**Automated Voice:** The following podcast is rated MAE for mechanical and aerospace engineering.

**Paul:** Friends, lend me your engineers. Welcome back. My name is Paul. I'm here with Kamryn.

**Kamryn:** Hi, Paul.

**Paul:** Hello, Kamryn. I want to thank everyone for taking a moment from binge-watching Stranger Things season two to take a listen to our very special Halloween episode today. Indeed, it's very special because we have the creative director for show development from Halloween Horror Nights on the show, Patrick Braillard. He's also a UCF alum. So very cool. Well, when I first moved down to Florida, my very first job was working for Universal as a seasonal employee during Halloween Horror Nights. Yeah. And I don't think that you really get the full grasp of just how enormous the production really is until you sort of see it from that backstage perspective.

**Patrick Braillard:** True story. Yeah. The scope and the potential of the event itself is something that is crazy to behold. Like you, I didn't know truly what I was getting myself into as a guest. I had gone to a couple of the events in four and five and again in six after moving down here. But it was until seven, when I became performance captain for the streets, that I had the opportunity to actually see the behind the stage like yourself, the immense scope of what we do internally here for all the guests. It is a crazy thing to behold.

**Paul:** About how many people do you have working to make this thing come to life?

**Patrick Braillard:** At the beginning of the well, let's see, it starts off at a very small group, actually. It starts off with about four or five people yelling at each other at a table for about six weeks. And then from there it balloons up to a good couple of dozen and it stays there in the development phase for a little while. And then by the time it hits the guest, I would say that all 20-plus thousand employees at Universal Orlando, plus the additional thousand characters we bring on board, not to mention the managerial staff, are all responsible for the event. In fact, I don't think there's a single person – I've said this before – I've kind of had it confirmed several different times over the last few years that I really don't think there's a single person on property working for Universal Orlando Resort that isn't impacted in some way by Universal's Halloween Horror Nights.

**Paul:** So this is the 27th year that this event is going on. Does it get easier each year or is it you're trying to top the last year so you make it more difficult?

**Patrick Braillard:** It's strange. As far as the difficulty is concerned, I think the pressure would be completely crazy if we tried to live up to what the tradition or the expectation is over the last quarter century. But I think that the reason that if we are successful, it's because we want to be aware of as well as pay off our expectations as fans ourselves. As long as we stay true to what we would like to see as fans, I think that that will go a long way towards what the guests would also like to see. And if there is any pressure, it purely is the pressure to make sure that we're happy with what we see as far as the mazes and the streets and the shows.

**Paul:** So, building off of that, you've been with Halloween Horror Nights for is it 12 years, is that correct?

**Patrick Braillard:** I did the math, it's ‘07 to now, but I think that's actually 11 seasons.

**Paul:** Okay, so in those 11 seasons, do you have a favorite house or favorite design?

**Patrick Braillard:** We've had a ton of – let me ask you this, what's your favorite?

**Paul:** I was a big fan of the Child's Playhouse with Chucky. I thought that was something really unique. There was a scare where a man was dressed in stuffed animals and he popped out and nobody saw that coming.

**Patrick Braillard:** Yeah, the plush room. I love that house. That was a lot of fun in ‘09. Yeah, it's so strange. And then the reason I ask is that everybody's got a different favorite. I think that's something that is certainly special about the event. I think that from year in and year out, if you have guests year over year, everybody's got a different answer to that question. One of my personal favorites in our past happened back one of the first years that I was working the event in Dead Exposure, back in the back of the park. It was a house that was amazing because we turned out all the lights and the only thing that showed up were zombies. Once we had a giant strobe go off in each room. That's terrifying maze, and I love that house.

**Paul:** So as the off season to Halloween Horror Nights expands, as the General Universal Orlando has more traction, does your space get cut down? Do you have to get creative with where you're going to put these houses?

**Patrick Braillard:** Well, I think that over the last few years you've seen property change so drastically with the inclusion of at one time disaster didn't even exist and they had to put disaster in and we had to evolve to that. You saw opportunities for the park to grow, as in Diagon Alley being added in, and you've seen Transformers arrive and we've had a number of different years of unbelievable growth here on property. And I think what's great about that is Halloween Horror Nights will always find a home, regardless of what phase or form it's going to take. And we've had years where we've had a lot of construction walls up and we've still brought the fear to everybody over the course of the Halloween season. So I'm not worried about it necessarily. I will say that the best part about Halloween Horror Nights is that we are always evolving and always developing new and interesting things. So I don't necessarily worry about the finite space that is included in the parks, but I would say that it does present an interesting challenge and an opportunity for us to think outside the box and paint stuff up from year in and year out.

**Paul:** So this podcast is presented by the mechanical and aerospace engineering department here at UCF, and we have a Senior Design presentation twice a year. And in this past year, we had the solar panel presentations where it was collaboration between the engineering department and the art department. Do you see a lot of collaboration between engineering and art? And can you speak to how important that is?

**Patrick Braillard:** Nothing gets done here on property without engineering. It's a fact. We have to work very carefully with not only our architects, but also in CAD design, making sure that our mazes are not only entertaining and aesthetically pleasing, if not terrifying, but also that they are safe for everybody involved. And there is a large amount of scrutiny on our behalf that the company, as well as art and design and creative development, put the mazes through in order to make sure that everything works the way it's supposed to work. It's not an easy thing and I take my hat off and certainly am honored to work alongside talented people like our technical crews that are able to provide our guests with the temporary structures that are Halloween Horror nights that are built more like permanent attractions each year, mainly because we want to make sure that the guests have a good time. And the only way to be able to do that is to make sure that their fears are in the right place, that they are scared of up the buildings that they are walking into. Right. We also have the opportunity in the Creative Development Department, which I'm a part of, that handles not only the marquee events, but also new entertainment offerings, that we have the opportunity to be able to partner with engineering to make sure that any permanent entertainment structure that we would bring into Universal Orlando Resort is also up to par. And it's wonderful to work with them because nine times out of ten, you're going to find those individuals want exactly what we want. They want to have the engineering be hidden from the guests because they don't want the guests to know exactly how things get paid off.

**Paul:** So if you're an engineering student and your dream, your goal is to work for Universal, work at one of the parks, what's the best way to get your foot in the door? Do you go work at one of the attractions or what advice could you give to an aspiring engineer?

**Patrick Braillard:** I'm still trying to figure out how I got here.

**Paul:** Okay.

**Patrick Braillard:** No, you know what? Everybody's got a different path. And certainly that's true not only in our department, but in creative development, but also alongside everything. There's wonderful opportunity, regardless of what your skill set is, for that growth to happen. At Universal Orlando Resort. Whether it's in marketing or whether or not it's in writing shows or whether you're a performer or you are an engineering student, I think that the key is and every time I talk to an education group about the particular skill set that I or the members of our team have culminated over the course of the last few years. But every time I have a chance to talk to those groups, I always say, if you're a writer, then you need to write. And if you're an actor, you need to act. And if you're a director, you need to direct. Because the more you do, the more you get to do. And I think that is also true with architecture, engineering, or any of the other scientific disciplines that would go into creating something alongside the artistic or creative side of the business. I think that's also true in the fact that you have to look for ability or opportunity to design as much as you possibly can. If that truly is something that you're passionate about, go after it. And that means that any foot in the door is a good foot in the door, because you don't know where that foot is going to lead you. You have no idea what doors or windows may open to you while you're in the midst of pursuing something that might not be or might feel like it's counterintuitive towards your end goal. You have no idea where that's going to lead you and how that's going to benefit you in the future. Does that make sense?

**Paul:** It does. If you want to be involved, get involved. Find a way and just make it happen.

**Patrick Braillard:** I think the misconception is that every actor is like, ‘Well, I'm going to do this.’ Well, you have to start somewhere, right? And if that might not be where you want to start necessarily, which certainly shouldn't be where you want to finish, it needs to be a good launching off point. And it might not be necessarily where you might see yourself in the future, but everybody's got to begin at a particular point.

**Paul:** Absolutely. And like you said, it's not about where you start, it's about where you end up and the journey between and the journey. So this is sort of the philosophical question, but Patrick, why do people like to be scared?

**Patrick Braillard:** I think that it's a great question. I think there are a number of different reasons why people like to get scared. First and foremost, I think that people like to seek that escape. I think that when they come to Halloween Horror Nights, they are looking to have a good time. They are looking to set aside their day or their week or their month, and they are coming in to have fun with their friends and to not necessarily relax, but to be open to a new experience that they didn't previously have at their disposal. I think that one of the funnest aspects of this job is that when somebody gets scared, they scream. And the first happens after they scream is that they laugh or their friends laugh at them. And I think that what's great about that is that it's an automatic cathartic release. They can let go of some of their tension, they can let go of some of their stress. But also, I think that by coming to Halloween Horror Nights, you have the opportunity to be able to share that experience with all of your friends as well. That you have the opportunity to share it in a group setting where you can safely get scared and have that stress release en masse for several hours and have a great time doing it.

**Paul:** I want to take this opportunity to pitch an idea to you for a house next year. It's called Revenge…

**Patrick Braillard:** Hold on, hold on. Time out, time out. I got to check with my PR rep whether or not you're allowed to. Okay. I don't know if legally I'm allowed to.

**Paul:** Okay, well, plug your ears.

**Patrick Braillard:** I'll just say it for about how about hypothetically? Hypothetically?

**Paul:** Hypothetically.

**Patrick Braillard:** Hypothetically speaking. Okay.

**Paul:** When I close my eyes and I dream about future Halloween horror nights, I would like to see revenge of attractions past featuring The Ghostbusters and Murder, She Wrote.

**Patrick Braillard:** Are they all covered in construction or deconstruction dust?

**Paul:** Yes.

**Patrick Braillard:** Alright, hypothetically speaking, that's a pretty good idea. That's a lot of fun. You could have a room with a dusty, broken Bruce and Bruce the shark, and I think that's a lot of fun. You could have the ghost of Christopher Walken on an animation screen. I like this idea.

**Paul:** All right, well, hypothetically. We'll look for that in the future, though.

**Patrick Braillard:** Yeah, hypothetically speaking. Coming to you live from 2018.

**Paul:** Well, of the actual houses that exist this year, do you have a favorite for people to check out?

**Patrick Braillard:** What's also interesting about the event, the answer is yes. The short answer is yes, and I'll get to that. But the longer answer is the amazing opportunity that we have here at the park to be able to put on this event is that everybody seems to be scared of something different. Each person will be able to have a payoff. If you like a movie-themed house, nothing is finer than The Shining. If you want to see how grand we can make a house, then you're going to want Dead Waters. If you're going to want to check out something that is culturally relevant right now, American Horror Story is going to be your ticket. But I think my favorite this year so far, just because of how scary it is, has to be Scarecrow: The Reaping. Scarecrow: The Reaping is the scariest maze that I've seen thus far this year. And that doesn't necessarily mean that the other casts or the other houses are not living up to our expectations. It simply means that on a particular run, when I went through, I got scared. And that's saying something, because I usually don't get scared in our room.

**Paul:** Has there ever been a house that was just too scary and you had to change plans?

**Patrick Braillard:** No.

**Paul:** Okay.

**Patrick Braillard:** No. I consider that a huge success if that happened.

**Paul:** Okay.

**Patrick Braillard:** If our senior leadership team had to come to me to tell me to change the scope or change the house because it was too scary, I would for a bonus.

**Paul:** Yeah. Okay.

**Patrick Braillard:** I think that as far as too scary is concerned. No, but here's the thing, is that during the course of the event, you bring up an interesting point in that during the course of the event, we will constantly be making changes to the mazes and to the streets and to the shows in order to make sure that the guests are getting the best possible experience. And so we will make sure that we're receptive to things that happen during the course of the year. And so I wouldn't be surprised if during the course of the year, that you see some things change inside all of the experiences.

**Paul:** So how quickly do you start working on Halloween Horror Nights 28?

**Patrick Braillard:** We're already working on Halloween Horror Nights.

**Paul:** It never ends.

**Patrick Braillard:** No. In fact, right now, we're in the concept phase. I was telling somebody on the way over here, I'm about ankle deep on the second maze, and I'm about, I don't know, mid-calf deep on the first maze. I think that we're starting that process, although conversations began June, July as far as, ‘Hey, what do you think about this?’ Or, ‘Hey, maybe we should go after this kind of…’ yeah, we're already well underway.

**Paul:** All right, well, Patrick, I want to thank you so much for coming on the show today.

**Patrick Braillard:** Oh, of course, Paul. Thanks for having me. And Go Knights!

**Paul:** And always there's a great big, beautiful tomorrow shining at the end of every day and tomorrow is just a dream away or a scare OOH or a scare spooky.