dance over to the anthropomorphic poop and pin a first-place ribbon on it.

**Jesse:** They give first place to the shit who really represented everything that the mummer stands for, that is awful. And so, everybody joins in a big old dance at the end. It felt really good. It felt like a ritual to banish this stuff.

**David:** Mummers' leaders did not get the joke.

**John:** And one writer in The Philadelphia Inquirer actually singled them out in print.

**Jesse:** All right, let me find it. "This was the single most tasteless thing I have seen in 40 years of parade watching." I'm like, "You're going to call a toilet with poop coming out of it that is making everyone laugh more offensive than racist transphobic all the shit that's happened? That is exactly our whole point."

**David:** Jesse stayed true to his word and left the parade after 2017.

**Jesse:** I'm done doing that 'capital M' Mummers stuff. I'm into the lowercase mummers. I just want to do the door to door marching around the neighborhood and getting people involved and just having a good time.

**John:** He's been helping build community gardens in North Philly. He directed a parade for an LGBTQ community center.

**David:** And he even organized the brass bands to march in Kensington on New Year's Day.

**John:** Do you miss the mummers?

**Jesse:** Yeah. The mummers is definitely the most fun I've ever had. The parts of it where it's just people dancing and people being goofy and making people smile and making people scream and having a good time, having a memorable time, remembering a year gone by, that's pretty important. It's like a birthday for everybody. Why else are we living in a city if we can't just pour out onto the streets and party together, every once in a while at least?

**Melissa:** Left, right, left, right, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle. [laughs]

**Al:** Wait, is that a shimmy or a wiggle?

**John:** As for the Vaudevillains, Al and Melissa choose to stay.

**Melissa:** Have you ever been in a room with 80 other adults and--

**Al:** --and some children.

**Melissa:** And some children. And in unison did [laughs] a dance that is even more ridiculous than the electric slide, and you all have the most serious, concentrated looks on your face because you're trying so hard to get your moves right? [laughs] And then, it's go over and you look around [laughs] and it's just like we did the most hilarious-- [laughs]

**Al:** We did that. We really did that.

**David:** Giving up that joy feels like surrender.

**Al:** Going down Fifth Street and seeing the kids come out and they're like Mexican or Southeast Asian kids. These kids are waking up on this New Year's Day, and that's the first thing they see in the New Year. It's us going down the street and this music and dancing and glitter, and that's awesome.

**David:** There are definitely mummers of color. Not many, but they are there.

**Al:** So, I'm Filipino. I'm very visibly brown.

**John:** As far as we know, Al is the only person of color in a leadership position in the parade.

**David:** Do you ever think about that?

**Al:** I do think about it. How do I feel about it? It feels lonely. I'm here though. So, there's that. That's not making headlines. I'm hoping that other POC folks who would have thought about joining, who would like to join, something like that, can see me and be like, "Okay, I could see myself here, maybe."

It's been a tradition as old as Philadelphia itself, and I think that the structural racism, homophobia, misogyny that is present in these displays that happen during the parade are the same structural, racism, misogyny, homophobia that's in every institution in America. To say that we're just going to throw this out is a total cop-out, and it's not actually doing the work that you need to do to disentangle those problems from the institutions in which they live.

[parade music playing]

**News Anchor:** 702 Now. Today is the big day. The Philadelphia Mummers Parade will march--

**David:** 2022 was the first time the mummers had marched down Broad Street in two years after COVID canceled the parade for the first time since the Great Depression.

**Person:** We saw some high kicks. I'm telling you, they're the highest they've ever been.

**David:** Crowds packed the bleachers by City Hall to watch the mummers do their thing.

**John:** But a few blocks away from City Hall was a different story.

**Person:** I mean, I've been going out in those things since I'm 10. I'm 66.

**John:** And you've never seen it like this?

**Person:** Never. I've never seen this place like this. Have you?

**John:** Streets that are normally impossible to walk down on New Year's Day were basically empty.

**David:** And the Vaudevillains were nowhere to be seen.

**Melissa:** Guys, thank you all for coming here. It's been a really, really hard year.

**John:** A few days earlier, the Vaudevillains had all gotten together in a parking lot.

**Melissa:** We as captains had decided to drop out, and we were about to make the big announcement to the group. Al and I were crying and holding hands.

**Al:** Yeah, we were definitely holding hands. [chuckles]

**Melissa:** I feel like it might be the responsible thing to drop out.

**David:** Covid cases were surging.

**John:** And suddenly marching with thousands of people didn't seem safe.

**David:** The parade would just have to go on without them.

**Melissa:** We wanted to have everyone here to see your beautiful faces and to experience joy [laughs] of being together right now.

**David:** About 20 people were gathered in the parking lot. The theme of their performance was germs, so some people were in costume.

**John:** Sequined blazers, frilly pants, funny hats.

**Melissa:** How's everyone feeling?

**Person:** I still like to dance.

[laughter]

**Person:** We love to dance.

**Person:** Yeah.

**Person:** Great.

**Person:** Let's do that.

**David:** Everyone circled up around Al and Melissa.

**John:** They organized themselves into rows.

**Melissa:** And then we just had a mini spontaneous dance party.

[Vaudevillains dancing and marching]

[parade music playing]

**Glynn:** The Mummers Day Parade is on schedule for January 1st, 2023. And the Vaudevillians? Al and Melissa, they'll be there.

[parade music playing]

**Melissa:** The costume groups include mushroom fairies, gators. What's the other?

**Al:** Waterfowl.

**Melissa:** Waterfowl. We have waterfowl. So, it kind of starts out with the jazzercise hands, waterfowl. [voice fades away]

[parade music playing]

**Glynn:** This story is produced by David Exumé and John Fecile. Additional field production by Daisy Love James. Original score was by Renzo Gorrio. Big thanks to the Mummers Parade and everyone who was in this story, Happy New Year's from Snap Judgment.

Now, Snappers, I thought that it would be interesting for us to talk to the fellows who made this show happen, who produced this show for Snap. John Fecile, David Exumé. John, you are a longtime resident, at least you were. You lived in Philly for a long time.

**John:** I lived outside of Philadelphia, near Westchester. Philadelphians will be quick to note it's not Philadelphia, but I have family in South Philadelphia. And yeah, I grew up going to this parade pretty much.

**Glynn:** What is your emotional relationship to it? What's your first memories of it?

**John:** Just being out on the street and it being cold, and I think I was with my uncle, just glitter and dancing and fun, and it being a real family affair.

**Glynn:** You were excited to go?

**John:** Oh, yeah.

**Glynn:** And you are a white guy.

**John:** That's also true.

[laughter]

**Glynn:** And, David, you are not a white guy.

**David:** Never have been.

**Glynn:** You didn't grow up around this at all?

**David:** No. In a way, you could say I also grew up just outside of Philly, just on the other side of the Delaware River in Jersey. Never saw this parade before. And I distinctly remember texting a friend from home when I went to report on this, and I texted her, I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to cover the Mummers Parade." She just sent back, "Oh, I know about them..." It was very--

**John:** It was ominous.

**David:** It kind of was. [laughs]

**Glynn:** This friend, was this friend from-- was she a person of color? Was this from a marginalized group? Or was it someone who just had feelings?

**David:** She's a queer woman but not a person of color.

**Glynn:** Yes. I think that people from the LGBT community were also kind of apprehensive about the Mummers Parade. And you heard people struggling with their participation in something that had brought them so much joy. And I guess my big question is, what did you expect?

**John:** Oh, that's such a great question. I'm going to need to think about that for a second. I think what was surprising for me was how real that struggle was. You hear Jesse Engaard really grapple with it. It's something that I think he loves and hates in equal measure, and that was a kind of a stark reality to confront. I grew up in that area. There is a lot of racism. It legit pissed me off when I would hear people defend blackface. And I did encounter that, people saying, "That was just what we did. That was what my dad did." I would say most mummers, you got a lot of really reasonable and talented people in that parade. Particularly in the groups with the higher performance bars like the string band, you got to be really talented and practice a lot to be in a string band. Same thing with the Fancy Brigades. It's a big show.

**Glynn:** I guess I've got to push back here as well. Are you suggesting that it's the people who don't put in the time that are the ones that are given this parade a bad name?

**David:** You know what pissed me off? The fact that is not the case. People have put active time, money, resources, planning. There are probably spreadsheets on spreadsheets of the best paper to use to put Jim Crow's face on a stick and march it through Broad Street. That I think pisses me off more than anything because you could have used your brain for so many things. You could have done anything. And the fact that this is what you're sticking with and this is what you're backing up angers me just as much as the fact that you did it in the first place.

**Glynn:** Are you suggesting that we have a sanitized, cleaned-up Mummers Parade? And if we did, wouldn't that really be no Mummers Parade at all?

**John:** No, I don't think that's true. I think the Mummers Parade, its mission is joy.

**Glynn:** Certainly, being in blackface will bring a lot of people joy if they saw it.

[laughter]

**Glynn:** And isn't that what it's all about? We can't be everything to everybody. Certainly, there's got to be a place, doesn't there? For a historical parade that purposefully sees itself as a link to a city's historical past. Why shouldn't they display that historical past they're celebrating?

**John:** Well, okay. If you really wanted to do a version of the Mummers Parade that was linked to the historical past, you wouldn't have blackface or you wouldn't have this Minstrel stuff in it because this tradition goes back to at least the 1600s and probably longer, because it comes from much older European traditions and the blackface element and the other elements that they adopted from minstrel culture, like mummer's strut down Broad Street, well, their strut is just the cakewalk, that's straight from minstrelsy. That didn't come about until the minstrel era. So, like the late 1800s, early 1900s. Back in its original form, it was just people getting dressed up, being silly, and going from neighbor's house to neighbor's house, trying to get a drink, trying to perform like a lewd skit. It was much more of a community thing. If you were to really go back to what it originally was, it would look a lot like what Jesse Engaard is doing at the end of the piece, which is organizing neighborhood celebrations, essentially.

**David:** Part of the reason I was so happy to talk to members of the Vaudevillains is because they are kind of the people that are sticking to the very core silly things that bring them joy. When I talked to Melissa and Al, it didn't seem to come from a place of deflecting the serious stuff that was happening.

**Glynn:** We can have our joy, we can have our parade, we can have our festivities, and we don't have to have all these things. The hate for various communities interwoven in our march down the street.

**David:** I would say yeah.

**John:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** The parade is about to happen right now as we're recording this.

**John:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** The 2023 Mummers Parade is about to occur. What do you expect? And if you were there, would you go?

**John:** Oh, man, of course, I would go.

**David:** Hmm. I'm expecting, I don't know why, but I thought there's going to be a lot of like Lady Gaga interpolations on string bands. I don't know why it's the first artist that comes to mind, but I feel like she would make for a great Mummer's Day.

**Glynn:** It's a healing performance.

**David:** Yeah, I think I'd go. If I didn't have to report that, then I could live it up a little bit, so maybe I think I would go.

**Glynn:** All right. Again, David, John, thank you very, very much.

**John:** Yeah, go Sixers.

[scintillating music]

**Glynn:** Again, we like to thank the entire community that helped us make this piece, that told us things that we want to hear, and even those who told us things that we didn't want to hear. Thank you.

[upbeat music]

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