

Transcript

Dead Ladies Show Podcast Episode 48

Zara Hadid

(Dead Ladies Show Music - 'Little Lily Swing' by Tri-Tachyon)

SUSAN STONE: Welcome to the Dead Ladies Show Podcast! I'm Susan Stone.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: I'm Katy Derbyshire.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: And I'm Florian Duisjens.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: The Dead Ladies Show celebrates women — both overlooked and iconic — who achieved amazing things against all odds while they were alive.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: And we do it through women's history storytelling live on stage — here in Berlin and beyond...then we bring you the very best of those stories here on the podcast.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Now we've all gotten together today to toast the end of another year — thank you for ending, to this year — with our favorite German tipple, Rotkaeppchen!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Woo!

SUSAN STONE: Yay!

[SOUND OF BOTTLE POPPING, SEKT POURING, GLASSES CLINKING]

ALL: Cheers!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: And at the end of the show, we'll be talking about some of our favorite Dead Lady moments from this year. But first, we're going to hear about a fabulous Dead Lady, architect Zaha Hadid. There are a lot of splendid visuals that you might want to refer to while you listen, or after you listen, and you'll find them in our show notes page at [deadladiesshow.com/podcast](http://deadladiesshow.com/podcast).

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Zaha's story comes courtesy of our own producer Susan Stone, who you know very well. She's a journalist and podcaster, and you can also hear her this month on the BBC presenting the history documentary *Parcels of CARE*, debuting December 18th on the World Service. But first, here she is from the stage at ACUD.

SUSAN STONE: When architect Zaha Hadid was asked if she considered her buildings spectacular, she said, "If you want to be discreet, don't build a mountain." [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] Zaha Mohammad Hadid was born October 31, 1950 in Baghdad, Iraq. She was curious and independent, and with her two older brothers abroad, she had the run of the house.

[SHOWS SLIDE] She remembered her father, Mohammed Hadid, as being very patient and tolerant of her many questions. He was leader of the opposition National Democratic party, and had been educated in England. Her mother, Wajeeha al-Sabonji, was an artist who taught Zaha how to draw early on – so she would leave her alone. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] Both parents were secular Sunni Muslims.

Zaha remembered Baghdad of the 1950s as a fun, very open society. And she had a great childhood there. [SHOWS SLIDE] Her parents were liberal with her; they let her experiment and waited to see how she would go. Young Zaha was very critical. At about seven or eight, she decided she didn't like her clothes, so was allowed to design her own. Her mother had them made, and then as "punishment" [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] she had to wear them. But her friends loved them, even if they were somewhat weird. She also designed her own room in the family's modernist house from the 1930s, that was filled with what she called "funky 50s furniture."

Zaha saw her first architectural drawings and models at the age of six or seven when a family friend visited with plans for an aunt's house, and was completely intrigued. She said, "My parents instilled in me a passion for discovery, and they never made a distinction between science and creativity. We would play with math problems just as we would play with pens and paper to draw, or listening to music and reading a book – math was like sketching."

Zaha attended a Convent school in Baghdad, and felt lucky to go there. "People don't realize Catholic nuns are insane [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] in the best possible way." By that she meant that they really believed in education, and that school was important for girls.

Still, she recalled the day that she came home and asked her parents, "Why don't you pray like we're taught in school?" And they said, "Well Zaha, actually we're Muslim." So after that, she stopped going to chapel, and she found out that the Muslim and Jewish girls got to play instead. Sounds like a pretty good deal.

[SHOWS SLIDE] Across from Zaha's school was this building, built by Italian modernist Gio Ponti. In the slide you can see it before, and then after, the many bombings Baghdad survived through the decades. It is still standing today. Modernism was the

talk of Baghdad when Zaha was a child. Several top architects – Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier – they had all been invited to submit their designs by King Faisal II, the country's ruler at the time.

In 1958, when Zaha was seven or eight, the Iraqi military mounted a coup. The monarchy was overthrown, Iraq was proclaimed a republic and Mohammed Hadid was appointed Finance Minister. He served only two years and was later imprisoned after another coup. Zaha once said, "I would have become a politician if I weren't Iraqi." [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

Anyway, by 11 she knew she wanted to become an architect. She said later it was not an uncommon ambition for girls of her generation. She went to boarding school in England and Switzerland, then attended American University in Beirut studying mathematics, where she observed the link between logic, math, architecture and the abstract shapes in Arabic calligraphy.

[SHOWS SLIDE] In 1972, she began studies at the progressive Architectural Association School in London, which was to become her adopted home – the school and the city – and she later became a British citizen. The school encouraged creative boundary breaking and alternative solutions, which suited her perfectly.

She studied under famed Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas, who was her tutor, and later her colleague, friend, and admiring rival. At graduation, he said: "Zaha's performance during the fourth and fifth years was like that of a rocket that took off slowly to describe a constantly accelerating trajectory. Now she is a planet in her own inimitable orbit."

It's notable that when Zaha studied at the AA, the number of women architects in the UK was only 6%. Today it's closer to 30%.

[SHOWS SLIDE] I love this plaque here, this historic plaque that was put up. It says, "Most famous architects, 1847 to 2006, have been here. Sooner or later." [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] At the school, Zaha discovered deconstructivism and Polish-Russian avant-garde artist Kasimir Malevich – this is tough for me – Kasimir *Malevich*. She was instantly drawn to his erupting geometries of suprematism and the experimental abstract architectural models he called "arkitektoniks." The painting on the left is from 1916, and it's called "House under Construction." Very fitting. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] This is Zaha's thesis project – you can see the similarities. It's a painting called "Malevich's Tektonik." It's an idea for a 14-story hotel on top of London's Hungerford Bridge – which some of you might recognize – and it won her the school diploma prize in 1977. It's now in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

She joined the school as a teacher, and stayed for ten years. It was an exciting time to be in London – punk and counterculture filled the streets, and rebellion was in the air. However it wasn't a great time to try to build expensive buildings! Nonetheless Zaha launched her own practice, Zaha Hadid Architects, in 1979, with a staff of four. She taught by day and worked on projects at night, drawing and painting until all hours.

[SHOWS SLIDE] [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] Zaha was known to be warm and funny, and was said to be the closest thing in architecture to Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin Round Table. Here she is having a ball with fellow AA student Ron Arad, who went on to be an acclaimed industrial designer and artist.

And laughing with Alvin Boyarsky who was director of the AA. His son Nicholas studied under Zaha and remembers her as a rebel who made her own clothes by stapling fabric together. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] And she also stood out for insisting on drawing architecture instead of just talking about it. He recalled: "We would have tutorials in her tiny house in the early hours whilst watching the movie *American Gigolo* over and over and eating wonderful food." She really liked Richard Gere. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] In 1983 at the age of 33, Zaha won her first international competition for The Peak clubhouse, to be built on the side of a mountain in Hong Kong. So I saw some of these exhibited at the Peak (which is not this, sadly) in 2006, and I thought, "I don't understand what I am seeing. She sees dimensions I don't."

These paintings show what appear to be gravity free buildings, splintered forms jetting out from the mountain.

Unfortunately the client lost the Peak site, and it was never built. But her designs really put her on the map. She won more competitions for buildings that didn't get built and began to be called a "paper architect."

She lectured a lot – it helped bring in money for the firm. At one, an architecture student from the University of Stuttgart called Patrik Schumacher is there. He's bored by architecture but suddenly intrigued again, and determined to work for Zaha. He gets hired in 1988 by one of her associates, but Zaha is not impressed. She ignores him, and then fires him several times. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] "I didn't like him, and I didn't want to talk to him. He got on my nerves," she said. But they find a balance, and he eventually becomes a strong supporter and collaborator – and later a partner in her firm, where he still works.

[SHOWS SLIDE] He looks a little like a Bond villain here. He called her – [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

SUSAN STONE: We'll get to that. He called her an "intuitive genius" who wasn't entirely aware of the power of her own vision. He said, "Somebody had to argue that this was

viable and life-enhancing, a highly functional set of innovations. I saw that to be my role.”

There are rumors the two of them had a romance, but he disputed this later. Zaha never married, and Patrik later did. Whatever the status of their relationship, Zaha developed a series of pet names for him, as she did for many people she was close to. Potato, because he’s German [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]; Fluffy, I guess because of his hair; and Cappuccino, because they’re fluffy?

Patrik works on expanding the office to have more bodies on hand for more projects. And 3-D computer modeling helps to move her visions into reality.

[SHOWS SLIDE] This is the Vitra Fire Station in Weil am Rhine, and it’s Zaha’s first major *built* building. (And I have seen this one in person, which was quite exciting.) She was originally commissioned by the Vitra design company to create a chair [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] – what she and Patrik came up with was more like semi-usable sculpture? So Vitra said, “Well, if the chair is too restrictive, why not do the fire station?” [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]. It’s very pointy, and has a lot of interesting features and angles. And yeah, it was briefly used as a fire station and then later became a gallery. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] Apparently this was planned all along! She got a lot of critique for this, but apparently it was always in the plan. But you can see in this picture the little fire trucks parked there.

So, the line between art, sculpture and architecture has been crossed – Zaha is no longer a paper architect.

[SHOWS SLIDE] So, she should have been on a high, but much like her later buildings, there were many curves to come.

In 1994, she wins the competition for the Cardiff Bay Opera House, against 267 other plans. There are objections to her design, so they repeat the process. She wins twice more. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] Her building is never built. The asymmetric design was rejected. Critics said, “Singers wouldn’t want to perform on an asymmetric stage.” (Somebody tell Frank Gehry that.) They said it wasn’t buildable, and they didn’t understand her drawings. She felt there was a campaign against her, and she was likely right. She said, “The fact that I was an Iraqi was a problem. The fact that I was a woman was a major problem, and I couldn’t change either.”

“They couldn’t talk to me. A cabal of men. They said, ‘Don’t worry she won’t do it, not over my dead body.’” One Welsh minister of Parliament actually said that her geometric design was identical to the shrine in Mecca and said he feared a *fatwa*. [AUDIENCE BOOS] That’s where the ‘boos’ go.

An Iraqi Arab woman architect, and particularly one from London, was not acceptable in Wales. They went with a local architect in the end. The firm felt stigmatized, and in

fact lost all their competitions for almost a decade, but the team stayed with her. She recalled, “I think in the 90s none of us slept. It was all coffee and cigarettes.” They were later able to use ideas from this era on other projects, and it was a great repertoire to pull from. And I just want to quickly explain that competitions in architecture are a bit like, for those of academics or creatives who apply for grants, in other words – you do all the work and you wait to see if you get any money.

So, despite later success, she remained bitter about the Cardiff project for years.

[SHOWS SLIDE] Though Zaha’s designs were slow to break through in the UK and London, she was able to do *something* for East End Boys and West End Girls! [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] I put this in just for that joke, it’s true. She created stage design for the Pet Shop Boys 1999-2000 World Tour, “Nightlife.” They called her a dream collaborator. She called the adjustable set “a three dimensional luminous landscape of projection and sound that fits in a suitcase.” It could be adapted to different venue sizes and quickly set up and packed – plus it just looks cool with all these angles and lights.

A lover of the arts, Zaha also designed sets for dance and many art exhibitions, and she also had her own paintings shown in major museums.

Then she got to build one of her own. [SHOWS SLIDE] This is the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, which I’ve also had the chance to visit. She described it as a *matroschka*, a Russian stacking doll, due to the limited horizontal space. You can see that it’s kind of stacked up against each other with various cubes of different sizes, and it’s a little bit like a maze – but there are curves here in the interior, as well as angles.

New York Times architecture critic Herbert Muschamp said of the building: “Might as well blurt it out: The Rosenthal Center is the most important American building to be completed since the end of the Cold War.” Whoa. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

Others agreed! [SLIDES SHOW] In 2004, Zaha Hadid was the first woman architect to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize, considered the Nobel Prize for architecture. She was also the first recipient in the first 25 years of the prize to acknowledge her colleagues for making work possible in an acceptance speech. [AUDIENCE MURMURS IN SURPRISE]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Wow.

SUSAN STONE: It’s said that she had only completed four buildings at the time. [SHOWS SLIDE] The angular one in the lower corner is Degewo social housing here in Berlin’s Stresemannstrasse, completed in 1993. She actually left the project before it

was finished, so I'm not actually sure if this one is counted as one of the four.

Architects were now superstars. And Zaha was the only woman amongst these *starchitects*. A friend remembered a moment at the Venice Biennale when a young man approached Zaha, knelt at her feet, ripped open his shirt, handed her a pen and said, "Autograph my chest!" [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

So after the Pritzker Prize, things really start picking up! [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] It actually becomes hard to keep track of everything that happens in the mid-to late 2000s. Her staff soon goes from 15 to 40 in three months, and doubles by 2005. She says, "Every time anyone knocks on the door, Patrik hires them." [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] Zaha was awarded the Stirling Prize for Rome's Museum of Art of the 21st Century, also known as MAXXI. She described it as "a large chewing gum hill you can pull in different directions," and said she "liked to think of it as a Martha Graham dance piece," accenting the movement that comes to mark her work. Sinuous forms erupt from the old building, like frozen concrete rivers, they add stability and form a courtyard. Her points are starting to curve. And you can see, in this picture on the corner, the reflection of the old building that surrounds it so that – and also in the picture down there – she really had to integrate her modern design into the existing structure and neighborhood. And the Italians loved it, so that was good.

This was one of her last projects made as a 3-D model with paper, pen and cardboard. So computers were taking over, but even the modeling programs had to be pushed to keep up with Zaha.

And while MAXXI was being built – you can see it took, what, more than 10 years? – As MAXXI was being built, the firm won and completed two projects in Germany .

[SHOWS SLIDE] Her BMW building in Leipzig is notable for flying, open layers that let workers from different sectors interact. "You can occupy space and make clusters of organization in such a way so that people from all levels of society meet each other." So, you have the car production line going by, and you have the desk workers being able to see it and kind of be in tune with the work that others are doing.

And then the Phaeno science center pushes her design and the technology further with its complex geographies. It's a little bit like a concrete elephant crossed with a spaceship [AUDIENCE LAUGHS], and it takes cues from natural forms. It's only an hour's train ride away!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You pass it by the train.

SUSAN STONE: You pass it by the train, yep! Definitely worth a stop.

[SHOWS SLIDE] In 2011, Zaha gets her second Stirling Prize in a row, for her work on the Evelyn Grace Academy in Brixton, London. It's notable for shared common spaces, and maximum levels of natural light and ventilation in a setting that encourages interaction for the students. I really love the racing track that...well, *runs* through the building [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]. Then you have these great curves and yet it's still angular. It does look a little bit like an airport from a distance, but it's cool.

Zaha was finally making her dent on London, and wowed with her London Aquatics Center built for the 2012 Summer Olympics. [SHOWS SLIDE] The Guardian newspaper called it "the most jaw-dropping municipal swimming pool in the world" – with its swooping wave of a roof and cathedral-like interior – the great legacy of the 2012 Olympics.

And in 2012, Zaha was named Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE for short) for her work in architecture. That's the female equivalent of being knighted. Still, she said that year: "You cannot believe the enormous resistance I've faced just for being an Arab, and a woman on top of that. It is like a double-edged sword. The moment my woman-ness is accepted, the Arab-ness becomes a problem... I've broken beyond the barrier, but it's been a very long struggle. It's made me tougher and more precise – and maybe this is reflected in my architecture."

And in 2013, she went on, "Being a woman architect gave me some advantages but more disadvantages. I can't go golfing with the guys. There is a brotherhood I cannot join. Whatever I do I cannot be part of that universe. And maybe I don't want to be part of that world."

[SHOWS SLIDE] The girl who once designed her own clothes became a woman who wore others' very well. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] She was known for her flamboyant style and bold choices. She complained, "They would definitely not talk about my clothes if I was a male. Or my nail polish. Or the color of my hair. They're so preoccupied with my appearance." But she is kind of a work of art herself, really! I don't blame 'em! [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

[SHOWS SLIDE] Along with her design team, Zaha also designed shoes – textured, sinuous and towering – for Melissa, Lacoste, Adidas and United Nude – which is Rem Koolhaas's shoe company. See? Architects can have shoe companies! As well as bags for Fendi and Louis Vuitton.

[SHOWS SLIDE] And jewelry for Swarovski (2008), Bulgari (2015), and Georg Jensen (2016) – forms that snake around the body.



[SHOWS SLIDE] There's also a Zaha Hadid take on furniture, perfume and wine bottles, lamps, faucets, glass ware, and cars. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] At some point, some critics start suggesting a little sameness, or maybe it's a signature style.

Zaha was more in demand than ever, and contracts abounded from every corner of the globe. [SHOWS SLIDE] Here is the Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center in Baku, finished in 2013? 12? 12 or 13. Every roof and ceiling panel is different. And I think you can really see the calligraphy in this design, although it's more like a whipped cream swoop – with windows.

However, Zaha was roundly criticized for working with a dictatorial government with a poor human rights record, and reports said that the city's urban renewal program came in tandem with forced evictions of more than 60,000 people.

The Al-Janoub Stadium, built in Qatar for the 2022 FIFA World Cup between 2014-2019, brought even more controversy. It was reported in 2014 that hundreds of migrant workers had died in Qatar since January 2012 during construction work connected to the World Cup. The tabloid press hounded her, and a writer in the New York Review of Books accused her of "showing no concern" over multiple deaths on her project. But actually they hadn't started construction yet, so she sued them for libel and won.

On the lighter side, perhaps, she was also accused of having created a vaginal form in that stadium [AUDIENCE LAUGHS], a claim she found ridiculous. Then again, if all sky-scrapers are phallic... [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

Throughout her career, she was called a diva and a hard ass. Her buildings, like herself, were too big and too loud. Too expensive and too challenging.

But not everyone thought so. [SHOWS SLIDE] In the prize citation for the Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects in February 2016, Sir Peter Cook praised her achievements, and skewered her detractors in Britain: "Let's face it, we might have awarded the medal to a worthy, comfortable character. We didn't, we awarded it to Zaha: larger than life, bold as brass and certainly on the case. Our Heroine. How lucky we are to have her in London."

Sadly, not for much longer. The next month, she was in Miami working on the One Thousand Museum Residential Tower. She is hospitalized for bronchitis treatment, where she suffers a heart attack and dies at the age of 65 on March 31, 2016. She's buried between her father and her brother in London.

It's a shock and a rift felt around the world. She left so many projects unfinished, [SHOWS SLIDE] including a building for the central bank of Iraq, which would have been her first project in her homeland ...and there are so many more unimagined.

The tributes to her genius and personality were many. She was an inspiration for many young architects and creative spirits, an icon who changed attitudes about women. Her friend and former teacher Rem Koolhaas expressed regret that she was rarely described as an Arab architect in the obituaries. The very thing that kept her outside the inner circle was now being ignored, and she was mourned as a British architect — finally “one of ours.”

There were a few dramas yet to come. At the time of her death, Zaha's estimated net worth was said to be \$215 million. And that legacy created some problems. The four will executors – her niece Rana Hadid, long-time collaborator Patrik Schumacher, a property developer, and a stained glass artist – all became embroiled in a toxic legal dispute lasting four years.

It started in November 2016 when Schumacher, who was left control of the business in a letter written by Zaha at the same time as her will, made a controversial speech at the World Architecture Festival here in Berlin. He said London's housing crisis could be solved by getting rid of regulations, privatizing public space and abolishing all forms of social and affordable housing, including rent control, [AUDIENCE BOOS] and developing London's Hyde Park. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] It turns out Potato is a neoliberal. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

Horried by these un-Zaha like statements, and other bad behavior (that I won't go into), the other three executors tried to oust him, and keep him from using the Zaha Hadid name for future projects.

With the dispute settled in 2020, the bulk of her assets will go to the **Zaha Hadid** Foundation, a charitable body with plans to establish a museum, and award scholarships, focused on supporting the architectural education of Arab women in particular. So her legacy lives on, in her own work and those of others, including the generations of students she taught and staffers she encouraged — and teased.

The world has had to catch up with Zaha.

Zaha Hadid Architects is still building. It's made up of 400 architects of 55 nationalities working on projects in 44 different countries.

[SHOWS SLIDE] Including the first carbon neutral football Stadium — it's the world's first to be built from wood and it's in Gloucestershire England. It's called the Forest Green Rovers Eco Park Stadium. And the sustainable CECEP Shanghai Campus in China, which will use renewable energy technologies and recycled materials to make

this very cool, stripey, modulating, silver, cool building. Yeah, I'm tired of talking about architecture. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

And there's a continued interest in public buildings from the firm that offer something for the public, despite Patrik Schumacher's personal beliefs.

There's no major biography out there about Zaha Hadid, but there are loads of children's books, which I kind of love! Zaha is incredibly well-documented online though. There are tons of interviews with her and lectures by her and feature stories. I did also find this book useful – conversations between curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and Zaha Hadid, and Rem Koolhaas is sometimes along for the ride as a bonus. The cover is absolutely hideous, but it's great to encounter her in her own words, and charming and surprising her questioners.

[SHOWS SLIDE] There's so much more I could tell you about this amazing woman. I'll end with a quote from Zaha's niece Rana, who also became an architect, inspired by her amazing aunt.

"She taught us that life is best when you build bridges between people, and not walls."

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Susan Stone on Zaha Hadid, recorded by Simone Antonioni. Wow, that's a great last name. Thanks, Susan!

SUSAN STONE: It's my pleasure! And I have to say, that might be my favorite of the talks I've given so far. This year, you know it's been triumphant and tragic at times, but there have been some great moments for Dead Ladies, and we wanted to revisit some of them. Florian, you have the most recent entry – tell us about it, please!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: I will! It's about Josephine Baker who I talked about – err – many years ago. You can find it on the podcast somewhere.

SUSAN STONE: We'll put a [link](#).

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Exactly, that's good. And it's about Josephine Baker, who is the first performing artist, the first Black woman and the first American to be inducted into the Pantheon's Hall of Heroes in Paris. I know! It's – I mean, her actual remains remain in Monaco where she was buried. She joins 75 men who are buried there, or symbolically buried there – and there are six women total now, with Josephine included. The first I think was the famous *l'inconnue du Panthéon*, which was the wife of a famous chemist. Her name was Sophie Berthelot, his name was Marcellin

Bertelout – you know, we’ve forgotten him already. And the other women who are there are resistance fighter and policy maker, Geneviève de Gaulle-Anthonioz; resistance fighter and ethnologist, Germaine Tillon; the great Simone Veil, who brought her husband, so, to even out that situation; the great Dead Lady alumna, Marie Curie, who *also* brought her husband, but he accomplished some stuff, too.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Plus one!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Yeah, he won some Nobel Prizes. There’s also Voltaire, just saying, who was a pal of my recent Dead Lady, who I gave a presentation on and who you’ll hear on the podcast next year. Her name is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and she brought vaccination to the West. Shout out! That’s really good.

My favorite story about the Pantheon is not women’s history related, it’s how in 2006 there was a team of urban explorers – you know, the people who like to live in the catacombs and ride their bikes down there and do stuff. They snuck into the Pantheon for a year, built a whole secret office there to actually renovate the clock – the 19th century clock that hadn’t rung since the 1960s – and they secretly fixed it. And then one day, the Paris people were just surprised that this bell started ringing again, and it was these illegal urban explorers who did it. Anyway, the Pantheon, pretty cool place.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Illegal clockmakers.

SUSAN STONE: Illegal clock *fixers*.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Exactly!

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Fabulous.

SUSAN STONE: Well, cheers to them and cheers to Josephine! [GLASSES CLINK]

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Cheers to Josephine! Yay! [GLASSES CLINK]

SUSAN STONE: Alright, I’ll go next. Mine was announced in October 2021, and I’m cheating a tiny bit because technically it doesn’t come out until 2022, I think it’s in February. And that’s the Anna May Wong quarter.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Ooh!

SUSAN STONE: So, check it out. Here’s a picture right here. You can see her –

KATY DERBYSHIRE: That’s pretty.

SUSAN STONE: Yeah! – peering out over her hand, with her bangs sweeping gently over her face. And it's got this really beautiful kind of framing of lights, what would you call those? Dressing table lights, or lights of the stage. And that's to commemorate, of course, Anna May Wong, who was the first Chinese-American film star in Hollywood.

She is not the only one coming on these coins. They're quarters – so that's 25 cents, a quarter of a dollar, of course. It doesn't sound like a lot, but still they're very collectible. People get really into them. And the other notable quarter ladies coming are writer Maya Angelou, astronaut Sally Ride, Cherokee Nation leader Wilma Mankiller and suffragette and politician Nina Otero-Warren, who was the first Hispanic woman to run for Congress, in 1920. Now it's said she lost partly because the public found out she was divorced. Times change, I hope?

So, these quarters are part of a series from the US Mint and were chosen by the public and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and they're part of a series that will continue through 2025. So, making change! [ALL LAUGH]

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Good work!

SUSAN STONE: "It's time for change" – is that better? All I know is I cannot wait to get my hands on one of these.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Yeah! I'm all about the public commemorations as well, but in an English setting. Because the cultural organization English Heritage, they've been basically going around putting up these blue plaques in places where famous people once lived and worked – for the past 150 years, which is quite impressive. They do have, however, a bit of catching up to do on the Dead Ladies front, as you can imagine. But this year they've installed six new plaques for women. Bit of a mixed bag, I have to say. Some of them you've certainly heard of, like Princess Diana. You've heard of her, I believe, yes? But there's two women that I'm really excited about that they've commemorated now. The first of them is Caroline Norton. She was a social reformer, *also* divorced, who fought for her rights after their marriage failed – which led to the Custody of Infants Act of 1839. So it was the first time that women got to have custody of their own children – up to the age of seven! – in English history, after the marriages failed.

And the other one is Ellen Craft, who escaped from slavery in Georgia in the States, and went to the North and campaigned for abolition. Eventually she and her husband had to come to London as refugees in 1850, and they carried on campaigning, they toured the country, they wrote a very successful book about their adventurous escape. They raised five children in a house in Hammersmith which is near where my mom's from, so I want to see that the next time I'm there.

I love these blue plaques and I love to imagine people just walking around and seeing these – they're quite visible, we often feature them actually when we talk about English Dead Ladies. [LAUGHS] They're visible on the outside of houses. And I think nowadays, you've got your phone with you – you can just whip it out and go, "Who was Ellen Craft?" – and be inspired for a future Dead Ladies Show! I hadn't heard of her so I'm really pleased to have found out more.

SUSAN STONE: Lovely. So, what was your favorite Dead Lady news of the year, listeners? Let us know on Twitter or Instagram @deadladiesshow or you can drop us an email to [info@deadladiesshow.com](mailto:info@deadladiesshow.com).

The Dead Ladies Show was founded by Florian Duijsens and Katy Derbyshire. Woo! The podcast is created, produced and edited by me, Susan Stone.

(Dead Ladies Show Music - 'Little Lily Swing' by Tri-Tachyon)

SUSAN STONE: Our theme song, boo-be-doo, is 'Little Lily Swing' by Tri-Tachyon. Thank you, Katy and Florian!

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Thank you, Susan!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Thank you, Susan, for everything and always.

SUSAN STONE: And thanks to everybody out there listening! We'll be back again soon with another fabulous Dead Lady.

KATY DERBYSHIRE: Support for this episode of the Dead Ladies Show podcast comes from the Berliner Senat.

SUSAN STONE: Cheers! [GLASSES CLINKING]

\*\*\*\*\*