



All from the Mouth: An Interview with Conrad Murray

[00:00:19] INTRO

Duška Radosavljević: Hello! Welcome to the Gallery!

Conrad Murray is an actor, writer, director, rapper, beatboxer, singer, teacher and theatre-maker. Since 2008 he has been leading the Beatbox Academy at Battersea Arts Centre in London, which he had initially set up with Monique Duchen, SK Shlomo and MC Zani, as a weekly youth group for 12-21 year olds.

Murray's independent work includes autobiographical solo show *DenMarked* (2016), the two-hander *No Milk for the Foxes* made with Paul Cree in 2015, and *The High Rise eState of Mind* made in 2019 with Lady Ki Ki, Gambit Ace and Paul Cree. The key aspect of Conrad Murray's work as a whole is a deep commitment to collaboration.

In 2016, with the Beatbox Academy he created an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* which has become a critical and box office hit, and has toured to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2019 and Adelaide Festival in 2020. A TV version of the Beatbox Academy's *Frankenstein* is airing this autumn on the BBC's Culture in Quarantine. Currently Conrad Murray is also co-writing a book on hip hop theatre with academic and writer Katie Beswick.

In the conversation that follows Conrad Murray talks to us about his early beginnings as an artist, his formative influences growing up on a council estate, and the trials and tribulations of finding success against all odds. This conversation took place on Zoom on 29th May 2020, during the Covid-19 lockdown in London.

[00:02:02] 'YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE THAT EXPERIMENTAL'

Duška Radosavljević: The way we do this conversation is: I like to retrace people's steps and go all the way back to what kind of formal training you might have had and how you integrated it, how you reacted against it, both in terms of theatre and performance-making and music-making, and what formative influences were important for you in terms of – specifically music here, actually, but also any other formative influences that became significant for you in how you work and so on. So, you grew up in Croydon, did you, or is that where you live right now?

Conrad Murray: Near Croydon, yeah. Similar postcode, but I live in Mitcham.

DR: So, yes, let's go back to the council estate where you grew up, and how did you get to where you are now?

CM: Yeah, I lived on a few different council estates. I guess music was kind of always blaring out of other people's houses and out of their cars. So, as well as hearing the music that was played at home, which was kind of my stepdad and my mum both listened to different kinds of music to each other. And, then also hear a lot of mainly hip hop, drum and bass and ragga around the estate, which was, kind of like, a bit dangerous to my parents, you know? Me and my brother, we played hip hop tapes upstairs because it had swearing on them. It felt like it was the most dangerous thing we were doing. I remember thinking, like: 'This is bad, like, this is the naughtiest thing we could be doing.' It's weird now because it's just music, but honestly it felt like a secret society upstairs in my room. My brother would get these tapes from his crazy friend from school and then we'd put them on. It's weird because some of those songs sound – the instrumentation sounds softer because you're used to it, but I remember that it sounded, like, really, the music sounded dangerous and then also with the things they were talking about, often, like, politics or drugs, it was like: 'Wow!', like, it was quite an education to be honest. I think I learnt more about sex from music than I did from, you know, anyone at school.

DR: What years were these roughly? And what were the artists that you were listening to that were particularly influential?



CM: Well, Tupac was kind of the main hip hop influence I first listened to, really. But you know what, before Tupac there was Will Smith, but even Will Smith to my parents was dangerous! [*Laughter.*] Like, 'Boom! Shake the Room', it was like: 'What is this you're listening to? It's noise! It's just noise.' I remember thinking I was letting them down because I liked it, do you know what I mean? Like: 'I'm such a letdown!' But then Tupac, which was a lot more savage – this isn't really connected with anything, but what I find funny is Tupac's favourite artist was Will Smith, and yet they're completely different, which is kind of crazy. But then also DMX and Onyx and a group called the Outthere Brothers. They had commercial songs that were like [*singing*]: 'Boom, boom, boom everybody say way-o!', which the public knows, but on their album it was, like, so explicit it was unbelievable. Onyx and DMX, if you listen to their lyrics, it's very dark and talks about demons and dark and – I mean, it's kind of like proper adolescent fare, but at the time it was like: 'This is savage!' And, actually it was new for its time, that kind of music, it was like 1995.

DR: In *DenMarked*, when you demonstrate your skill of being able to reproduce sound by listening to records, presumably that your family had, it's a different type of–

CM: Well, because my parents' music is older music so I also like different styles of music. So I like Elvis because my mum liked Elvis, and my stepdad, he liked R&B and soul music, so there's quite a mix there. But the song that I sing there is an Elvis song because I used to – I was very good at copying people's voices and stuff, not just the sounds but the voices, and I just – I really studied the records on the record player. I remember sitting there seeing the discs spinning and then just copying for hours. I think, I don't know what kind of concentration you have as a kid but you can just do it for hours and hours and hours, and then doing it again, starting it again! And then again! Yeah, it was great.

DR: So obviously music was a big thing in your family anyway–

CM: Kind of. Kind of. I wouldn't say they were music fans, they liked it just as much as the normal, working-class family – probably less likely, because they would kind of put it on but it wouldn't be blaring out or a big thing, it would just be: 'I like this', put it on, play it once, turn it off. But they listened to music in the car mainly and then my stepdad would listen to music at home loud, which my mum didn't like.

DR: And how did you discover theatre?

CM: Me and my brother were very precocious. We talked quite early on. I guess it's probably the way our parents spoke to us, to be honest. There was no mollycoddling or, it was just like: 'Do this, shut up', do you know what I mean? I remember I'd watch TV and see kid actors and I remember saying to my mum: 'Ah, what is that?' So, she said: 'It's that actress', and I remember I went to school and when they said: 'What do you want to be when you're older?', I was like: 'I want to be an actress!' [*Laughter.*] And everyone was laughing and I'm thinking: 'What? That's what my mum told me!' But I had this thing in my head that I like performing because at parties and things like that, me and my brother would always be showing off and maybe we'd be singing or dancing. We were just, like, liked to perform. I guess it was a good – something to do. Also, there was kind of I guess a lot of working-class people, I guess, you're either going to make it famous or you're going to be poor, innit? Like, people have this thing in the mind of, like, which kids are – if you're good at sport or you're going to be famous. The idea of, like, a career or working hard – everyone goes to school, but there's no rewards from that, generationally. There's kind of a distrust of that's going to actually lead to anything, because we all went to school but we're all the same. So, I think it's kind of like you need to be a boxer or you need to be a singer or... So any kind of precocious attitude it's like putting you forward. So, I had this in my head I wanted to be a performer or something like that. I didn't necessarily know about the theatre until I went to the Polka Theatre – do you know the Polka Theatre in Wimbledon?

DR: Yeah.

CM: So at school – well, actually before that, I went to the theatre because my mum's a bus driver and there's, like, I don't know what it is, some sort of charity thing where they take some of the kids on trips, like, the drivers' kids. So, they took us to see *Dick Whittington* at Wimbledon Theatre. I remember I was at the very, the very back row but it was pretty mind-blowing at the time. I just thought it was amazing. They used to take the bus drivers' kids, like, without our parents which is kind of crazy and exciting, to watch shows on ice. So, you would watch people ice skating and apparently it used to be



quite a big thing. I remember, I really remember *Snoopy on Ice*, and there'd be different things on ice. But I think what happened was that Disney took it over so now everyone only knows it as *Disney on Ice* but before it would be *Dick Whittington on Ice* or, I don't know, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. It would be lots of different stories but, as with everything, Disney took it over and made – it's probably a bit old-fashioned now, but obviously that was theatrical. But the Polka Theatre was when I really thought: 'Wow, this is amazing!', because you understand more. I've watched the story of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and it was an amazing story, like 'wow!' and, I don't know, it was just the experience of seeing people in front of you telling a story, which is a real story, but they're real people, you know, it was just like mind-blowing. And: 'I want to do this as well because of the way it's making me feel.' I was like: 'Wow, imagine being part of this.' I just remember just thinking about it all the time, and we did do drama at school but it was different, it was off and on, but we did do some, some drama, which I enjoyed. But it was in English they mainly spoke about drama. And I remember never forgetting when they talked about soliloquy and all these different terms and thinking: 'This is like that – I mean, that's what they were doing in *Anne Frank*.' So I'm lucky because school wasn't that important to me and I had a bad time and I was bullied and the school on my estate was shit, but, but I remember these things and my social worker who told me about the Brit School and basically got me an interview, an audition. I just so happened to just remember all these things from English but it was only because of *Anne Frank*. I remember thinking it was probably one of the best days of my life, and I was thinking, 'Wow, like, I remembered all these terms, I remembered the play.' But it was not in preparation for the interview, it was just that I just kept thinking about it and I thought: 'Man, I'm so lucky that that had happened, that experience, because there's no way that I'd have got in otherwise.' A lot of the kids there, they had a lot of experience before they go there.

DR: How old were you when you got into the Brit School?

CM: 14.

DR: So you did what? What's that stage of education called then, like, GCSEs, or...?

CM: Yeah, it's GCSEs.

DM: So, at Brit School you trained to be a performer, right? Is that what the education is?

CM: Yeah. You choose different areas. So I chose drama because I wanted to be an actress! [Laughter.] But actually most people would – even when I started there at Brit School everyone would always say: 'Why didn't you choose music, because everything you do is music even though you say you want to be an actor?' – because I was still young, I had limited language and understanding. But the thing is people don't realise how elitist music is, very elite, and you have to be very, very rich to do well in music, and even if you look at the pop charts there's Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran; these are children of millionaires. They may dress like us, they act down, but their parents are millionaires. And it's hard because people are buying these stories of: 'They hang around the pub like us and round the park', and it's like it's all bullshit. I know this because I went to the same schools they go to, they're fucking rich! So by the time they go to somewhere like the Brit School – the Brit School is amazing because it does give – I mean it has to give local kids the chance to get in and it has to have a certain amount. But, the first time I ever saw a piano was at Brit School. Would I have ever seen one if I didn't go there? Probably not! You know what I mean? I got to touch one. Amazing experience! People don't think how amazing that experience can be, it's just – I got to see a fully strung guitar, in tune! Like, I would never have had that experience. But the music strand, because of the way the sorts of knowledge they expected you to have of music, that would have taken thousands and thousands of pounds of training. Music's my job and I do it, but there's always that sense of – and I know it's not true but it's at the back of your mind – I've never studied music, I just love music. I can hear tonally, I can hear harmonies, I love it, but there's this thing of like: 'You're the musician, you're the actor, you're this', you know. And now I encourage people to break down those boundaries, but I know what it feels like when you feel like: 'Oh, that's not what I do. These are the great ones.' And they show you: 'This is the great pianist who's playing this piece that was written hundreds of years ago and he's learnt it.' And, you're making and inventing but somehow, you know, you're taught that's not a valid skill, but actually it is a skill, but at the time when people would say: 'Ah, shouldn't you just be on the music strand?' I'd think: 'Wow, that's wild. Why do you keep saying that?' Because just in my free time I'd be, I'd be on those pianos,



mate, having fun with them, bashing about. Any instrument I'll be, like, I wanted to have a go because it was there.

DR: And, how long were you at the Brit School for?

CM: I was there for two years. So, you can be there for four years – I don't know, you probably saw it in *DenMarked*, but I was always in trouble, you know. I took in a gun quite early on and was suspended. But the teachers still liked me, they were actually – even though I was always in trouble, I had a good relationship with the teachers because they knew me more than the good kids. Because I was in the Head's office all the time, my parents were always in all the time... But by the end I was quite confused about what I wanted to do, I guess, and I just thought: 'I want to get out', and I already felt a lot older anyway. Because, you know, the kids who went there were quite mollycoddled and they talk about 'mummy and daddy' and whatever and I was like: 'I don't talk to my mum and dad about what I'm doing here', do you know what I mean? Like, 'What!?' Do you know what I mean? 'What your mum thinks about what you're going to be doing?! You talk to your mum about that?!' But, that's because their parents are still supporting them at 16. Even now, you know, kids will be having conversations about college and university, and I never ever had a conversation about that in my life. So I kind of wanted to go out and make money, and thought that's what I needed to do. And to be honest, class-wise, that was probably better for me because another two years... Because my two years there was different from those other kids' two years there, because they had a support system for those two years, they had all sorts of shit going on staying there for those two years. Although it would have been a brilliant, brilliant time, it's not equal when you step out of those two years. You're older, we might be the same age, but they have all those connections, family connections, they have all that money already. I wasn't thinking that way, I just knew I just needed to do my own thing. And I thought, at the time I was thinking: 'Yeah, but I'm a big man, I need to get out, I need to get out of this.' And, you know, it was sad to leave my friends but it was best for me because I got a job as a bus conductor. The buses is, like – that's the family industry! [*Laughter.*] I started buying music equipment straightaway. So, recording equipment, I spent every penny that I had and spent that time learning and doing – and actually that was probably better for me. Risky and, I don't know what, I think I'd be more scared to take that sort of risk now. To like say goodbye to this massive institution looking after me and be like: 'Nah, I'm going to do it myself.' But, I'm glad that I was – you know, when you're young, you're just so fiery and angry: 'I'm going to do it myself!' It was great because I learnt how to multi-track, and I had loads of interest from like the record industry and stuff like that. And again, now I think back I think: 'Whoa, this is crazy some of the things I was able to have access to.' But, I did it all myself from my bedroom on a council estate. It's mad! I look back and think: 'I don't know what I was – I don't know what I was doing!'

DR: So you were making music that was – and writing presumably – that was in the vein of your interest in hip hop and-

CM: Yeah, and other stuff. I was experimenting with guitars. I was experimenting with – I was mashing it up; I had a drum machine but I'd also play guitar on it. It was, like, it was like indie mixed with hip hop. I was just mash, I was just mashing stuff up. I remember going to the studios and stuff and people were like: 'What the fuck!? What is this?' And I remember the Head of Music at Brit School, because I went back there for a careers meeting – because back then you would go back and get a careers meeting with your teachers. So I'm thinking: 'It might be Brit School but I'm going to go back, they need to help me out!' But they were like: 'It's never going to work', you know? Even though I'm mixed race, my dad's Indian, whatever, like with whatever, he was like: 'No, rapping is not – England? That won't work. Playing guitars with rapping, that's not going to work.' And, there's loads of songs with guitars in it, but the thing is, maybe they're onto something because when it's a posh twat like Ed Sheeran, he's allowed to do some kind of false rapping over a guitar, innit? But when it's like people actually from council estates doing it, they want to limit you what you can do. Like, it's really depressing because they want to put you in a box, like: 'It needs to be like this.' So a lot of it was a bit: 'You're not allowed to be that experimental.' It needed, it would have needed to have been fully one thing or fully another. But I was experimenting, I wasn't really worried about it, I just thought: 'Fuck you', do you know what I mean? 'I'm going to carry on.'



[00:17:14 to 00:20:15] 'No Books' from *DenMarked* (2016)

[00:20:15] TECHNOLOGY

DR: So this was, I presume, something like late '90s, early 2000s?

CM: Late '90s, yeah.

DR: And what was the sort of technology that you were using at the time? I know that in *DenMarked* you used a loop pedal, you use your voice, obviously, as a primary thing when you work with the others, but what were the kind of music-making technologies that you were using at that time?

CM: I started off with a four-track on tape. So I'd seen them at Brit School actually, we had used it a bit, but because music was my minor, drama was my major, we didn't get a lot of time on it. Well actually, what I first did was I made my own four-track. I connected two different tape machines, I would record on one and then play it back and then sync over that with the other one recording at the same time, and then play that and be singing with that already recorded, and then that one was recording at the same time to layer, layer, layer. But what happens when you do that is this destructive kind of recording because on each layer the last instrument you recorded as you re-record, it downgrades that layer, like it becomes less quality. But it gives it a certain quality because you're recording on tape and there's something interesting. I mean, a lot of those old '60s and '70s recordings are done that way, that some of the earlier takes would have degraded on the songs we're hearing, but it gives it a certain quality – and it was great to experiment. But what the four-track did was there's less destruction in the layers, but you still do it because you record one, two, three, four and then you bounce those four down into one track and then you record another three over them and you keep bouncing it down. I'm quite glad that I started that way because it's good experience for understanding layering, understanding what is going on, because now when you buy software it does it all for you. People don't actually know what is going on, whereas now if I'm using a digital audio work station I'm always aware of all the different processes that are actually happening. Now you press one button and it's got delay on it and it's doing all sorts of things but that's not even your delay, you haven't even set it up. Before, that would have been a rack unit that's coming in as an insert into your machine, like – loads of different things. But I think having the hands-on experience – because it was just as the technology was coming in, and I remember I was saving my money, I never had any friends, I didn't have – I had an interest in girls but they didn't have an interest in me! So there was this perfect alchemy of like having interest, and being a geek is great, mate. At the time it was a bit depressing, do you know what I mean? If someone said to me, like: 'Hey, you can be hanging round with girls and be doing like-', I would have probably said: 'Yes.' But now in retrospect I'm so glad that I was just doing whatever I wanted to do because it gave me that intense focus. I remember going into a music shop and buying all this stuff, and the guy said – because I had money, I was saving and had nothing to do – he was like: 'Don't buy all of this stuff. Buy one computer because it will do it all for you.' But I said: 'No', because it was very early on and I was thinking: 'What?' – I just thought: 'How the hell can that computer do everything?' And at the time it actually couldn't have done as much in depth as I wanted – it could do it all, but it would have sounded actually worse. In the same way that, you know, a CD or a tape is quite convenient but vinyl actually has frequencies that we hear that – it's more basic, it's different. A computer's different, it's not better, and I think that's what you learn. The more you think about sound is – it's never better. Even that destructive way of recording I was talking about, it's not better now, it's just different – because when you hear 50 people singing at the same time you're not hearing them all exactly the same as the same volume. Someone's standing at the back, someone's slightly to the back. So sound isn't equal anyway, there's not one equal way to hear it. But no, I started off on four tracks and then I got an eight-track, which was – I'm trying to think, how come I got the eight-track. Eight-track just meant that I had more channels, less destructive, it was digital, but it was quite expensive. I'm wondering what happened, not that it's that important to the story, but I was just thinking how all of a sudden I could afford that? I was hit by a car at some point and I got compensation. When I was a bus conductor, riding a bike, I got hit by a car. But the guy was arrested – it was a hit and run, he was arrested and anyway I got compensation, so I had a little boost to my cash so I could get some more equipment. So I moved from a four-track to an eight-track. And again, I'm so glad on that journey because, had I went straight to a



computer – which again, it was so early and you couldn't record audio on a computer, it was just MIDI – and the audio was shit. Enjoying that journey of: 'Wow, I've now got eight tracks!' Like: 'Now it's unlimited!' Not that they care – no one cares, but I'm like, that feeling of getting those extra tracks is such a great feeling! Like, recently I was at CPT with a bluetooth – I've got a bluetooth keyboard so I can move around the stage – but obviously it's not just a keyboard, I could trigger drum samples, I could trigger anything I could trigger on it. I'm there and I'm saying: 'This is amazing!' It's really smart, where is it? Anyway, it's here somewhere. Because, I was thinking: 'You can build these into the set! And you can have people triggering sound, like this is amazing!' Like, and then the engineer at the desk was: 'And what? What?', and I'm thinking: 'Can you fucking see this?! I'm over here, playing here, no wires – and it's triggering sounds!' Anyway, I think that that's kind of the epitome of if you don't experience that journey of different kinds of equipment you don't really get to respect it.

DR: Right. That's really interesting.

[00:25:40] GETTING INTO UNI

DR: So what was your next step then?

CM: So I went to Brit School and then I went to South Thames College. South Thames introduced me to BAC. And it was through South Thames and BAC I learnt a lot more about the theatre world in a real sense than at Brit School. Because Brit School would teach you about proscenium arch when it comes to theatre, very old school. Whereas getting involved with BAC and through South Thames, actually getting us that knowledge or that access, I learnt about people devising and creating...

DR: How old were you when you were doing that? Just to get my bearings in your life story.

CM: I went to South Thames when I was 18.

DR: Okay. And then that's when you discovered BAC because they had a pre-existing relationship and you discovered devising.

CM: But at BAC, in their youth theatre it was quite mixed. People didn't do the theatre group because they wanted to act, which also blew my mind! Because I still had this thing that I would say: 'Oh, I want to be an actor', but I knew that it didn't really fit what I was doing at all. I'm making music, I'm mashing it up, I'm thinking of many different ways to make performance, but I didn't have the language to know what I'm supposed to say I do. Back then I'd be like: 'I'm playing around, I'm a performer, I'm an artist.' And in the group there'd be like a banker – I remember one guy worked in a bank and I remember thinking, like: 'Whoa, I'm in the same session as someone who works in a bank. That's weird, that's mad!' And, a lot of these people that worked in the city, they would say: 'Ah, I'm interested in being creative. I don't want to be an actor.' I remember thinking – at first I was kind of angry. I thought: 'Why are you wasting your time?' And, then I realised: 'Wow, there's value in what they're doing. Like, this is actually really valuable. They're really tired and they're coming here for what reason?' And then some of them had been to uni and they'd talk about uni, and I didn't know what uni was, I didn't know anyone that ever went to uni, I'd never heard anyone talking about uni. I'd heard the word on TV but for me it was somewhere where posh people went. And then I just had it: 'Wow like I'm at the BAC, I know about theatre stuff like they do, I hang in the same place as the bank guy! Maybe I should go uni as well.' I asked one of the teachers called Deirdre, she said to me: 'Go to Kingston Uni because it's very practical.' It was a very practical course, and it was a very, very good course. That's how I went there because I really trusted her.

DR: And how was that for you being at uni? How did it form your further development as an artist, either as a musician or as a performer?

CM: I started the uni but I did find it hard. I didn't know – I couldn't work out what time to go to my lectures. I didn't know the difference between a seminar and a lecture, and I couldn't work it out because I'd never – even though that sounded really stupid – honestly, 90% of the people there had heard of these things before. Their parents would have gone or their friend would have gone, and it was like: 'I can't even access the words to get in the room let alone like start thinking about what I'm learning.' So I deferred, and then I went back two years later. And in those two years I carried on making music, I carried on experimenting. Then I was strongly experimenting in those two years with theatre



and music, mixing it up at BAC, very practically. I was actually creating more of a buzz about what I was doing. And I was starting to say that what I was making, like – I already thought this back at Brit School – I was saying: ‘I want to make hip hop theatre, I want to mash both of those forms up.’ Because, although I’m learning about all the stuff from the past, none of it speaks for me and it doesn’t speak to me, even though I’m just as excited learning about how *A Doll’s House*, you know, really pushed feminism. I thought it was amazing, I loved learning about that, I thought it was great, but at the same time I thought: ‘It’s great but even the people that made, you know, the writers of these plays, they’re not from the same background as me. I don’t even fit into that order now. Who’s going to let me tell my stories, do you know what I mean? Is that ever going to happen? Because all these stories represent the same people and they are the best in their class, but they don’t represent everyone.’ In those two years I was getting much more practical but I realised that the more I met people at BAC, I realised that the people – even the devisers and stuff – who had done really well, they had gone to uni. Or they had gone to drama school. Their knowledge of being able to connect concepts was really strong. And, again – I probably didn’t have the thoughts in my mind at the time, but I just intuited that you possibly need to understand where this stuff was coming from – it’s easier to start making connections and bringing it together rather than just pure rage. Because at the time everything was just like pure rage: ‘I must be the best and this must be the most amazing thing you’ve ever heard!’ I quite enjoyed being like that but, I don’t know, something just told me that I need to work out where all this was coming from, because everything that I was saying or doing wasn’t original. Obviously I’d watched films and I’d watch other peoples’ work, and although it was my original voice, it really had come from other voices – everything comes from somewhere. Obviously this is cliché or whatever, but I didn’t know that. It was the first time in the university I’d realised it, had these thoughts, so it was the first time again. And, then going to uni, I remember Trish, I don’t know if you know Trish Reid?

DR: Yes.

CM: I remember in my first week – some people were taken out because they offer you these extra special lessons in the library for people that are maybe a bit behind. It’s hard because at BAC I was killing it. I had the head of East 15, people had offered me to join their theatre companies. I’d worked with *Complicité*, a lot of people I’d worked with that were on the text books that we were learning from, I’d met the people already and worked with them. But I didn’t know the language. I just practically could work. And I remember we had a list of words and one I remember clearly was the word ‘protagonist’, and they said: ‘What does that mean?’ And I didn’t know what it meant. And that’s so embarrassing, but that was how lacking my knowledge was. I’d done all this theatre and performance, so it kind of dawned on me that there’s loads of stuff I don’t know. And it’s so good to have that realisation because I’ve got a lot of friends who don’t know what they don’t know. And a lot of my friends that I went to school with from my estate – I’m not lying – are dead or are in jail or homeless. That’s very true. I feel like they never had the opportunities to learn these things because it can be frustrating like you don’t always have all the knowledge that you need to get on.

[00:32:00] THE SYSTEM

DR: Why did you think you were getting this sort of access that maybe wasn’t available to those other people you knew on your estate?

CM: Out of luck basically. I think that – my brother, we grew up from the same household, same problems, but because, to put it bluntly, because my abuse towards me was stronger than his – even though his to most people would be very tragic – I had a lot more therapy. As an adult I have a much better time than him because I had more abuse. So some of the kids on the estate, they might have been just as poor, they might have had a social worker but they might’ve not had one. Again I was lucky to have – but to have a social worker meant that actually there were next levels of abuse at home. So it was luck, but it was a strange kind of luck. Because I had a social worker that was able to – and who knows like because I had a social worker I may have been more eligible to get into the Brit School, basically like – I may have been more eligible, which is fine. You know, not that I didn’t deserve the opportunity, but I was given the opportunity. But I wouldn’t have been able to do the application form or do all those things like that. What was strange was like everyone had the same



levels of deprivation, but just certain types of deprivation can sometimes give you access to certain chances, even on my estate where I lived. Me and my brother would use the youth centre on there, but my sister, my step-sister, she's got blonde hair and blue eyes – we've all got different dads, my dad's Indian – but she wasn't allowed to use the youth centre because a quota of white people was too high. But we lived in the same house. So sometimes there are quite complicated things which allow people access to – even though you're going through exactly the same levels of deprivation, but sometimes it's just different kinds. So it's luck, it's luck, but it's not just luck. It is the system as well. But obviously I was ready to accept these opportunities, but again it can be easy for me to say: 'I was listening to music and I loved music', because I've created this narrative, but you know I'm fully aware that there will be people who also had the same thing but never really got that chance. And, I think that really – I almost feel like the guilty one that I was given the – so now it's like my duty, you know, with the Beatbox Academy and like even through *DenMarked* I always create other [opportunities] for people to open up my show, and after – because it's kind of like I was lucky. I'm a teacher, you know, I've worked at schools, I know how actually to spend extra time with a student means that you're knackered and tired and you have to give up your lunchtime or you have to give up after school. So all those teachers, social workers, lecturers who met me because I would bug them, all those extra times wasn't easy. The system isn't built for that, they don't have to do that, that's not their job. So I was lucky and also like I don't know what it is, ready to get some of the guidance and mentoring that they were able to give. I guess, you know, obviously it's very complex. There's a kid that I walk past, you know, he's a grown man now, at Clapham Junction station, there's a lot of homeless people there, and I kind of hate it when I see him because we went to school together and he's homeless. If I catch his eye, I know I'm going to have to give him a tenner, do you know what I mean? Because, we lived on the same estate. We went to exactly the same schools, apart from he never went to Brit School, but he'll say: 'Remember, remember I was a singer, bruv! I was a singer! I used to do dancing as well! Remember my artwork, bruv? You said it was sick!' And it's like: 'Yeah, it was, it was absolutely brilliant, but I don't know–', you know, it's hard, man, it's hard. Even when I went to Brit School I still went home to the estate and I still had people be like: 'You're gay!' or, like: 'Help me out, bro! Help me get in there!' and it's like: 'What can I do? What can I do?' I got robbed on my doorstep coming home like from – because it was, like: 'You're the one that's made it out.' There was nothing that I could do, do you know what I mean? I think just being listened to and understood is amazing. Whilst I was in my first year the show that I made at the uni, by my second year had toured, it had a run at White Bear Theatre that they paid for, so we didn't take box office, they paid ahead for the show – that's rare, I didn't even know then, now I know, that's quite big! The Etcetera Club in Camden, they paid us to be put the show on that I made at uni in my first year. And then we did a three-week run at Battersea Arts Centre in my second year, which is crazy. So I'm like, Kingston Uni was great for that because I made the show there, do you know what I mean?

DR: What was that show called?

CM: It was called *Hitler Wrote 20 Pop Songs*. And I wanted it to be a political hip hop show. And Trish came to see the show and so did Alex Mermikides. But the other lecturers, not only did they not come but they complained about it, they were really angry. I understand, for them, they hadn't seen anything like it in the way that we used to hustle, like you make a song, you put on a mix tape, you're trying to sell it. And it's like some of the lecturers thought we were doing it to be rude but it was like: 'But we're getting people to come to the uni, we're getting people excited about the theatre! I'm going to other people's halls and they're putting posters up of our show! Like, and all of your students are in the show and we're getting loads of people outside the uni to come!' And they were like: 'You're not supposed to-', because we were publicly advertising the show but they were like: 'You're still in your first year. The uni doesn't vouch for this show. It's just yours and you've made it here and you're advertising it as a public performance, which you're not supposed to do at a uni, and you've put posters everywhere!' But it wasn't – we didn't think that we were being rude. I actually thought I was helping, we thought we were – of course we did, we were young – and we thought that we were changing the world like we thought that this was going to be the best experience of your lives! We want to put posters up everywhere and share the experience with everyone. We thought we were just: 'Aren't we doing the right thing?' Because you're telling me I'm wrong, but the people doing the wrong thing where I live are stabbing people, are selling drugs and hurting people.



DR: When you say ‘we’, was this a company that you formed when you were at university? And tell us a little bit more about this show that was so controversial?

CM: Well, it was called *Hitler Wrote 20 Pop Songs*, so it’s a bizarre title. It was supposed to be absurd. We just wanted to challenge the politics of the day. The thing that some of the lecturers were angry about, and reviewers, and people at BAC even – but they still put the show on because we were rapping, it was completely different, there was no rap scene in the UK, Dizzee Rascal wasn’t out yet, there wasn’t UK rappers in the charts, let alone in experimental theatre – but the thing at the time, what we saw was: Tony Blair’s government was a racist, white, right-wing government. Like they may have been Labour, but they were racist. The people that they were killing were the same colour as my family. Super far right-wing, racist government. They made universities all of a sudden have to charge, which before they were free, and the country in and of itself, people were getting, you could get like there were lots of bans on hoodies, you couldn’t wear a hoodie and go into a shopping centre. Well: ‘Why not? What if it’s cold? And also, these are just clothes, it’s how we dress ourselves.’ It felt like it was becoming really draconian. Again, it was partly the age that we were at. People are young, they thought like everything’s against your ideas, but it’s partly embedded in truth that Tony Blair was far right-wing government, and we now have another far right-wing Labour party. And in it we were rapping and talking about the country, but what we would also do was that there were lots of parts in the show that were really funny, but they may have been racist but they were funny parts, because the whole company was ethnic minority but the audiences that we played to were white. So people would be laughing and loving it, and there was always this – what we were trying to do is play with this element of like you know: ‘You’re laughing at this which are you agreeing with?’ And we were showing our abuse to ethnic minorities onstage, but we were loving it too, we were acting like we were loving it, but the audiences were genuinely loving it but I don’t know if they were ever – I don’t think they ever really wanted to critique the work on what we were doing. I thought that it was a lot cleverer than what they really understood, but people couldn’t get over the fact, including reviewers – I never understood at the time, and now I’m fully aware that the newspapers are super political. So *The Guardian*, it’s not going to give you a good rating if you’re criticising the Labour Party, even if the work is what it is – they don’t want to do it. And the same with all the other papers, unfortunately. But also venues – we had support from the venues, but some of the lecturers at uni, they were very angry because historically I guess they had felt like they had fought for a Labour Party for all those years and we finally had it, but we didn’t know about this. All I knew is I was growing up with a right-wing government who was murdering lots of brown people in super high, high quantities and that also should be judged as well. But again, the rap and stuff, *The Stage* reviewed the show, they gave us no stars, they said it was animalistic – they couldn’t describe what it was. They couldn’t describe what it was: ‘How dare BAC put it on!’ But what’s interesting about that was that – it was the head reviewer, Shenton, who said this – he said: ‘By the time the show’s any good our careers would be over’, which is disgusting. We were still at uni when the show was doing an Off-West End run. Some of the people in the cast were 20 and 19 years old. Now, for middle-class people, they all say: ‘Ah, 19, 20, you’re an adult!’ ‘Mate, look, I’ve got people who are 30 on the council estate. Their cultural experience is they’re still hanging around kicking beer cans on the wall – they ain’t got the same sort of experiences.’ Like, there’s a lot of class issues when it comes to like the way people understand it – because they don’t understand what you’re trying to say, it’s not that you don’t understand them. And the show was also banned–

DR: By whom?

CM: By the Advertising Standards Agency. So again, because I was at uni at the time, I really wanted the lecturers to like the show, because, like everyone else, you want to please your lecturers. And I couldn’t understand why, apart from Trish, they were so angry, because I’m in the *Evening Standard* and they’re writing about the work, not even just reviews, they’re complaining about it but I just fucking spent a whole year learning about Ibsen getting banned, these people getting forced to change their endings of their shows, all these other things, so what – so I’m spending all of my evenings doing the same shit – what I’m thinking in my own style, completely free – and then when we do it, you refuse to watch it. It’s a strange old journey! So BAC said that I should apologise, because the name of the company was Theatre de Cunt [TDC]. So there was loads of reasons why the work was banned. It’s frustrating that we were forced to apologise, but BAC did stand down. David Jubb wrote a two-page



article in defence of my company and the show, and I'll always be so grateful for that because to me he was like a real, a real serious person defending us and also – I was older, I was a bus conductor for years, I was at uni, I was older than my friends at uni, so also felt like, you know, only a few years older, but I had got them into a show that was banned, all sorts of shit, and like everyone was all a bit confused, like: 'What is, what happening!?' But I didn't know what was happening either, I mean, to be honest, I was like: 'Well, this is, this is a bit of a whirlwind.'

[00:43:19 to 00:44:40] 'Click Click' from *Frankenstein* (2016)

[00:44:41] THE MAKING OF *FRANKENSTEIN* (2016-2018)

DR: So then you set up Beatbox Academy at Battersea Arts Centre?

CM: Beatbox Academy, yeah, yeah.

DR: Was that straight after graduating?

CM: No, after graduating I was asked to lead the youth theatre at BAC with one of the members of TDC, Monique. We led that and, I guess again, it was very hip hop orientated in what we were doing and BAC had another beatboxer called Shlomo, and they were like: 'Do you want to be part of this new thing?' and then it was, like: 'Yeah, okay, let's give it a go.' And it worked well because it's all hip hop culture, it makes sense. And, then we started doing Beatbox Academy and then it kind of that's when it started evolving, from the second it started it was changing; it was one thing and it was changing straight away.

DR: How did it work? Was it like a once a week place for people to meet?

CM: Yeah, it was every Saturday. And, I'm not sure how long it was, maybe it was one, two years, something like that but it was, you know, funded for different terms.

DR: Yes. And, so *Frankenstein*, the piece that has become such a huge success it's been around the world now already. It's been to Edinburgh, it's been to Adelaide, it's going to the BBC.

CM: Yeah, yeah, we're going to Sydney Opera House.

DR: Oh, wow! You're going back to Australia. It was made in which year, when was it finished?

CM: It started in 2016 and it was finished in – it's hard to say really because it never feels finished, but I guess 2018, it was finished.

DR: Okay. How did you come up with this idea? Maybe one bit that we skipped in your journey was that you also trained as a teacher after Kingston, right?

CM: Oh, yeah, yeah. So whilst running the Beatbox Academy I needed more money and I asked Liz [Moreton], the producer – often when I would go into schools, teachers would say: 'Oh, you should be a teacher.' Stupid me, you go into a school and do a bit of beatboxing and rapping and although it's once a week at the Academy, the outreach could be sometimes every day. And, I would think: 'Wow, when I go into the schools, they love me!', and I do remember one of the teachers said to me, and he looked knackered, and he was like: 'Yeah, they love you now but if you worked here every day it would be a different story.' And I remember thinking: 'Wow, like', and I actually did think: 'That's such a challenge.' I actually ended up working as a teacher at that school, because Liz – I was broke and I said: 'I'm desperate for money', there was no money at the BAC going round – and she said: 'There is this one thing where they pay you to train as a teacher.' And actually it was the last year that it was ever done. You don't get paid to train anymore, but I applied and I did it for one year. At the same time I still ran the Academy – I was so tired because in the evening I was still running the Academy, but what was great was that the kids from the secondary school started going to the workshops at the Academy, and it was great because it was a south London school so like it was good for some things like that, it was great. And it was good to get the experience of training to be a teacher. It was very hard!

DR: So then you decided to make *Frankenstein* with this group of young people. How did that idea come about, and how did you approach this project with them?

CM: It came about because initially when I was working with the Academy I'd always be pushing: 'This show should be a big show, we need to make a big show.' And each term, because of funding and new



producers coming in, you know – something you’ve just made, you wanna keep working on it everyone wants you to make something new. But there’s no progress. So it’s this new, new, new, and it’s very frustrating and there’s loads of reasons for it. I made *DenMarked* and went on tour with it, but then I had the idea that I wanted to take the Beatbox Academy on tour with me, not all of them, but what we could afford, to do curtain-raisers and workshops whilst on tour. And that was really cool but also I had an ulterior motive that I wanted to try and convince those places to then take a Beatbox Academy show. But one thing they would say to me is: ‘We love the Academy, we come to see the work, everyone – it’s great, but what’s the show? Maybe, maybe you need to make something like *DenMarked* because *DenMarked* is clearly *Hamlet*, an allusion to *Hamlet*. Think about that, because that works. It’s very easy to understand that.’ And I didn’t make – I already wrote *DenMarked* before it was called *DenMarked* and I already wrote half of it before I’d even made those connections.

DR: Yeah, let’s talk about *DenMarked* a bit more before we come back to *Frankenstein*. So this is an autobiographical solo show and it came out at what time? What was the year when you released it as *DenMarked*?

CM: 2013 I first did a scratch, but it first came out as *DenMarked* in 2016.

DR: And then you toured it for a while. How did you come up with this idea of actually telling your life story through referencing of *Hamlet*?

CM: Because I wanted to make a story about how the events in your life, do they mark you? Are you marked by them or not? And the initial name for the show was just going to be *Marked*, right? And I was writing these things and it was, like: ‘To what degree are we marked by these things?’ And then, I was reading a book, which talked about *Hamlet*, so I started looking at *Hamlet* and I realised: ‘Wow, I remember a teacher at school gave me a copy of *Hamlet*, a brand-new copy. Hold on. There’s loads of stuff in *Hamlet* about questioning, about, you know, is it good or bad but thinking makes it so – hold on, wait, this is exactly what I’ve been trying to say!’ And again, it might have already been in my subconscious and I was looking for it, and I thought: ‘Marked? Why don’t I call it *DenMarked*?’ because that’s the effect that the whole thing leaves on you: which one is it – is it the thinking? Because I don’t think that it’s final – I do think that we are all left like is it totally true? And initially when I had the idea of mixing Shakespeare with it, I so felt like it worked as a concept, but at the same I’m not good at saying Shakespeare at all. And I knew that BAC so liked the street, urban aspect of the show how it was, and producers and people would like that, that me then merging it with Shakespeare was going to be quite strange. It’s not what they expect from me. A bit like what I was saying mixing drum machines and guitars and people were like: ‘This ain’t going to work.’ It actually slightly followed that again because it was like: ‘We really liked what we’d seen before, why have you now got to do this?’ But I really felt and I still feel like it’s a good, it’s a strong concept anyway. But you know what, it means something to me – that’s why! So why that linked to *Frankenstein*, because people would say to me, producers: ‘Why don’t I do something like that with the Beatbox Academy? Why don’t you take something – because it’s easier for us to put that on, because it’s very hard for us to sell it to our audiences.’ I was performing in theatres and also performing on council estates and producers said: ‘Why don’t you just think of a story? Is there something you can take and do the same sort of thing – where it’s actually personal lyrics but it’s around the framework of another show?’ I just thought that the experience of going to all these different places would be amazing for all those young people. Because it was amazing for me. And I thought: ‘I’ve never done this and I’m a lot older than them. They need to – imagine they need to have this now! What can we do as a conduit to making a great show but also changing their lives.’

DR: Amazing!

CM: Which is important. So Lara [Taylor], the producer, said: ‘Let’s think of a show, let’s do it then!’ And she said *Frankenstein*, and then she started to say other shows, but then once she said it, I was like– And she was like: ‘No, no we need to brainstorm’, and I was like: ‘Hold on, *Frankenstein*’s 200 years old, it was written by Mary Shelley when she was 18, in 1818. Tyler [Worthington]’s 18! Like, hold on, it’s almost– I mean, it’s a feminist book basically. Our main writers – although it’s boys doing the beats – are the girls that write the lyrics. Let’s do it!’ And she was like: ‘No, no, I just said it now.’ And I was like: ‘We don’t need to think about it. That’s it. Now, let’s do it.’ And then it just started from there,



really. And then we started – we encouraged them to read the book, which all of them wouldn't do. [Laughter.] Some of them did, I think one or two. And then we watched the films together, and then what we did was I would say: 'Write down words and sentences that really stick out, and themes, and things that you think mean something to you.' And that's kind of the first thing we did, a sort of putting out themes and stories. It's funny because people would pull out stuff that would seem really connected to them. Like Tyler, he picked out like the genius. He kind of secretly sees himself as a genius and he – from immediately when we said about the show he was like: 'I'm going to be the main character.' That's the first thing he said. You don't know Tyler but – we had a much bigger ensemble at the time, about 30 kids, and only a third of them were going to be in the show. I don't know how Tyler made it into that group. So what was funny was – I do know how, basically he was allowed to go in as long as he kept going to the training sessions because all the other kids wanted him in there. But he's very shy and very – he's super shy and lots of other things, shy about everything. It was weird, because it was: 'I want to be the main character. I'm the main character.' And then when he's looking at the script he's like: 'Genius. Misunderstood genius.' And it's like, people find – I mean, I don't know, this is just me that's psychoanalysing the whole situation, but it just felt like you could see the links between the things they were finding. And some of the cast who made the show who aren't in the show in the end because they had lots of other problems, the things that they were picking out were problems that they were finding with the monster about race: 'This is about race', or like, people not understanding them. They were not linking it to themselves but you can see that people are drawn to those things that are really coming from themselves. It's that whole thing of like you know, it doesn't matter what you're writing, fiction, it doesn't matter what it is, it's all autobiographical in the end.

[00:54:54 to 00:56:15] 'Hideous' from *Frankenstein* (2016)

DR: What was interesting about it was the way – well, several things really. One was this frame of doing rap battles at the start and at the end of the show, which is a very particular way of engaging the audience and probably within the tradition of hip hop as well. And then there is this other element which is the way in which you approach the adaptation always seemed very sophisticated to me because of the way in which you read the script with a view to making the sounds of the language come to life like the sounds of the writing come to life like because that was the main means of expression of you as a company, that you gave us these like at the beginning you give us the sound effects of where we are in a way, which was quite interesting. And then of course you pick out the themes and then you break down the narrative of the book and just riff on different aspects of it.

CM: Yeah. But tonally, the emotions or the sounds of the words and stuff, that would be, we would say like: 'Without words create a soundscape – create the mood of those feelings now', which is a very kind of abstract way to do it but also somehow makes total sense, doesn't it?

DR: Did you keep developing it live in front of the audience? Or did you only put it in front of the audience when you had the main bulk of the show?

CM: No. We kept developing it so it changed quite a lot. There were stages that were more narrative led. We did a performance of it without microphones. So there was lots of different stages, which definitely helped. But I would say that the feedback we had from every stage was always: 'This is absolutely amazing!' Because one thing I feel like from outside sources – and it's very frustrating – is that the kids would now say: 'Oh, remember back then when we were shit', because they would hear adults say: 'Oh, you were shit then', or: 'It was really poor then.' Because people that are evolved now love to say that before they were there nothing existed. But everything always exists. We're just finding it again. All sounds are there, they exist. So it's very frustrating. I hate people that are not sensitive or understand our medium and platform, and the fact that we are dealing with young minds, being around and saying frivolous remarks like that. It's very frustrating. Because all of those incarnations were just as good as the others. They were just a different part of the journey and they're just as valid. Like the part in *DenMarked* when I rapped the Shakespeare, to be honest, when I think about it, I think: 'It might have been better there, but at the end of the day it's not better or good. Nothing's good or bad, thinking makes it so.'

DR: What do you think is the secret of its success? How come it's worked so well on the audiences, in every incarnation?



CM: I think, understanding the journey of the show: the curtain-raisers, the people at the start, and the part at the beginning. So the audience getting involved makes them slightly understand this journey that we can all make sound. Like, a lot of the audience come out saying: 'I want to beatbox, I want to do it.' And it's not that I want them to beatbox to join the Academy, I just want them to understand it's all here. Like, all of this is all here for all of us. Maybe that sounds trite but it's just important, you know. It's such a shared experience. I think that along the way – nothing to do with me – there were people that were trying to make it about this excellence part, about just the part in the middle, and which would have been so redundant, you know? There were people that didn't want the curtain-raisers, didn't want the battles. And I bring this up not to add any negativity to the conversation, but that just blows my mind. I don't understand why I had to fight for something that's a fundamental part of the practice of what we're doing. But again, what you're dealing with is a street artform and that is what you are doing. Again, I can't complain because everything's been received well and I think it is because of that experience. But it hasn't been without having to argue and shout and tears, and be very angry. And it's, you know, some of the pieces of rage from the estate, or being at uni or so on, haven't left really, even though it can seem like this is just a show with kids – it's not. All shows are with kids, we're all fucking grown-up kids, it's all the same. I think the fact that they're quite young has made it be received really well, but I would hate that to be too much the thing because actually I don't like the fetishisation of youth. I think it's horrible and gross. I would love to make the same show with people that just want to beatbox who are 60 years old because we live longer and we're still emerging at 60. I hope that is the message; that it's not just that they are young – because the people at the start are very young and the people in the middle are older. And I'm hoping that the people who are older are like: 'Well, that could also be me as well!' I try and bring the audience – I'm not sure what night you were there but I always do it now – the audience get involved in the circle jam as well. Because it's like we're all part of this circle, we're all part of this journey. The excellence-of-the-show part is meaningless. It's about the whole philosophy, about the artform. And there are lots of beautiful people around – people like Trish, Liz Morton, the producer, and Lara – but there are some people that you have to work with along the way that can be, I would say – it's offensive the way that they talk to you, because they wouldn't do it to anyone else. It's not only because of the class of the work or where it comes from, it's something to do with music and sound as well, there's a hierarchy about it, about who gets to say what works in theatre and sound and music and who doesn't. The lighting person lighting your show or the person operating the desk, though I respect these roles – they also may be a well-studied pianist, or whatever: 'But I'm sorry, that's not what we're doing right now. I really respect what you're doing but don't try and give feedback that's totally irrelevant.' Or collaborators that are sent to work with you: 'Your background is very formal – because I really respect what you're doing, I actually studied the old plays so I could disregard them. I have done it, I have gone to uni, I have got my Masters, I'm also a drama teacher. Am I allowed to disregard it now or are you going to keep throwing it back in my face that you know better ways?'

[01:02:27] SAFEGUARDING AS A LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

DR: How do you perceive yourself in relation to the kids? Because you have so many multiple potential roles in relation to them: the mentoring role, the facilitator, the director, the teacher. What is your leadership philosophy, if you like?

CM: Oh, it's hard because I try and not be seen like the director. I try and be seen like we're all doing this together. And really that is how I like it to be like. Because although I've been on the planet longer and I might know a few extra things, I want you to find your things as well, not to learn my things: 'I'm trying to get you to find your stuff! And sometimes maybe I'll have something that will hopefully be right and might help you out.' The struggle is that to the outside world they want you to act more of what they see as a 'director'. And I guess, like – I don't know if this is valid for the conversation – but organisations and stuff will criticise my approach. But I'm like: 'Hold on, this has run for 12 years. No other programme in the building has run for that long, and they don't have retention.' But I don't try to be overbearing. I just try to make it an honest conversation. We all try and get there together, it's all of ours. I don't want it to just be my thing, but I definitely don't want it to be John's part, Tim's part, Rachelle's part, either. Because it's all of our part. I think that the idea of the reason why it maybe



seems like, not that I'm ranting, but I'm on this slight path is because *Frankenstein* is so successful, obviously there are lots of people that want to have, put their words in, or get involved, because money gets involved. But the money's just going to come, we're going to deal with it: 'Don't alter the philosophy or the group because it's not fair on all the other kids that we have coming along that need to have the same experience. You're going to ruin it.' We all own it. I maybe, you know, I'm in charge, I'm leading it or whatever, that's just because it's good to have those executive decisions, but I don't take it so serious. I am in a tricky situation where there is an expectation, with venues, with Edinburgh, the way people speak to you, and it's like: 'Look, if you want this show, which you do, you need to understand the artform, or at least try and be willing to work with me a little bit.' And, again, now we have people putting – the thing about ownership is that people talk about their points and their copyrights and stuff, but they're selling that to the performers. We've never had this problem before, and even in workshops it's like if this person gives a high hat and this person gives a cue drum and the next person wants to give a high hat but doesn't because this part is very full and needs space, we don't say that this person had a less – leaving space is also writing. Knowing when not to make notes in music is just as powerful as making notes. Now, everyone that makes music knows that, but when it comes to maybe theatre people, or just manipulative adults, they want to say: 'This person should get more money than everyone else because they're making more noise.' But it's like: 'That person was only given licence to make noise because we were all silent.' And it's very, very difficult right now because of idiots, I have to say – because it's stupid to not understand that relationship. And I would say even in music and sound, in any company, theatre company or art – if we're painting a picture together, I'm going to put all these lines on. If your partner thinks: 'Oh my god, this is brilliant', and if you're together, you both made it together because it takes that person sitting back and letting you do that, it's still a collaboration. But to think nervously: 'I'm going to put lines on too so we both have lines', and you've ruined it now. What is the point of that? But these people, like the more other people want to get involved, I'm like: 'You would ruin this.' These people will never make shows because of their mentality.

DR: Yes. I just was thinking about the film version, which I was inevitably comparing to the theatre version. And again, what's happened with the film is that it's medium-specific, the way in which your adaptation of *Frankenstein* was medium-specific to beatboxing and live performance, I was seeing some ways of acknowledging maybe the influence of MTV on this particular way of rendering your show. Why did you want to make the film? What was behind that impulse?

CM: I think the success of the show and having the opportunity to make a film is good. I think it makes the work more accessible for people to watch. I was hoping that it might inspire people, not beatboxing, but anything in their local community centre with anyone of any age could have some sort of fruits of the labour, even if that just means coming together. I'm not sure how that comes across because the workshops part at the end is very short. So I'm not fantastically happy with the film at all, because I feel that the film lends itself more towards the show part of it, whereas to me it needed to be more bookended like what the show really is. I think as an entertaining music performance, all from the mouth, it's interesting, I think that people would enjoy it, but I don't think it – for me, it doesn't have the same effect as the live show. But why I'm happy about the show is because the kids get paid, they get exposure, but the artform gets exposure, and maybe more people can be encouraged to do stuff with young people – and with people of all ages. And that's the spirit of hip hop, is creating something out of nothing.

DR: That's great, thank you. For the end I want to go back to your roots again. I was struck by what you said in *DenMarked* about your grandma and the importance of oral history to her. The way in which she came alive when she was remembering her own experiences. And certainly this has been – I've really enjoyed listening to your stories, it's been a feature of this conversation too. I've heard everything you say about the importance of hip hop in shaping your way of working and your aesthetic and your methodology, but is there a way in which you might connect this practice to something that has been a legacy, a cultural legacy for you, from your grandma or from any other people that came before you?

CM: I guess the storytelling aspect is that they tell and pass on like stories. And a lot of traumatic stories. In my family, if someone were to tell a long story and all of a sudden there might be a part in there, all of a sudden, of extreme abuse in there, and then bookend it with a joke. But you would never question the story because right now it's story time, someone is talking, it's not a conversation! So in a



way, yeah, because stories are kind of a massive thing. And very detailed stories. I definitely don't go into the minutiae detail that my grandparents would go into. I mean like non-sensical, like: 'I was sitting on the chair and the cup was on the side, obviously, and it was, it was the cup that we got with the Easter egg last year', and I think: 'Why do I need to know that part of the story!?' And it's always been that way, like everything's very detailed. But also that's because they don't read and write so everything is super detailed because the stories have to be passed on. I need to record those stories because they're quite old because nothing's written down and there's barely like any photographs. But definitely I think the storytelling aspect of passing down those class-based stories.

DR: Thank you so much, Conrad!

CM: Thanks for having me. I enjoyed it.

Transcription by Tom Colley

Clips Summary

[00:17:14 to 00:20:15] 'No Books' from *DenMarked* (2016)

[00:43:19 to 00:44:40] 'Click Click' from *Frankenstein* (2016)

[00:54:54 to 00:56:15] 'Hideous' from *Frankenstein* (2016)

Audio available at www.auralia.space/gallery1-conradmurray/.

To cite this material:

Radosavljević, Duška; Pitrolo, Flora; Bano, Tim; Murray, Conrad (2020) LMYE Gallery #1: All from the Mouth - An Interview with Conrad Murray, *Auralia.Space*, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, <https://doi.org/10.25389/rcssd.13026971.v5>.

