



Translating Experiences

A Little Commitment – Kiruna Stamel and Gareth Beliner

A Commission for DaDaFest International 2020 – Translations!

Podcast 4

Interview with Cheryl Martin:

GARETH: Hello and welcome to Dada Fest International 2020. Translating experiences

KIRUNA: We're your hosts, Gareth Berliner and Kiruna Stamell

GARETH: Today was speaking with Cheryl Martin. Cheryl is a singer, poet, director, writer, performer. She's also Co-artistic director of Black Gold Arts and her work show recently as part of Homotopia.

KIRUNA: This interview was recorded over Zoom because of Covid restrictions, so we apologise for any effect this has on the sound quality of the recording.

GARETH: The following discussion contains themes that may be sensitive to some including details of mental health experiences and suicide.

KIRUNA: Hello and welcome Cheryl Martin, thank you so much for joining us

CHERYL: and thank you Kiruna and Gareth.

KIRUNA: Gareth and I saw your film which was part of Homotopia the other night.

CHERYL: Thank you for watching.

KIRUNA: So when did you start to identify as a disabled person, or do you, or don't you?

CHERYL: I only started identifying as a disabled person within the last 10 years.

I had told a friend of mine what symptoms to look for to know that I was getting really sick and she said she saw them, but I was gone by then as she couldn't really do anything about it. And when they finally got me back on medication that actually worked, which took a long time, but I was still crashing and burning so badly in the summers that my GP would call out the crisis team and the crisis team would have to actually come to my house and you know all that, she said that actually, you know you should go for a personal independence payment. Because you're, you're that sick and I think that it was around then that I began to accept that I'm actually disabled. I was diagnosed as borderline personality disorder when I was diagnosed in '87, I think it was, they said then that you can't treat a personality disorder and so, it wasn't until I was 55, something like that, 2014 or something like that that I started getting actual borderline specialist treatment and that is when I basically came out as disabled when I started making this solo shows that were about my experiences

KIRUNA: And you are also Co-artistic director of Black Gold Arts.

CHERYL: Yes

KIRUNA: Why did you create black gold arts? You felt there was obviously another gap you know within the art sector. So what inspired that?

CHERYL: Will you saw Contact back in old Contact days, you know mid 2000s and back then all the senior heads of department except for one more black 2/3 of the young actors' company where black. If you looked around there were loads of black people all the time and some people even thought that it was a black, they thought it was a black theatre, but when the artistic director then left the next artistic director who is not the artistic director now, this is somebody who's gone, but slowly all of that disappeared and in Manchester it seemed like, you know I've got a few awards and things it didn't seem to matter how much you had done, you just didn't get any real love from anybody. Your stuff didn't go on the main stage. It could go in the studio and that was if you paid for it yourself, you know, got the money in yourself and we just decided to take three shows, that had just been done and all were really good, put them together and call them a festival and so that was how Black Gold Arts started because we just felt like black artists from Manchester were being more or less side lined.

GARETH: Well we just saw your film, One Woman, which we saw as a film, but obviously before the pandemic, was going to be a live performance, so is it a translation of the live performance in the way to the film, or how do you feel about it? How were you able to do that?

CHERYL: I was lucky because I was working with a black woman director name Juliet Ellis, who used to be in Sheffield and now lives in New York City, but she's also a film maker and a film actor, but she's been in a lot of Shane Meadows stuff

I think she was in *The Virtues* was the last one she was in and I wanted to do the binaural sound, that was my idea, that soundscape because I wanted to find a way for people to experience the sort of chaos that actually goes on inside my head and that's why it was cacophony that you were talking about it was just a way for them to feel that and plus I just love binaural sound and so we found a young sound engineer named Guillaume Dujat who is still studying, that's why we could afford him and he was really good and from Clubland, Sean Clark did the projections and Julie filmed those things at the beach and some things were from my *Holidays*, some of those film images, and we had all that and so we did the R&D where we did, we assembled all that and the last layer was supposed to be done last July which was the live performance part, because we hadn't actually finished that. So the stage play, like I said, has interaction with the audience and there's more stuff in it, it's longer, but luckily we had all these ingredients which Julie then basically remixed to make a film, because she's a film maker, so it's not the stage play cos it wasn't done, we didn't finish that. In the film you hear that I say that I worry about talking about my suicide attempts. What they were really like because I don't want anybody to feel triggered into, you know. But, I mean, she framed it so that you know, I say it's not pretty, I would never do it, et cetera, et cetera. but that part is now extremely prominent. There was a long part in the original soundscape where I talk about sort of, my anger at the way people talk about borderline personality disorder because it is very stigmatised and there are a lot of people who feel that women are wrongly diagnosed with that when they should be diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but for me at least that is correct. I was in hospital in the states at the National Institute of Mental Health where they do research and the description of Borderline Personality Disorder that you find in the National Institute of Mental Health, that's really just what I was like when I was in my 20s. I was one of a series of people and it was accurate, so that was me.

KIRUNA: Given you had this idea that was going to be theatrical and live. Then COVID happens so you adapt brilliantly, which the Arts Council will love your adaptive resilience, you turn it into a film which translates your experiences and the ideas that you had beautifully, like. I was very, very moved by it. What will the process be for you to take those ideas in that concept and translate it back to a live performance? Well, how will you do that?

CHERYL: Well, I'll only be able to do that with the team back. So the director will help a great deal and I was going to work with the movement director named Jane Mason and I'll have to think myself back into that space. This time, I think I'll also get some psychiatric cover because I'm unearthing trauma that I haven't dealt with to do the show and that's basically it, I'll just need some help. It'll have been a year or two years now, something, a huge gap of working with it physically, so I imagine that it's going to change again because I'm not in the same mind space I was in when I created it now it's changed quite a bit.

GARETH: So how do you find as an artist touching on those points to take you back there, when you're trying to kind of move away from it, How do you navigate that?

CHERYL: When I did Alaska, the first solo show, which is about again my suicide attempts and being in asylums there's lots of funny stuff in it and I think, I basically used music to recover. So at the lowest point of that show, I just cry every single time I do it, and I did it at Edinburgh, obviously there was no Edinburgh this year back in 2019 and I did it for the whole of Edinburgh because it's a small capacity show, so I was going through that hell every single day. There's something in me that still feels like I'm back in that room. The other reason I did the binaural sound was I was going to load all the really heavy stuff into that so that on stage I was supposed to be doing something serene like I'm having a day at the beach and I thought that way I wouldn't relive it but the truth is that just looking at what's on the screen still makes me cry. The real answer to your question is, I didn't find the proper work around for it, so to do Alaska or to do this one, I've accepted that it's going to be really rough and what I need to do now is get psychiatric cover, and so that access to work I need to have somebody there. Looking back on it, I don't know how I did that? There's an old black gospel song because how I got over and it's like "how I got over, how I got over, oh my soul looks back in wonder, how I got over" and that's how I wonder about my whole life. How did I get through all this stuff?

GARETH: We wanted to bring it back to a place that might mean that we end with something to talk about that was a bit lighter for all of us we believe that you're a fan of Star Trek Discovery

KIRUNA: But I , I got that from watching your work

GARETH: Yeah

KIRUNA: Which I thought was

CHERYL: Oh, did you?

GARETH: Yeah

KIRUNA: Yes cos your themes are so Star Trek

CHERYL: Oh, that's funny

KIRUNA: It's so weird, I could see Star Trek in your work

CHERYL: And I never mention it, so that's brilliant Yes, I'm a fan of Star Trek Discovery, love it to death! It's Michael isn't it, and a young Spock, and, you know, Spock Dad's It's James Frain who plays his dad, and he plays it well! Michele Yeoh

doing the Empress from the evil empire She is so kick ass, it's just, in fact they all are It is really, I just love that Star Trek. Well it's nice to see both of you and get to know you two a little bit better as well

GARETH: Yeah, thanks for your time

KIRUNA: Thank you Cheryl

CHERYL: Bye

KIRUNA: Bye

GARETH: Thank you Cheryl. To see more of her work check out her website at www.cherylmartin.net, or www.blackgoldarts.co.uk

KIRUNA: If you were effected by any of the themes discussed and would like support please contact Samaritans.org, or check out MIND

GARETH: This podcast was produced by Little Commitment and edited by Pete Gledhill.

KIRUNA: This was a DaDaFest 2020 Commission.