

[00:00:00] **Stephen Calabria:** From the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, this is Road to Resilience, a podcast about facing adversity. I'm your host Stephen Calabria, Mount Sinai's Director of Podcasting.

[00:00:12] On this episode we welcome Tasha Golden, PhD. Dr. Golden is a singer-songwriter turned-public health scientist who most recently served as the Director of Research at the International Arts + Mind Lab at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

[00:00:26] Dr. Golden has led pivotal research into how art and creativity may affect individuals' health and well-being. This includes her founding of Project Uncaged, a trauma-informed creative writing program for incarcerated girls. We're honored to have Dr. Tasha Golden on the show.

[00:00:43] Dr. Tasha Golden, welcome to Road to Resilience.

[00:00:49] **Tasha Golden:** Thank you for having me.

[00:00:51] **Stephen Calabria:** To kick us off, who is Tasha Golden?

[00:00:56] **Tasha Golden:** Well, the quickest intro that I can give is that I am a singer songwriter turned public health scientist, mashing my worlds together to try to help people. People understand how creativity and support well being and help create a better world for all of us.

[00:01:12] **Stephen Calabria:** Now you started off as a singer songwriter. So if you would, for those of us who have never been rock stars, help put us in the headspace. Is it as romantic a life as everyone thinks to be a young professional musician?

[00:01:27] **Tasha Golden:** I feel like I want to answer both yes and no. Um, it's not what I imagined it being. Like, this is the job that I wanted to be, like, this is what I wanted to do since I was a really little girl. I wanted to write songs and travel the world and play them for audiences.

[00:01:43] And I will say that it was as romantic as I thought that it would be in the sense that doing something that you care about, I had a lot of autonomy and a lot of sense of, I can kind of go where I want and explore this the way that I want to.

[00:01:56] And that was really meaningful to me, meet different audiences. experience the world, see a lot of amazing and beautiful things. And it was definitely not as romantic as I might have thought when I was a little girl in the

sense that there's a lot of, um, hustle and grind to the music industry, a lot of unpredictability, a lot of isolation from the people that you know and care about, cause you're traveling all the time.

[00:02:18] So, it's a mixed bag for sure.

[00:02:22] **Stephen Calabria:** So you garnered an audience over time. What was it about your music that made it resonate with people?

[00:02:29] **Tasha Golden:** Oh, that would be a better question for our audiences, but we always strove to make something that felt really honest and really human and our music has been described as kind of like Indie-pop- folk.

[00:02:42] Like, lots of different things. Lush pop, bringing together some different sounds that felt really vibrant but also a little bit stripped down but also very shimmery.

[00:02:50] We wanted to make music that expressed what we felt and then I think a lot of what wound up changing my life about my career was people's responses to the lyrics.

[00:03:00] A lot of the songs were about difficult experiences in my life or in my family's life, um, and those were often the songs that people wanted to Talk about after shows.

[00:03:08] And I think like a lot of musicians, like a lot of musicians that have been meaningful to me, I think having somebody reflect your experience, your truth back to you is incredibly important.

[00:03:18] **Stephen Calabria:** So what was the trajectory in a nutshell of your music career?

[00:03:24] **Tasha Golden:** Uh, that industry drove me into depression, but, the trajectory of it, we started out really small playing wherever we could around the country, like coffee shops at the time and, you know, small bars and things like that.

[00:03:38] Wound up signing with a record label in Seattle and got a lot more radio airplay and songs on TV and film and got to play with some really wonderful, like opening for some really wonderful musicians.

[00:03:50] And, that built up over time. And we went into the studio to make our most ambitious project to date. It was with the Grammy-winning producer that we really loved his work and we were really excited about that record.

[00:04:04] But I was also by that point didn't realize it, but was at the beginning stages of really feeling burnout. And, we toured to try to support that record before it was released, kind of like building up momentum toward its release.

[00:04:19] But that was when depression and burnout really hit. We wound up delaying the release of the record because I was, because I was in bed. Because I was trying to figure out who I was and what was going on and how to heal.

[00:04:32] **Stephen Calabria:** How would you describe to someone without depression what it feels like?

[00:04:38] **Tasha Golden:** It's a great, question. And I think before I knew that I was depressed, I think I thought that depression was being very sad. And in my experience, depression was much more a lack of feeling anything.

[00:04:56] And combined with, because I, I was facing not only depression, but severe burnout, it was a lack of feeling anything combined with an utter exhaustion that made me uncertain whether I could keep going. And it wasn't so much, in my case, not wanting to be here, but not understanding how I would possibly have the resources to continue to be here.

[00:05:20] Just not being able to imagine my life out into the future, because it felt like such an exhausting such an utterly exhausting proposal, to still be here a year from now, you know, five years from now, was like nothing interested me anymore. Nothing could pique my curiosity.

[00:05:36] There were a couple things that I wound up really leaning into. At the darkest moments. You know, I was in bed for many weeks. And the things that could interest me in that time were very few. One was Mary Oliver. I was reading poetry by Mary Oliver.

[00:05:50] And, I was thinking a lot about those experiences at music venues when people stayed and shared really personal stories with me after concerts that they had never shared with anybody else.

[00:06:01] I was thinking a lot during that time about why that could happen, how it happened, what it meant, what that could mean for my future. I wasn't sure, but I found it interesting.

[00:06:11] **Stephen Calabria:** What would you say caused it? Was it primarily the burnout? Was it certain aspects of the music industry that you had never encountered before?

[00:06:20] **Tasha Golden:** I think it was primarily burnout. I was also, I'm neurodivergent. I was undiagnosed at the time. And there was a lot of things about just the way that we had to live our lives as musicians that are, I now understand to be completely counter to the way that my brain needs to function in order to thrive.

[00:06:36] So the grind of the industry itself combined with my needs as a neurodivergent individual, not getting met, but not realizing that that was happening, and, you know, just the kind of contrast of like, I really imagined myself to be this impulsive, you know, artist who like, I'll go anywhere else, I can sleep anywhere.

[00:06:54] I don't really need sleep. Let's just go play shows anywhere, like share music with anybody. And as it turns out, what I really need in order to thrive and to be creative is like routine and structure and all of these things that were my self conception as an artist, I would have really diminished as like some kind of, too straightforward of a way to live and to ever foster creativity.

[00:07:17] So I was really pushing against kind of like ,what I needed to be able to be healthy, to be resilient, to feel connected to myself and to the world, to the people around me. The job itself sort of required me to do the opposite of all out of those things.

[00:07:31] But of course, at that time, I didn't know that that's what I was doing. I just knew that I used to have a lot of energy around all of this and now I felt like I was trudging through mud and I couldn't keep going. I knew that I couldn't keep going.

[00:07:45] **Stephen Calabria:** We know social support to be a crucial part of resilience, particularly when it comes to dealing with depression. Did you receive social support at the time?

[00:07:56] **Tasha Golden:** You know, I have always wanted to be incredibly transparent about the fact that when I was at my worst, I had a partner who, we had a band together, so when I couldn't make music anymore, that also, you know, messed up his career and his living, right?

[00:08:12] But we were also married, and he was able to kind of like say, okay, like you need to do what you need to do in order to heal. I'm going to go get a job and support us.

[00:08:22] And at the most basic level, like what you're talking about, social connection can mean lots of different things, but at the most basic material level, I think it's really important for me to be transparent about the fact that I had somebody that could do that for me, who was willing to do that for me, who could go find a job that could support both of us, at a meager level, I'll say, but we were able to make it work so that I had a way to heal.

[00:08:42] Because of course when you're in the arts, it's not like you have paid leaves that you can be like, Hey, I'm having a hard time. Can I get medical leave for, you know, any length of time? If we weren't out playing shows we weren't making money.

[00:08:53] So, at the most basic level, having that person who valued me and my health enough to, like, make a lot of sacrifices on his end to support us both while I was getting better, that meant the world to me and still means the world to me.

[00:09:07] And then, yeah, we had, I wasn't sure at the time how to be public about what was going on because I didn't know how to talk about it even to myself. I didn't know what I was experiencing for myself yet.

[00:09:16] That took a lot of, like, therapy and working through with my, you know, with myself, but we did have a handful of close friends who checked in and who stayed curious, even though I was turning down lots of invitations to people.

[00:09:29] Hang out or be with anybody right and that that has always meant so much to that the people who stay interested and curious even if that's not reciprocated because sometimes you don't have it in you in the midst of depression to actively reach back out.

[00:09:46] **Stephen Calabria:** What was the turning point?

[00:09:47] **Tasha Golden:** Well, there was a kind therapist that I met, my first experience with therapy, and she walked me through a lot of things, gave me definitions and words to put to my experience, which was really helpful. I also got some Cymbalta medication, really helped.

[00:10:05] I didn't expect it to, but it was an amazing difference for me. Within a couple of days, I felt so much different, so much better. So I still point to medication as maybe having saved my life in many ways. And then I had applied to a graduate degree in poetry, Stephen.

[00:10:22] I didn't think that I would get in. I didn't think I was a poet. I sent them, you know, CDs and song lyrics. I was like, they're not going to let me in. And then they did. And I had to decide whether I was truly going to, like, leave music for at least a couple of years, right, to do this degree program.

[00:10:37] I kind of applied on a whim, really. And, I started that program several months, you know, I, I landed in bed in like December of one year. I started this program the following August, and I think that was a massive turning point, like connecting with that cohort of fellow students, having a space to write where there was no immediate audience, which I hadn't done in many years.

[00:10:59] I, you know, always in the back of your head you're writing songs, like kind of imagining what it would be like to share those with people.

[00:11:05] But with the poetry I was writing, I had no audience in mind. I was just exploring and there's a lot of space for research and nerding out about lots of different things. And, yeah, it was such a different kind of structured life and a social cohort around that exploration.

[00:11:21] I had never had something like that before, and it was really healing.

[00:11:25] **Stephen Calabria:** And what did that ultimately lead to?

[00:11:28] **Tasha Golden:** That creative writing program showed me, first of all, that I was a much bigger nerd than I even realized that I was in that, you know, we had to do a lot of research as part of that grad program, but a lot of my fellow poets were kind of like doing the research as a group to jump through.

[00:11:41] They're like, we got to do this, but really just let me write my poems. And I was the person who was like, Oh, this is amazing. How can I do more research and further develop some of the questions that I had had at the worst of my depression, like as far as what is it that art is doing for our brains and bodies that allows us to share things that we don't share otherwise, that allows us to kind of tolerate really difficult and complex topics that we find difficult in kind of more straightforward situations.

[00:12:06] Like what you and I are having right here. This is a conversational space. We often find that a difficult space to have complex conversations about difficult topics, but the arts, that's where we explore things.

[00:12:16] And so I was writing a lot about that and researching that and also, began running a program called Project Uncaged, which was a creative writing program, a trauma informed creative writing program for girls that are incarcerated.

[00:12:28] And I saw the same thing with them, that they shared a lot of things about their lives, in their poems, in their songs, that they were not sharing anywhere else. Not only did that strike me as crucial for their own mental health, their own processing, their resilience.

[00:12:44] But I was also realizing that a lot of the things that they were sharing in their poems and songs were like, that's actionable data about their lives, about what they need when they leave, about how they could, you know, what resources they were not getting on the outside.

[00:12:56] And I was just struck by like, oh, there is a lot that we don't know about ourselves and each other when we ignore these modes of communication that we've evolved to use to share the human experience.

[00:13:07] And I kind of, that became kind of like my research question, I suppose. I pulled on the thread of that question of like, what is it that we don't know when we're not accessing the space of the arts as a space where humans share what's going on in our lives?

[00:13:20] And what could that look like and mean to integrate that better across our different sectors? And how could that help us achieve more connection, more solutions for some of our most complex problems, if we had more ways to talk about them.

[00:13:34] **Stephen Calabria:** And what's become of Project Uncaged?

[00:13:37] **Tasha Golden:** That program has run mostly throughout the Midwest and a lot of different juvenile detention centers. It has been on a hiatus the last couple of years as we look to hand over the reins for people doing it on the ground and in more communities.

[00:13:50] But what's been wonderful about Project Uncaged, and I often say that the young people that I've met writing with them in that program have been

my greatest teachers about all kinds of topics about what justice is, what equity is, what it means to share space and leadership with young people.

[00:14:08] They have been my greatest teachers, but as I said, I recognize that they were sharing things in their poems and songs that were essential facts about their lives that could transform how young people are taken care of in their communities.

[00:14:21] And so we publish books of their poems, and share those books, not only with the writers themselves or the funders or the detention centers, but also send those books to policymakers, city council members, mayor's offices, legislators, along with policy briefs, indicating like, here's what these young people are sharing in their poems, and here's what they need, and here's what they're living, and also here are some of their strengths and some, some of what's like so amazing about them.

[00:14:49] And here's what you can do in your role to help better support them and help improve justice and equity in your community. And, it's been one of the biggest privileges of my life to not only be able to share space with these young people, but to help them find and create platforms for their leadership and for their voices to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

[00:15:08] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, now that you're something of the expert on the subject, what are ways you think creativity impacts health, particularly mental health?

[00:15:18] **Tasha Golden:** There are so many but the thing that always immediately comes to mind, because it's been such a driving force behind my research, is that we evolved to make and share art for a reason.

[00:15:31] It's essential for us in some way, and if it wasn't we would have stopped doing it millennia ago. And we don't have to know all of the reasons why art is essential to our survival to broadly accept that like, well, it must be doing something because we're here and we're doing it.

[00:15:46] And one of the main things in my work that I've seen that it does, especially when it comes to mental health, is that it expands our capacity for communication.

[00:15:53] There are things that we can't bear witness to or process or navigate or disclose unless we have expanded our creative and communicative options for sharing those things, for expressing those things. Sometimes you can say

things in a straightforward way. Sometimes you need to be able to say them without saying them.

[00:16:12] How can you express what's going on in your life in the form of a melody or a painting or a dance where you're not having to form the words around it, but you're still sharing what's going on?

[00:16:22] We need all of these different capacities in order to manage our lives. So if I were to break that down into kind of like a single thing, it's often, I'm encouraging people to not expect yourself to be able to process and express the human experience all the time in straightforward language.

[00:16:39] If what you're going through isn't something that you can figure out how to say in words, like what I'm using right now, or in like a social media post, that doesn't mean that something's deficient or wrong with you.

[00:16:49] it means that you need a different kind of communicative option. And sometimes the arts and creativity supply that for us. And we diminish those and kind of set them aside sometimes, and kind of think of like, well, art and creativity, that's kind of like a cute pastime, or that's an indulgence or it's entertainment and leisure.

[00:17:08] But again, we evolved to do this. And so, just encouraging people that like, if you find that you're experiencing something that you don't know how to share, what might it look like to broaden our sense of how we're allowed to or expected to share that?

[00:17:23] What is another way that you might be able to express what's going on? So that's the first thing. And then there are some other quick tips and tools just to know that, first of all, having a model of expression can be really useful.

[00:17:37] So this is why people really respond to songs sometimes after concerts or why people go to poets like Mary Oliver or novelists like James Baldwin or others like, these writers and these performers are oftentimes giving us words that reflect our experience back to us.

[00:17:51] And that's something, there are parts of the brain that aren't necessarily online when you're experiencing trauma and things like that. And sometimes you can't verbalize what's going on, but somebody else verbalizes it for you.

[00:18:00] And you can latch onto that and say like, yes, that somehow is me. That reflects my truth back to me. Sometimes it's not even words. Sometimes

it's, obviously like music or a scene in a story or something that says like, oh, this makes me feel less alone or less isolated.

[00:18:14] This is my humanity being reflected back to me and creativity in the arts can give us ways to re find ourselves and to describe ourselves to ourselves and then maybe make a choice to share it out with somebody else or not.

[00:18:28] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, you sort of touched on it earlier, but I can see how some people might be dismissive of creativity. If we looked at the hierarchy of needs, it doesn't fall within shelter, food, these sorts of essentials, and it could be really easy, I imagine, for people to be dismissive of it.

[00:18:48] **Tasha Golden:** Yeah. And I think sometimes the conversation about creativity and mental health, we can think about these things that I've just mentioned as far as how can it help us to cope?

[00:18:57] What are some of the even kind of like exercises that you might be able to dig into to help your mental health? But for me, you know, I come at this work from a training in public health, right? So I'm like, not, I'm not an MD or a therapist.

[00:19:08] I'm usually thinking like zoomed out and in systems. And what I think about quite often when it comes to what is the role of creativity in the arts in mental health, we, at this most basic level, humans need to feel like we want to be here.

[00:19:22] Well being, I get to speak and consult around the world and I ask audiences all the time, like, what is wellbeing to you and collect their definitions.

[00:19:30] And over the last many months, I've pulled those definitions together into my own, which is well being, at its core, is having a life that you want to participate in and feel that you can.

[00:19:43] And I think sometimes in our searches for like what is most essential, what is survival, we forget that a core part of survival is wanting to be here. And humans have always sought ways to pursue interests, to satisfy curiosity, to make connections, to express ourselves.

[00:20:02] What are the things that humans do that make us feel like life matters and that we want to be here that we can imagine a future or contributing to it. These are essential to our survival.

[00:20:13] And so building, you know, a lot of times in my work, it's kind of like, how can we build communities and systems and structures and environments that are conducive to human's ability to thrive.

[00:20:22] Not just making sure that we react when something goes wrong, but how do we proactively build a place that makes it more and more likely that more and more people can actually thrive and feel well-being.

[00:20:35] **Stephen Calabria:** You've talked about how creativity can be used as a way to get one's own feelings out, to share with the world and make something lasting. But I'm curious, is it also possible that creativity may be used as a coping mechanism, perhaps in ways that are not altogether productive.

[00:20:57] If a person is creating primarily to keep negative thoughts, feelings, at bay, instead of encountering them head on, facing their fears, that doesn't sound like creativity is altogether that healthy in that situation.

[00:21:12] **Tasha Golden:** Yeah, I mean, any tools that we've developed as humans can be used for bad or good, right? You know, like a hammer can be used to build a house, it can be used to injure somebody, right?

[00:21:23] So, there's nothing that's kind of like across the board always going to be a good in everybody's lives, but in the example that you gave, I think, if they are facing something that's so difficult that they can't just go ahead and face it and they feel like they need some way to distract themselves or avoid that conversation, avoid that issue, then it's important that they have some kind of coping thing.

[00:21:45] If there is not a way for them to move forward, then choosing to create in order to avoid the things that they're trying to avoid can be often a better mechanism than some other kinds of, like, substance use or things like that.

[00:21:57] So if we're looking for ways to distract ourselves from our lives and from our problems, long term that's not a great idea.

[00:22:03] We need to face the things that are going on, but if we don't have supports and, unfortunately, in the U.S., oftentimes their healthcare system and people working multiple jobs, et cetera, oftentimes we don't have the resources and the support that we need to face the things that we need to face.

[00:22:16] And so if somebody is using those tools in that way, I can understand that and then I would just say, a lot of times in trauma informed

practice the big rule is don't take away somebody's coping skill unless you've given them a support to replace it.

[00:22:30] And so, to the extent that people might find in this a coping mechanism, cool. And then how can we as a society use creativity to imagine better resources, better policies, better systems that ensure that people have supports when they do need them.

[00:22:46] **Stephen Calabria:** I'm curious to know what kinds of research has been conducted into the physiological effects of creativity on the brain. Can you say that creativity makes your brain healthier because it makes it more active and engaged?

[00:23:03] **Tasha Golden:** Yes, and I will say for full transparency that I am not a neuroscientist, so I am not the most awesome person to ask this question to, and I can't completely nerd out with you.

[00:23:13] But yeah, there are some really beautiful studies, and I can recommend my colleague Susan Magsamen's book, *Your Brain on Art*, that goes into some more detail about how the arts can affect the way that the brain works, but you know, like some beautiful studies around what's happening in the brain when people are improvising music versus just reading it, and it's changing the way that the brain is connecting with itself and how it lights up.

[00:23:33] And I think that we can see some of the manifestations of that. What I get excited about sometimes is like the connection between creativity and critical thinking. Creativity, and being able to question the world around you in a different way.

[00:23:46] Creativity and the ability to think of new solutions to problems. There are ways that when we expose ourselves, we know from different studies that when we expose ourselves to certain kinds of like music, certain kinds of scenery, that our brains change and we have new thoughts and ideas that we wouldn't have had otherwise.

[00:24:03] And, yeah, I think it's exciting to think about, especially because my research interest has been so much around like, what do we not know when we're not engaging with the arts? How is the art a form of knowing and a form of data?

[00:24:13] I think it's exciting to consider how we can open ourselves up to more kinds of experiences, more kinds of knowing, more kinds of connection and processing by expanding, you know what I mean?

[00:24:24] Moving past the kind of robotic ways that we've structured our professional lives and public lives often to abide by, like you have to show up as a robot and you do A, B, and C.

[00:24:35] Well, we can do that, we can perform that role perfectly well, but we're only going to get the same results over and over again.

[00:24:42] It's creative thinking and creative practice that opens up new possibilities for the ideas that people have and the ways that we engage with each other.

[00:24:49] **Stephen Calabria:** Let's talk about meaning and purpose, on both a project by project level and overall. Is there something there as far as endowing people with greater resilience and using creativity as a way to push themselves forward?

[00:25:07] **Tasha Golden:** Absolutely. This is why sometimes I prefer to talk about creativity versus just the arts because when you say the phrase the arts, depending on who you're talking to, sometimes they make that mean really specific kinds of activities and they can't see themselves in that.

[00:25:21] For me, when I think about creativity and especially like, culture broadly understood, it's sort of like, what are the things that light us up? What is it that you're interested in? What is it that you're curious about?

[00:25:30] Part of well being, from my research and work, as far as like a public health standpoint, our mental health and well being is having something that you're interested in, being able to pursue it. This is sometimes particularly important for neurodivergent communities where we have special interests and being able to pursue that special interest is part of how we stay well.

[00:25:50] And some people used to pathologize that and call it an obsession, but it's really part of how, our brains are able to thrive. But yeah, having meaning and purpose often requires creative options, not in the sense that everybody needs to pick up a guitar or draw a picture, but more that people need to have some space to like find out, what is interesting to me?

[00:26:09] What is it that I want to be doing and what access do I need in order to be able to pursue that? And that doesn't have to be some kind of specific art form, but every human need some, you know, we know that we need something that kind of pulls us forward, that sense of forward motion.

[00:26:24] And we need to not only have something that maybe gives us a spark or a sense of meaning and purpose and intention like that, but also we need, as far as systems and structures, we need access to those things.

[00:26:35] We need to be able to both feel like we have an interest and also have some hope that we're going to be able to pursue it.

[00:26:41] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, I think that's an important point, too, for people who don't consider themselves altogether artistic.

[00:26:47] I mean, if you encourage artistry and creativity in people, oftentimes, to your point, that conjures images of art galleries, of symphonies, etc., these things that your average person might not feel much connection to.

[00:27:04] And so, how can folks incorporate these insights that you're talking about into their daily lives a way that they can find relatable?

[00:27:13] **Tasha Golden:** I would say first of it, I think a lot of people are doing that already without realizing it. And like a lot of people, when they need to feel motivated to like, empty the dishwasher, they're turning on some kind of music that they really love, right?

[00:27:27] Or, when they need to relax, they're putting on some kind of soothing music that maybe helps them slow down, or when their baby needs to sleep, they're putting on a certain kind of sound.

[00:27:37] There's the ways that when somebody's planning a weekend, they might be like, oh, what movie do we want to go see? Or, you know, you're in New York City, like, are we going to go see something on Broadway or some other kind of play or theatrical performance?

[00:27:49] People are already kind of engaging this, but we don't typically, really consciously link it to our well being. We're just thinking about like, well, I don't know, I'm interested in going and seeing that band this weekend, let's go see them.

[00:28:01] Or like, I wanted to get Taylor Swift tickets, so I got Taylor Swift tickets. I'm not thinking about like, oh, my interest in going and seeing a band or in going to see a Broadway play is my having an interest in that and my ability to experience that and go do that is part of my well being.

[00:28:16] It's part of how I'm building a life that I feel like includes interest in creativity and connection with other people. So yeah, I would say first, we do

these things in small, almost unconscious ways. And I think the next step is to give yourself a lot more permission to explore those things when you need them.

[00:28:34] So, recognizing that music doesn't have to be just some kind of leisure thing that is just entertainment, that you can recognize, like, oh, that's doing something for my brain and body. How might I consciously use that?

[00:28:47] If I'm feeling down, maybe I really kind of intentionally get my iPhone out and go to Spotify and pick a song rather than kind of just doing it here or there. We can get a little bit more intentional about the things that a lot of us already do.

[00:28:59] And then maybe just some noticing too about how you feel when you're engaged in those things or when a video of a song that you haven't heard for 15 years comes up and you're like, ahh. What is it that's going on in your brain and body that make you light up like that?

[00:29:11] How might that be part of what makes you well? It's not like everybody needs to draw a picture every day the way that we say like, Hey, maybe take more steps every day or something like that. But we can start just by noticing how we already engage in these things and getting curious about how they might be affecting us and how that might support our well being.

[00:29:29] **Stephen Calabria:** Now, you've recently stepped away from your role at Johns Hopkins to pursue helping community leaders tap into all this kind of work. What are some of the projects you're pursuing?

[00:29:40] **Tasha Golden:** Oh, thank you. You know, I have loved my work with the International Arts and Mind Lab at Hopkins. And over time I was getting a lot of invitations and opportunities to help people kind of like plug the research in, like, how can we translate this research what we're learning about how the arts affect well being, how can we translate that into practice?

[00:29:59] And especially the last few years, as we've done more and more work with the concept of arts on prescription, I was so glad to evaluate the first statewide arts on prescription program in Massachusetts a couple of years ago.

[00:30:10] We released a free field guide last year, a field guide to Arts on Prescription. If you all want it, we can make sure you have it in show notes or things like that, but a massive resource for people who want to create this in their communities.

[00:30:21] And especially with that kind of work, there have been lots of opportunities to help community leaders think about, well, what would this look like for us, sometimes not necessarily at the city level, although there definitely are municipalities and cities that are like, from the mayor's office level thinking about how we can coordinate this.

[00:30:34] But, the sticking with all kinds of communities, whether geographical or patient centered or whatever, but like, how can we create better connections between the arts and culture assets in our community and our health care assets, our health care providers?

[00:30:50] **Tasha Golden:** So that's been really rewarding work. So to answer your question, some of it is helping communities make those connections. Some of it is, helping people research and understand their programs. Like, is this working? How is it working?

[00:31:03] And then doing a lot of work with organizations around the world to help them get creative about how they're doing their work. What if this was infused with the arts? Or, if you're trying to do something for people's well being, what is it that you're, that you're missing?

[00:31:14] What is it that you're not thinking about it? Because you're kind of like gone down the well being angle and you haven't ever considered this whole world of the way that arts and creativity might enhance that work.

[00:31:25] **Stephen Calabria:** Are different artistic mediums more helpful in expressing ourselves than others? Or does it come down purely to the artist, the person who's creating it?

[00:31:37] **Tasha Golden:** I think what we have seen is that it matters, somebody's interest in what they're doing matters, or somebody's personal engagement or enjoyment of what they're doing matters.

[00:31:49] Sometimes people participate in something that they weren't initially interested in, and then they find that they really felt good doing it, but their subjective interpretation of the activity is what matters the most.

[00:32:00] And so, especially in Arts on Prescription programs, what we have been advising is that people create enough different kinds of opportunities almost like on the menu of options, so that the patient that's being prescribed something has something to choose from that's really resonant for them culturally, and just as far as their interests and things that they would like to learn or things that they want to pursue.

[00:32:20] So that's the first thing that I would say. And then, we need to feel like the opportunity is accessible and that, like, we get it. Sometimes there can be a barrier as far as if you're trying to introduce somebody to something that they're not only not interested in, but they think is, it's not for them.

[00:32:35] Maybe there are a lot of cultural barriers where a lot of our arts institutions in the U. S., for example, the arts sector has not been equitable for a long time. And a lot of our greatest institutions, museums, some things or whatever, have long been elitist and white centered and things like that.

[00:32:48] And so, if you were to prescribe somebody who doesn't identify with that to that kind of experience, that might be a really big barrier. So, there has been a lot more research in the field around music's effects on people's brains and bodies than anything else, but that doesn't necessarily mean that music is the most effective.

[00:33:04] First of all, there's some people. I suspect that it may be, it's just the thing that we maybe know the most about and there's been the most interest in researching, but we definitely know that people's subjective experience, interest, enjoyment, et cetera, is really important.

[00:33:20] **Stephen Calabria:** Ultimately, what do you think are the roles of creativity in cultivating and maintaining people's resilience?

[00:33:28] **Tasha Golden:** Oh, I've been writing recently about, I really feel that creativity's greatest contribution for all of us is allowing us, is helping us to imagine otherwise, to be able to see the world as it is and to see our lives as they are and to be able to imagine that it could be different and especially, we're at a really difficult time.

[00:33:47] There's a lot of major world crises going on right now. It can be really hard to believe that the world can be different and we can create something where humans truly can thrive. And I think it's creativity that allows us to imagine what the world could or should be and imagine how to make it.

[00:34:03] I'm often coming back to James Baldwin's quote. He said, the world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in, and I feel like that's the greatest call to all of us as far as, what does it mean to be human and to be creative?

[00:34:19] It's to be able to imagine that, whatever path I'm on, is not the path that I have to stay on. Whatever identity that I have right now is not the identity

that I have to stick with, whatever my industry looks like is not the way that this industry has to look like.

[00:34:32] Whatever our systems and structures and policies look like is not the way that they have to look like. All of this is a story that was made up and we can tell a different one. I think that is the ultimate value of creativity for our resilience.

[00:34:48] **Stephen Calabria:** Last question. In thinking about the art that has been most meaningful for you, books, TV, film, music, what are some that you think you have always gone back to, and you always will?

[00:35:03] **Tasha Golden:** I read James Baldwin's collected essays every year. His birthday is in early August. I try to read it every August. Yeah, I come back to that definitely on an annual basis. I often also come back to nature based poetry. So, Mary Oliver was really important to me at the worst of my depression.

[00:35:22] I come back to her descriptions of the natural world. There's something meditative about that. I tend to be really cerebral and stay out of my body and there's something about her writing that, , that puts me back into the present.

[00:35:34] That's really helpful for me. And, I'm not a revisitor of many books or films or things like that, but those are two authors that I come back to all the time.

[00:35:44] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, that was it for my questions. Was there anything else you wanted to say?

[00:35:48] **Tasha Golden:** Well, I will say if listeners want access to the Arts and Prescription Field Guide, I would love for them to get that. It's just tashagolden.com/fieldguide, and you can download it for free. And, if you're a city leader, a healthcare provider leader, an arts leader, it's basically a roadmap.

[00:36:04] It's not only what is arts and prescription, but how can you literally create it in your community? But then, also, if you're just somebody who's interested in it, sometimes just getting that guide and sharing it with other people has been a great conversation starter, like a way to get the ball rolling.

[00:36:17] So, highly recommend.

[00:36:19] **Stephen Calabria:** Dr. Tasha Golden. Thank you so much for your time.

[00:36:22] **Tasha Golden:** Oh, thank you so much, Stephen.

[00:36:26] Thanks again to Dr. Tasha Golden for her time and expertise. That's all for this episode of Road to Resilience. If you enjoyed it, please rate, review, and subscribe to our podcast on your favorite podcast platform.

[00:36:41] Want to give us feedback or an idea for a future episode? Email us at podcasts@mountsinai.org.

[00:36:47] Road to Resilience is a production of the Mount Sinai Health System. It's produced by me, Stephen Calabria, and our executive producer, Lucia Lee. From all of us here at Mount Sinai, thanks for listening and we'll catch you next time.