



**SK Shlomo**  
**The Making of *RECONNECT: DIGITAL RAVING* (2020)**

Aural/Oral Dramaturgies resident artist SK Shlomo is featured in the Laboratory section of LMYE #4 through a documentary assembled from interviews, Zoom rehearsals, recorded meetings and archival footage of his 2020 work *Reconnect: Digital Raving*.

Born from a long and adventurous career in the music industry, SK Shlomo's theatre is a hybrid, unconventional beast that ultimately defies categorisation. Pushing at the confines of gig theatre, his work insists on blending different economies of attention to create highly experiential and captivating performances that make use of autobiography, a natural (and inherited) talent for storytelling, and masterful technical knowledge. You can learn more about Shlomo's arc as an artist in his LMYE Gallery #3 interview with Duška Radosavljević.

*Reconnect: Digital Raving* is a fierce work, both in its inception and in its transformation. Originally commissioned as part of Aural/Oral Dramaturgies and intended for the Edinburgh festival 2020, it was eventually produced as part of the BBC Culture in Quarantine programme. This documentary details the ins and outs of how the work was conceptualised, re-conceptualised and made, transforming the nature of process and of collaboration as it grew and bridging ever wider gaps between people to find its sonic and performative feet. Footage of the process is interspersed with conversations between Shlomo, director Matthew Xia and film-maker Chris Britten as well as with other co-creators and participant-spectators. Apart from granting a rare depth of insight into numerous aspects of the making of a piece of performance, this LMYE Laboratory is a testament to how the year of the pandemic has both obliged and allowed theatre-makers to marry a new meaning of 'experimental', acting in a world where nothing is certain.

*Reconnect: Digital Raving* is a performance that was always based on an idea of rave-as-cure, and grounded in a belief that the fact of dancing together has a therapeutic effect; its realisation as a domestic Zoom-rave in a time of enforced isolation has made this even more clear, poignant and valuable.

**[00:00:23 to 00:02:03] Excerpt from BBC Culture in Quarantine *Reconnect: Digital Raving* (2020)**

**[00:02:08] THE PITCH, 20.11.2019**

**SK Shlomo:** Hey Battersea Arts Centre and Dr Radosavljević – I was so excited when I heard about your project to explore how performances using speech and sound are created – that is right up my street. So let me tell you my idea: Rave is a religion for an entire generation. But what is a rave? What does rave mean to you? Why is it back in such a big way and what does this tell us about the wider world around us? And did rave ever really go away? SK Shlomo here – the world-record breaking beatboxer, composer, and theatre-maker. I've made music with Basement Jaxx, Ed Sheeran, Björk and Damon Albarn of Gorillaz, and I've created theatre with Southbank Centre, Underbelly and Bristol Old Vic.

Born in the '80s and growing up in the '90s, I'm about the same age as rave, and now I'm making a new show to celebrate. It's gig theatre, with the working title *Heart of the Rave* – an autobiographical journey through time – a coming-of-age story paying tribute to the music and the culture that soundtracked my life from the 80s, right up to the present day.

Matthew Xia, who is Artistic Director of the Actors Touring Company, is hoping to direct. And together we'll create several 'scratch' sharings, building to full length previews, before a premiere at the 2020 Edinburgh Fringe, followed by touring in Autumn and into Spring 2021.

Now *Heart of the Rave* builds on the format of my 2019 show *Surrender* which used custom-built live-



looping technology, beatboxing and spoken-word to make a gig theatre show adapted from a TED Talk I gave about surviving suicidal depression. Surrender married theatre and clubbing in a new way, starting with the audience seated, and ending with them abandoning the restrictions of their chairs to dance, jump and rave. After nearly two years off the road battling depression, *Surrender* was more successful than I could have hoped for: It was shortlisted for the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe Mental Health Award, it won acclaim from critics, and the accompanying solo album was played on BBC Radio One. I even got to perform parts of the show on the Other Stage at Glastonbury Festival.

My goal now is to build on that success and take theatre into non-traditional, configurable spaces where the audience can again move their chairs to start seated and end standing. Why?

Well, I want my audience to feel the deep emotional connection and intimacy of seated theatre. To feel enveloped in the story, sounds and music building to a celebration so euphoric that they can't sit still any longer. Only then is the crowd invited to stand, rave out, and lose themselves in the music. Using Beast, which is my self-built software instrument, I'm planning to 'live-loop' both classic songs and originals in real time, blending soundscapes, song and story into a single, flowing artform. The audience will help form each performance, becoming a core part of the narrative, so that when we eventually rave together, we will all experience the feeling of unity in its truest sense.

And why choose this story? Well, music has saved my life so many times. It has not only been my livelihood, taking me around the world to perform on huge stages and work with heroes, but music has also got me through growing up in an immigrant family, surviving addiction and overcoming suicidal depression. *Heart of the Rave* is a great platform for me to explore my own identity, but I'm also keen to examine what it means to be a human in these turbulent times, to investigate the history of rave against the backdrop of social, economic and political change. Why has dancing to music attracted such resistance from authority? What proportion of lifelong bonds, made and proclaimed on the dancefloor, translate to real life? Can raving really heal segregation from past scars or is it just escapism and hedonism? And do we really need the drugs and the alcohol in order to abandon our inhibitions? Can we learn from the rituals of our ancestors? They would gather to celebrate and process both the joy of new beginnings and the grief of death. As a legacy, this show could help bring theatre to new, younger audiences. The music elements appeal to a demographic who might not usually think of themselves as theatre-goers, whilst traditional theatres can use this show to literally get their old audiences moving.

For me as an artist, creating this show will be a risk – I've never worked with a director on a solo show before and my dream is to match the virtuosic elements of my music with a depth of realness in the storytelling. This will mean putting my own truth out there, including the hard parts, but for me, it's vital that we share our vulnerabilities. Speaking out makes others feel safer to do the same and slowly builds a culture of support over stigma.

To summarise, *Heart of the Rave* creates a safe, trusting space where we can find release for our full spectrum of emotions and collectively express our joy of just being alive. Rave is a religion to an entire generation. To us, that communal honouring of all that we are – the good and the bad – that celebration is the true heart of the rave.

This is SK Shlomo signing out from the heart of the rave.

[Beatboxes.]

[Text on screen reads: As an Aural/Oral Dramaturgies Artist in Residence, SK Shlomo was supposed to have his first R&D process at Battersea Arts Centre on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the date when the theatre was forced to close to the public due to Covid-19. As a result things took a different turn...]

#### [00:08:10] INTERVIEW WITH SK SHLOMO 1, 24.07.2020

**Duška Radosavljević:** The main thing I'm interested in is the way in which you had started to develop what we were calling the 'Heart of the Rave' as a show, and then, when these other opportunities arose, to make it into a sort of a TV show – how that's kind of affected your process of



making it, if you had any reflections on that.

**SKS:** I had a very different vision to what we've actually made now, because I still wanted it to be a theatre thing and I wanted it to be live and I wanted it to kind of be a moment in time where people around the world came together. And that's what I wrote in my application. And then I don't know if – did we talk? I don't know if we've talked to you about all of this how it kind of evolved–

**DR:** Not at all, no.

**SKS:** The BBC gave us the commission and they gave us the award, and then it wasn't until quite a lot later that they said: 'Actually, we don't want you to do it as a live event.' And it's – I mean, it makes sense. Like, they don't really have a live – what I was talking about was a livestream, you know? I've been doing a lot of that with the *Homeskool*, and you know I already was doing lots of livestreaming before lockdown. And they don't really have that platform, the BBC don't have a livestreaming platform. You can go – iPlayer can broadcast live, but it's a one-way communication, whereas most livestreams you have feedback from the audience. So they were like: 'You can do it live if you want, but really we want you to make a film.' And I was a bit like: 'Oh, I don't want to make a film.' But then I think once I'd understood that I could separate – like, what we're making for the BBC is a cousin of the other baby that we originally were going to have. And so, yeah, now it feels like there's sort of three strands, because there's still the original stage show which I'm still really planning for next summer. I feel like, yeah, once we know a bit more about the legality of it, I'm fairly planning to make it, which is going to be way stronger because we've had all this chance to experiment, and so it's going to work out for the best. So that's still there. And then you've got the TV, the sort of 15-minute film that we've very nearly finished making, and that's kind of, that's quite static. When you make a piece of film, it's like when you record an album or something, like that's finished, it's done, it doesn't change the way theatre is alive and breathing. And then you've got this one in the middle, which is like a digital kind of livestream version. And I feel like I'm still going to do that. So I've been – lots and lots of ideas have come out of this restriction, and that's cool.

#### **[00:11:00] ZOOM REHEARSALS 1: PLOTTING THE SHOOT 19.06.2020 – 30.06.2020**

**SKS:** So introductions: Matthew [Xia] and Justin [Treadwell] you know each other from *Homeskool* – well, remotely – and Chris, I don't think you know either of these guys.

**CB:** I know Justin now, and Matthew, hello.

**SKS:** Matthew's our director, and Chris is our film-maker. And Matthew, if you've seen, I think you have seen 'Bellydancer', Channel Four thing that I did a few years ago – that was Chris who made that, directed it and kind of it was his baby. He approached me about it and said: 'Look we've got a chance to do something for Channel Four.' And he'd seen me do that, I think he'd seen me on stage or a clip of me doing it or something, and he was like we've got to do this as a film. So he's very good at like making shit happen, which is what we need right now. And Justin has agreed to take on a kind of support role from my point of view, basically. So Chris is going to have his own sort of sub-team of a DP and a lighting guy for the shoot. And Justin's going to be my support team, so he's going to help kind of get all these people together for that closing scene with loads of people self-taping, and he's going to help just coordinate things. Just like he did on *Homeskools*, he's going to be a whizz in terms of keeping everyone connected, yeah. And Matthew's going to direct this beast. Me and Matthew go back a long way, we've been friends for a long time, and been developing this transcendent show over the last, oh it's been a while now, hasn't it, Matthew? The last few months really, I guess.

**MX:** Half a year, isn't it, since we did–? Didn't we do the thing just before Christmas – our first workshop?

**SKS:** Yeah. No, just after, I think. But yeah we were supposed to be doing a five-day rehearsal process just before lockdown happened and we were supposed to be opening the show in about a month's time or something in Edinburgh, and it being this big finished one-man show, which obviously isn't happening, but this is instead!

**CB:** So the couple of locations that I showed you.



**SKS:** Yeah.

**CB:** I got in touch with them. Only one of them's had a chat with me so far, and the good news is they're up for us using their location.

**SKS:** Do they know that we're doing like a shoot rather than just going to—?

**CB:** Oh yeah, I've gone through in full detail of who you are, the type of shoot, the number of crew. Because originally she said: 'Oh, I'm going to need a bit more information because I'm almost certain we had other people filming something else in our cottage, and it wasn't the kind of thing I'd like to have been filmed – if you know what I mean.'

[Laughter.]

**MX:** Always the worry.

**SKS:** Justin, did you have questions about digital casting?

**JT:** Yes. I did some sort of just initial ideas about it, initial problems that might come up. I think a lot of it also relates into that question of whether you're recording them live, or whether you're having them pre-recorded. Because that will affect – because if you're having them record themselves along with a recording of you performing or whatever, then the casting process can be fairly like: 'We get you to sign up on here. If we think you're right, we'll send you something with the instructions,' Then we just get it back whenever. The same thing we did with *Homeskool*, but hopefully on a few more weeks than we did it with *Homeskool*. And so in that case, I'd say it's just like a form that collects their interest, that has like 'do you have any-' – because I read over the end of the script that has the 'They all get up and use various rave gear' or whatever. I have a question in there that says 'do you have anything that would work for that sequence, what do you have?'

**SKS:** Yeah, nice.

**JT:** That kind of stuff. But if it's live, then it's a different question of trying to manage everyone's availability, finding a day that works for you, Matthew, and everyone else and all of that kind of thing. It might give better performances if they're not sort of dry-reacting to a screen, but also how much does that matter if there's going to be loads of them on the screen and they're not on there for that long anyway? All of that kind of stuff.

**SKS:** It would be more exciting for them to think like this is all happening, we're having this rave together now. But it means we've got to use up our limited time on location dicking around with internet and stuff like that. We might not – what's the broadband going to be like in fucking – where is it?

**MX:** West Berkshire.

**SKS:** Yeah, it might be great, but it's – I think we should try and shoot that. I think we should try and shoot the actual people who I directly have conversations with in real time on the shoot on location, and everyone else should be an instructional video.

**MX:** Yeah, I guess my worry with the instructional video is the lack of control over what we end up with. If we receive you know 40 questionable videos that we can use four of or something. You know, it's just the degree of control that you're going to want over it. I wonder if it's more about putting all the energy and focus into the shots that are required in the house and then doing a secondary session where we do the crowd control stuff and direct.

**CB:** In terms of blocking and how the pace would go, I like the fact that we're getting to a different location, but in the same vein you could do the 'Man alone in the kitchen of Manstone Cottage' and go the living room to do your 'Bellydancer'.

**SKS:** Yeah.

**CB:** And then carry on for the outside being the rave.

**SKS:** That's technically going to be complicated though, because we'd have to set up way more kit outdoors.

**CB:** Oh yeah, full lighting.



**SKS:** If it rains, yeah, basically, I don't want to – I don't want to have Beast outdoors.

**MX:** I thought there was a kind of simple like track through it before, wasn't there, which was that you started outside, you came in, and then you ended up – you know, it was kind of a three location...

**SKS:** Yeah, that is – that's still how it is. But those three locations-

**MX:** I was thinking about the big story and how content is form and all of those rules means that, in a way, I think you're right to start inside, to be trapped and confined, then to go out like you do into the garden. Because I think it becomes too on the nose if we'd like tell each story in its literal replicated space. So I think it's you, and you've got this particular drive which is getting the fuck out of here. So you get out and you get fresh air, and that allows you space to reflect and go: 'Ah this old tale.' And I wonder if it just sounds a little less again on the nose: 'I can't take this anymore, I shouldn't be here, I've been here for weeks', so 'here' then becomes bigger, you know, it's: physically here, mentally here, emotionally here.

**SKS:** Yeah, that's nice.

**MX:** 'I shouldn't be here, I've been here for weeks.'

**SKS:** Yeah, I like it.

**MX:** 'If you've got a disco light, smoke machine.' I think you should reverse this, invert the list, Shlo, so you start small and grow as opposed to starting, like: 'All of your friends are Terry Tew's Club Hire and Sound Equipment.' [*Laughter.*] Start with party poppers and sunglasses, and move towards: 'I don't know, smoke machines, foam cannons!'

**SKS:** 'I don't know, disco lights, smoke machine!'

**MX:** I love that 'I don't know' – because it allows you the licence to go anywhere with it. 'I don't know' and then you're off.

**SKS:** Disco light, smoke machine. What would be a ridiculous one, like a...?

**MX:** A glitter cannon or confetti cannon.

**SKS:** Yeah, and I actually have got, I've actually got two confetti cannons that I bought for the-

**MX:** I like that. I like if you plant confetti cannon, like, it's like something no one's got in their house and in the end, you know [*mimes raving and explosion*].

**SKS:** Yeah, and I've got, I guess I've got to pop it because I'm alone in the story. But unless we want to dick around that, unless something, you know, someone does throw an inflatable flamingo at me.

**MX:** Yeah. Or it could just happen, couldn't it? I think, like, that kind of the digital effect of superimposing something on the screen means 'final moment', because I've got a question about how you end the show. Like, is it in the very final moment that from off-camera, two huge jets of – or one, depending on how we angle that one huge jet of confetti just starts – because it's like magical realism in the final four minutes, two minutes, because we're going to cut in around here you talking directly down a Zoom lens. We can have you talking to the audience again, like we have throughout. So I think we secretly want audience members to close the blinds and like, you know, at home watching on TV kind of thing. Like me and Anna watching this alone on iPlayer, we're turning off the lights, we're closing the curtains, and we're going to do the thing: 'Put your glasses on, come on let's do it, let's do it!' So I wonder if you could just have something in here that – and again it's going to lengthen it, but again we can find other places to contract maybe – that allows us real humans to go and find a thing, a baseball cap or whatever, a sponge finger: 'I want to have fun!'

**SKS:** I really like what you're saying about differentiating between your passive viewer at home and the people who are in this party, because ideally people watching this will feel included rather than they just watch other people have a fun time.

**MX:** Yeah.

**SKS:** Well how do we – it's like maybe it needs to be a visual thing where I'm talking to the laptop and then there's another camera here, so I'm like: 'Guys, go and get anything ravey', and I'm like: 'You guys too', like so there's a desk separation between the camera, Chris's camera, and the Zoom



camera.

**MX:** That's nice, that's nice.

**SKS:** And then in terms of like production point of view, filming and stuff, Chris, does this – the direction we're going in here – does this present any particularly concerning changes for you?

**CB:** No, that's it, I don't really have a lot to say at the moment. It's really just about you guys developing it as tight as you can, and then it's a case of watching the performance and blocking the space together.

**MX:** Beat Four, it feels like there's a little shift in that where the camera's now observing him, but he's not speaking, and if he is speaking he's talking to self. Then we get the phone call. And we wondered if in that moment we had these two little points that you might have spotted in there, Chris, that were Shlo talking to the computer screen, talking to Andy on the computer screen: 'Da-da-da-da-da.' Someone says: 'Monique loves this song.' Shlo says: 'Oh Monique used to love this song' – sorry to the camera – 'Monique used to love this song', and then looks away to the Fleabag camera: 'No, honestly, she really did.' And then back, like, so it felt like there were two worlds that meant that we understood that we were in the television audience, but Shlo had this Zoom audience that was multiplying.

**CB:** Yeah.

**SKS:** And there's another moment where I say: 'Are you guys ready for this?' and then I turn to the camera again, I say: 'You guys as well.' So it's like there's a really clear direct address to people watching on telly that they're supposed to get their rave kit out right now or whatever.

**MX:** So the initial audience is the 'viewers at home', in the olde-TV-worlde-speake, and then we watch you...

**CB:** Well, instead of breaking the fourth wall, we put up a fourth wall.

**SKS:** Yeah [*laughing*].

**MX:** I think so, yeah. Well it felt like: here's a man in house alone, oh he'll talk to us because we're here with him, so he talks to us, and we go with him, on this journey of memory and reminiscence, and then that is punctured by a real world moment of someone interrupting that, at which point we kind of lose him and he goes to that world, and then we want to swing back. But I guess the trick in there is can we get punters at home to turn off their lights and run and get glasses and glowsticks, and can they sync with that because they know that he's talking both to us and to them, so that as the computer screen goes dark, as they are watching it, they're also – you know [*mimes dancing*].

**CB:** The only real difference between scenes in my head is for the final rave. It's the only time the piece has ever shifted outside of the ordinary world. And, you know, I was just hoping once the script's done, we've kind of got it, we'll just develop this kind of thing. But for me, it turns into a night – it turns into like an underground jungle rave in my head, because that's what I was familiar with. You know, the neon, the strobe lights, the full-on smoke, just like Cream or whatever, the dirtiest, filthiest, most visual Tomorrowland – like the living room becomes Tomorrowland.

**SKS:** Throw it all in.

**CB:** What if we do throw it all in, we cut to the audience, and then we break another wall and it is just your imagination that we got let into, and it's a little shitty strobe in the corner with a police light – you know, the classic gag like we did with the Rocket [in *Human Geekbox*, 2014] or something like that – we break it again, and it's like: 'Oh yeah, it wasn't like that'.

**MX:** But I think we have to return to the full rave, that's the thing though, isn't it?

**SKS:** Come back to my imagination today.

**MX:** Because you had that thing of like confetti cannons blow at the end. Rave, rave, rave, seeing all the different Zoomers raving and then like, yeah, six seconds of just a man stood in front of a computer screen, just like that [*laughter*], speakers coming out, that's the truth of it and back into that, and the credits start to roll and we see them all again or something.



**SKS:** That sounds good.

**MX:** Yeah, great, all right. Next one... [Reads] 'Actions!' 'The actioning mantra: one thought, one sentence, one breath, one action.' [Caldarone & Lloyd-Williams 2004: xx] So every line from capital letter to full stop is one thought, one breath, one action, one idea. We can then choose an action to place on top of that thought, so it might be – I'll just flick through and pick one... 'To humiliate', that might be the action that you play on a particular line, and then you can say: 'I humiliate you' to the person you're doing it to, and then you can try the line moving 'I humiliate you' – let's go for something nicer... 'I coach you' – and again you can put that on a line of text: 'I soften you, I pat you, I implore you, I touch you, I enliven you', et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. 'A whole thought is comprised within a whole sentence. This sentence should be spoken with one breath.' Unless, of course, there's cheeky punctuation in there that we want to use to break stuff up. Wants. [Reads]: 'Objectives are wants. Every moment in our waking lives (and our sleep too, if dreams have any meaning), we're in a state of want. They accompany us from womb to tomb, we are drawn through our lives by a mesh of intertwined wants long-term and momentary all travelling together over varying periods of time. You want: to be a celebrity, to have a cup of tea, to find someone to love, to pay your bill, to change your life, to buy some clothes, to settle an argument, to borrow some money, to lead an honourable life, to recall the past, to take a holiday, to be left in peace, to feed the ducks, to prove yourself a good friend, to catch up on the gossip, to avoid confrontation' [Alfreds 2007:48] – da-da-da-da da-da-da-da da-da-da-da da-da-da-da. And again we'll just find all of them and how they change. There might be a moment you want Andy to fuck off, you know, and we'll just find that bit of: 'Well, if he wasn't listening, what was the point in even trying to talk to him?' And we'll just own that little moment. So that hasn't scared you, worried you–? And, like I said, I think it's all in you, because you're playing this guy called Simon Kahn, so that's going to be fairly easy.

#### **[00:27:45] INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW XIA, 17.07.2020**

**DR:** How do you think of yourself as a director? What do you feel is your main function in the room when you're making work with other people?

**MX:** When I'm making work with other people, I think I'm like a head facilitator or director of collaboration, because it is a collaborative art form. Often, if I'm the initiator of a project, then I might have some clues, and some ideas, and some pathways, and possibly even know bits about the destination, but I never go in as a – I don't see myself as an auteur, as a visionary, who kind of imagines a thing, and then delivers the thing. I have soft ideas and I play with them, and I throw them up against other people, and they throw them back at me, reconfigured, and I go: 'Oh, that's interesting!' There's a tiny bit of pretentiousness that I'm going to add to that, which is – and I read this, so Bill Brewster, who's kind of music historian and wrote a book called *Last night A DJ Saved My Life*, talks about the role of the DJ. Bill Brewster in his book talks about the shaman. He talks about, you know, the griot, the shaman, the person, who holds the space for transformation, for ritual, for mass engagement, for spectacle. And my job, I think, within that – and this is why it's not different whether I'm in a club or on the radio or creating a piece of theatre – is to shape the energy for an audience across a particular amount of time. Now, I'm kind of fascinated by, like, you know the liveness of that. When I'm in a club and – particularly back in the day before we had Serato, where we could have all the songs in the entire universe ever made by every species downloadable immediately, but when we used to have to like pack a bag and now I'm going: 'How am I reading the room? I'm going to go here, or no, that didn't – okay, let's pull back – I've lost these guys over here.' And feeling that energy shift and move, you know, knowing there was a DJ who had the headline slot after me, so how do I gear up towards that? And now, what I get to do is: I get to do that, but I get to do it with, you know, 15 other people examining every single second of time within an allotted amount of performance; and then to deliver it, and test it, and try with an audience. And I think this is why my forums are always live, they're always, you know... So it's interesting the way this Shlomo project has come around that, actually, you know that began as a live project, but because of circumstances has shifted into something not live and digital.

**DR:** Yes, indeed. I mean, that's something that I really wanted to talk to both of you about – the way,



in which – also, I talked to Shlo, and interviewed him as part of this, before what was going to be our week together at or two little bits of time at Battersea Arts Centre. And he talked also about the way in which he works that is very much about taking in the feedback from the audience, and building it into the show, and kind of like keeping this loop going, if you like, as part of his development process of the work. And in this case, obviously, making this version of the piece for the TV has, in a way, placed a different framework on your process, for both of you. So how did – I mean, how was that for you?

**MX:** I think it was interesting in that Shlo came to me, and again, of course I know Shlo, because we've been sat on tour buses together, going around the country, doing gigs in 2004.

**DR:** Yeah. Yeah. Tell us more about that. Let's do that bit of the story. How did you first meet? And what did you previously work on together?

**MX:** So, I think when he was in Foreign Beggars, they were affiliated with a group called Underground Alliance. I'm looking for the record here. [*Finds record.*] From Foreign Beggars, it says: 'Excalibah, you're the saviour of UK hip hop.' [*Laughter.*] So, you know, like, we were all in the same clubs, in the same rooms, and I'd met him through Foreign Beggars. I think I was the first DJ to play them on the radio nationally. So we developed an affinity, and that was it. And then I knew over a period of time that he was developing little kind of bits of hip hop theatre at the same time as I was doing things like *Da Boyz*. So, actually, we must have met much earlier, like, we must have done. But I knew that he'd done a couple shows. And then he said: 'I want to work with a director.' And I think it just made sense that we worked with each other, because I could be sensitive to his lack of experience as an actor but his incredible experience as a performer, and know how to work with that, because it was stuff that we'd done with *The Blacks*, you know, working with poets and comedians, and rappers to deliver a true performance with them. So it all just felt very natural, I think.

**DR:** And this was supposed to be – you were supposed to be doing a show together, which was going to be going to Edinburgh this year [2020], and you did a little bit of a work-in-progress at Battersea Arts Centre together in January – at which point, maybe you can tell us what happened at that point in terms of the development of the idea, and then, we can move on to the next stage?

**MX:** Yeah. So for me that was kind of, you know, 'post-it notes on the wall' stage in a shape that tells you about the arc of the story, but also that started by just talking to Shlo about what material he had ready. I guess a bit of a kind of R&D, and then story development, is essentially what that was – drilling down into, as I always want to, the kind of the 'why'. 'Why are you telling the story? Why do we care? Why should they care? What do you hope to achieve by the end of it?' I guess dramaturgy ultimately, you know, the meaning-making process. And helping him with that. Then he went away and wrote a first draft. And then... Covid! [*Laughter.*] And that first draft, you know, we were doing further script development, and we started doing script development remotely – it all feels so long ago, like in week one, when house party was a thing.

**DR:** Yeah.

**MX:** And then, you know, he was getting little development commissions and we were meant to have worked – do further work on it. And then this came out of it, which was: there's an opportunity to do it as a 15-minute thing. So then, you know, that becomes kind of editorial – what do we want to hold on to—

**DR:** A 15-minute thing for the BBC *Culture in Quarantine* series, right? And then, you had to rethink what that 15 minutes would be as part of that?

**MX:** Yeah. And also, you know, form, like – we all desperately wanted to hold on to the live experience of it. And this live raving experience that people all across the country at the same time, turn off their lives, get their glowsticks and rave together – felt epic, and it felt like some of the stuff he'd been doing already with his *Homeskool Beatbox Adventures*, which of course I'd helped him put together – I'm not sure it can have 'dramaturgy' – but in an ideas and ordering and structure kind of narrative and storytelling I guess.

**DR:** Yes.





**MX:** So that was it. And so, then, we worked on getting the script down to 15 minutes, we worked out what team we now needed, which felt like a very different team to the one we were looking at before. And I've kind of wanted to lean into TV and film so this is for me a really useful opportunity – baptism of fire. But again, what was great is I had wonderful people. So, we worked with Chris Britten, who's an experienced film-maker, who's worked with Shlo on other short pieces, but hasn't, you know, hasn't done so much drama, maybe. So again, I come in and I direct, again, the piece – we co-direct the piece. He directs the camera, I direct the performance, but we can all have a say on everything, because it's, you know, a bunch of guys in a room, trying to work out what to do.

### **[00:36:07] ZOOM REHEARSALS 2: SCRIPT-WORK, 26.06.2020-30.06.2020**

**SKS:** When I spoke to Matthew earlier in the week, I said that if we had to make a huge cut because it was really over, it would probably be 'Bellydancer'. How do we feel about that, and how do you feel about that, Chris?

**CB:** I think it's a piece that's been around for a long time, it's something that you know to the back of the hand, and this might be a good opportunity to just present all new material, or newer material.

**SKS:** Okay. I think it's not completely key to the story.

**CB:** No.

**SKS:** There might be some way we can get a little flavour of it without doing the full piece or something.

**MX:** Yeah. I mean, sorry, just to jump in. What you say about it not being completely key to the story, it's not – as in like narrative structure, it's not, but it does put a load of like foundation, I guess, under the stuff that you're then trying to reach for now in later life. So, you know, in terms of like backstory, it's doing a lot of work there that I don't – you know, if we lost it completely – we get 'my life was exotic' and then, I don't know, there's going to need to be some way of getting from that...

**SKS:** But maybe it's like, you know, we've got these five or six Glasto flashbacks. Maybe it's a matter of flashing back somewhere else real quick.

**CB:** I wish we had footage of your living room with the bellydancing.

**SKS:** No, I have got some but it's really not – it's just much less colourful than I remember it and how I tell it. It's actually really boring.

**MX:** There's only two people, it's just you and your mum.

**CB:** Is it you in a nappy, just going round?

**SKS:** It was a grandmother's party, right? My grandmother was hosting a party, so although that was like really exciting for a three year old, when you look at the footage it's just a load of old people. [Laughter.]

**CB:** What 'Bellydancer' does bring that you can't get back, I think what you're trying to say, Matthew, is with the heritage, isn't it? It's the Jewish heart, it's the Arabic-Jewish connection, it's the fact that: 'Oh my god, this is a completely polar opposite world', and you're in another completely polar opposite world to your, you know – how would you get those aspects? I mean you can–

**MX:** Also that it centers him, you know–

**CB:** It does, doesn't it?

**MX:** What you're saying there, Shlo, is from the perspective of a camera in that space there's a bunch of old people sitting around kind of eating and talking, you know, it's probably quite, quite kind of genteel – not gentile. But I think what it needs to be, in what that is, that's what you then chase, you know.

**SKS:** The feeling.

**MX:** The perspective of the three year old is that all of those older people are looking at him, focused on him, he's the star. That's what gives him this 'how can I hold on to being some sort of centre of



attention through life’.

**SKS:** Hmm.

**MX:** So in the rave you then find that again in another way, and then you're like: ‘Oh I can – I’m now empowered to invent this. I have – I can do this, I can give this to people now, I’m not the receiver of it.’

**MX:** So Shlo delivered a longer script than this, and I’ve just kind of – what have I done? – pruned, I guess, more than massive editing. But it’s like structural and trying to hold on to the poetry of it. And I really wouldn’t want to lose that, and I feel like if we started hacking in willy-nilly, some of the beautiful kind of poetic rhythm of it will vanish and it will just become more prosaic.

**SKS:** Okay, okay.

**CB:** Agree?

**SKS:** It feels good, it feels like it’s in a healthy place.

**MX:** Let’s record it, let’s get that. And then if that comes in at seven hours, we’ve got work to do.

**SKS:** I think the reason I had the ticking of the clock as the first thing I did was just to establish: ‘Oh, here’s a guy and he’s going to loop things with his loop station’. But we get that very quickly anyway–

**MX:** Yeah.

**SKS:** –when I start looping. Where do I loop, do I loop a word or something?

**MX:** Yeah, yeah, you loop ‘crazy’.

**SKS:** Yeah, so if you’re okay with that, I’m going to delete that now, yeah.

**CB:** Delete.

**MX:** That means we don’t have to have you move. And we can keep you static and still and fixed in the chair.

**SKS:** I can just say: ‘Slumped in my chair.’

**CB:** Good. That feels good already. Yeah, I was struggling with the getting up.

**SKS:** It changes the energy, doesn’t it?

**MX:** Yeah. And also what’s the motivation, like going back to all that stuff about objective. What is the want in that moment to create the sound of a clock ticking?

**SKS:** Yeah. So now I get to stay in my chair. I’m still stirring my tea, I’m having the flashbacks, I’m sitting in my chair and I don’t – but then I do have to – if we do, then we have another problem which is when I do stand up to leave, the word ‘escape’, like why?

**MX:** Yeah, but we can find, I think, we can find that, because it’s long enough from the start of the action, you know. Again in terms of those motivations – stirring, stirring, stirring, talking to the camera, stirring, stirring, stirring, some moment that just takes you up into space [*gets up*], you know, fucking headless horsemen, really hallucinating, that takes you up.

**SKS:** Yeah, maybe it’s like: ‘Every day feels like a fresh loss. Yesterday we had another bereavement.’ And then–

**MX:** You want to get away from that moment.

**SKS:** Yeah.

**CBY:** So for the majority of this, for the whole of this section up to ‘But I can’t feel anything’, you’re going to be – we’re going to be slowly pushing into you, but all we’re going to get is tighter, tighter on your face, at which point all we’re going to see, when you say: ‘I’m running but I can’t feel anything’ and stand up, is this frame, your head. You stand up out of shot and we’re tracking backwards with you, so we’re never going to really change this frame. You look into the camera and running out of ways to escape while you’re walking towards your loop pedal, we see your head go down and: ‘But I’m running out of ways to escape’ – your head goes down and we hear ‘escape, escape, escape’ and the camera comes down and sees that you’re holding the microphone, so the audio changes



during that. I see what you're asking – 'I'm running out of ways to escape', for it to go into the pedal, you need to have the mic in your hand.

**MX:** So can I suggest we don't loop that 'escape'. We loop the next one and we move the word 'this' to after the 'dot dot dot'.

**CB:** 'How can I escape... this?' Yeah.

**MX:** Because then you've got: 'How can I escape...?' I can see then why he's gone to the microphone, there's a thing for me which is [*looks around*] that thing that's in my head right now, which is connecting to thousands of people, normally involves me standing in front of a microphone. 'How can I escape this...?' [*gets up*] so there's a reason to go to it now, which is to get back to this position of having a mic pressed against your lips, which evokes those memories. Glasto flashback, moving towards the microphone: 'How can I escape, escape, escape, escape, escape dot dot dot this solitary confinement?'

**SKS:** Yeah. So 'Shlo walks towards...' After that – 'I'm running out of ways to escape. Glasto flashback. Shlo walks towards the loop station and picks up a mic' – because then that's a bit like it's referencing those flashbacks, it's like–

**MX:** We see the motivation, I think.

**SKS:** 'How can I escape, escape, escape, escape.' I think you'd say it again: 'How can I escape this solitary confinement.'

**MX:** You've added another point six of a second.

**SKS:** Yeah, shit all of these point six of a seconds add up!

**CB:** We'd have a close-up on hand putting a mic down. I think we should have a shot of the mic being dropped as well out of the hand.

**MX:** Yeah.

**CB:** So all you see is the frame, hand, and then he blurs off into there, and that covers all bases of how the edit could work. And I suppose these are the kind of decisions that could be adjusted when it comes to feedback later on. Have you said 'early evening' just because it's not bright sunlight?

**SKS:** No, just because that's what time it is in the story. It's going to be – his birthday's in three hours so it's kind of roughly eight-nine p.m.

**CB:** Okay, I'm thinking there won't be much difference in visuals between three and seven.

**SKS:** Assume it's still pretty much pre-dusk.

**CB:** Okay.

**SKSY:** So is that actually not a very helpful stage direction, writing 'early evening' there?

**MX:** I mean, it worked for me in terms of giving me a sense of what you were chasing in terms of the look of the time, I guess.

**SKS:** Yeah.

**MX:** Then how does that relate, Chris, to when we'd actually be filming and what we can capture and all of that?

**CB:** I mean it's – well, it changes things. If we're going to try and achieve those kind of looks, then we're going to really put the pressure on ourselves on this two-day shoot.

**SKS:** You're going to get two dusks, and they don't last very long.

**CB:** Yeah.

**MX:** What were – which of the two words would you strike: 'early' or 'evening'?

**CB:** I'd say 'late afternoon'. [*Laughter.*]

**MX:** Could you talk to me, Chris, about movement in 'Bellydancer' and edits, and I guess your kind of take on the look of this?



**CB:** Yeah, well, currently I've got it in my head as quite simply a replica of the 'Random Acts' shoot, except in a gravel pathway with hedge and scenery in the background. And I suppose the only thing that isn't in the 'Random Acts' set – no, there are two wide speakers. There are two big speakers but they're in the corner of the room, aren't they?

**SKS:** Can we just copy and paste the other one? No one'll notice.

**CB:** Copy and paste the other what?

**SKS:** Version of 'Bellydancer'.

**CB:** Oh just take it out, like you've just walked from the kitchen into a manor house.

**SKS:** 'Oh look, I'm in BAC.'

**MX:** Yeah. 'Oh look, yeah, six years younger.'

**CB:** You've gone through pages 13, 14, 15, a few times now with a fine toothpick. Have you, in terms of the language and stuff like that?

**MX:** I mean, did it feel long there?

**CB:** It does feel long. And I know what – and I can see what you're trying to achieve, and there's all the right inspirational language. But for me it just feels a little bit convoluted, and maybe, maybe the key message could just be said in simpler terms, because I can see this working on the stage and the hype and the hype and the hype but–

**SKS:** I think once you've got the music, it feels very different because I was–

**CB:** Yeah of course, it does. It also does in the recording.

**SKS:** It actually isn't that long and when I did it just now without music again it just felt like it went on forever. So have another listen to the audio and it does give it a different energy. But, like, I kind of need to finalise now so I can start rehearsing.

**CB:** Well, I think that's something we could cut anyway later on if we needed to, so it's not even a concern. If it makes you feel your performance is right, then that's what should be the decision, isn't it?

**SKS:** I'm not sure how easy it will be to cut, because it's kind of set to a certain amount of music so that build-up happens in the right place...

**MX:** If you want, I can do a kind of another pass over it. But I do believe that it – once it has the music under it, it becomes a bit of performance art, doesn't it? Becomes a sermon with music underneath it, and we sit within that, and we will go with you.

**SKS:** It definitely felt very, very long just then, doing it without the audio.

**CB:** It did, didn't it?

**SKS:** It went on forever.

**MX:** Yeah, but I imagine 'Lose Yourself' by Eminem feels quite long without the beat underneath it.

**SKS:** Yeah, yeah, okay. Well, I'll go back and have a listen to the audio again.

**MX:** What I'll check is: is it tautologous or repetitive? If it's that, then we've got a problem. But if each thought moves us onto another thought, then I think we'll live with it.

#### **[00:48:55] INTERVIEW WITH SK SHLOMO 2, 24.07.2020**

**DR:** I was struck the last time we talked, you know, before we were going to go into the rehearsal together we talked about how you make work with the audience by testing it out in front of an audience and you really wanted to break down that period into smaller chunks and share your work and have a number of sharings as part of the R&D. And I know that you were also at the same time writing a script for Matthew to give his dramaturgical input on. But I just wonder what it was like, this writing process, when you were writing – because you kindly allowed me to come into your consultations about the script which was very, very interesting and I saw you live write a little bit as



part of that which was also great – but how was it? Did you feel that you were doing more writing than you expected because of this outcome being something different?

**SKS:** Well, not really. Because it was – because we had this time limit on the film, it had to be 15 minutes or less, and then I kind of thought: ‘Well, I’m going to use the big set pieces from the show, which I already know that they work for this, because it’s such a big platform.’ So that’s why we use ‘Bellydancer’, which is a set piece that we know works and that we know works on film. And then there’s another piece called ‘First Rave’, which again I had already made it into a film before. So that there are new versions of them and they’re done in a new way, but they’re material that – I didn’t have to do much writing, just a bit of adapting. And then the third big set piece, that was the experimental piece. And I’d already written so much.

**DR:** Was that the one with where everyone kind of checks in to rave, right?

**SKS:** Yeah, yeah. But I’d already written so many of the words for that, having written, like, because I was on the second draft of my script for the one-hour show and I had too much content for that. That was already going to have to be cut down and rewritten anyway. So it was more like, yeah, kind of cherry-picking some stuff from that, and then a little bit more writing just to smooth it all together into one story. But, yeah, the writing – I put it off for ages because I was scared that it would be too much work, but Matthew was just super-encouraging. It was like: ‘You’re not really writing, you’re more like deleting, so just–’

**DR:** Oh great.

**SKS:** ‘–take your big script and delete it down.’ And then in the end that, yeah, it has become a new piece but in a – it felt quite easy to do, it wasn’t too painful.

### **[00:51:35] ZOOM REHEARSALS 3: READTHROUGH AND RAVETHROUGH 30.06.2020-09.07.2020**

**DR:** Nice to see you all! So there will be a readthrough?

**SKS:** Yeah, we’re just talking through at the moment actually.

**DR:** Yeah I’m sorry, sorry, okay, I shall just keep my–

**MX:** I just started kind of reading through the material to get there, just beat by beat.

**MX:** Hello, it’s good to see you.

**Andy Brooks (Testament):** You well?

**MX:** Surviving. Surviving the traumatic world that is Covid-19 and BLM.

**ABT:** It’s crazy, crazy, and trying to do your job at the same time, it’s just like: ‘What?!’

**MX:** Oh I’ve stopped that bit, for a minute.

**CB:** This is technically work isn’t it, Matthew, this is.

**MX:** Oh yeah sure.

**CB:** This is anti-furlough for another day.

**MX:** Yeah, the alternative stream.

**CB:** We’re generating ideas though, not income, so this is fine.

**MX:** So how much, how much do you know, Andy?

**ABT:** Erm, very little. I know, at the end, I think, is it something along the lines of an incredibly talented and charming man is feeling isolated and lonely? And it’s about people coming together – which is a very Shlomo thing, I have to say, bringing people together, that’s something one of his giftings right there – and making people feel good, and then at the end there’s a community, an online community which all come together and we feel togetherness, right? And I’m one of the people jumping on and going: ‘Yay!’

**MX:** You’re the instigator.



**ABT:** Is it?

**MX:** You're the catalyst.

**SKS:** You're pretty key. You're kind of like some kind of childhood friend of mine, which isn't too far from the truth.

**ABT:** No, it's not that far.

**SKS:** Not quite childhood, but definitely like from the transition between child and adult, and then—

**ABT:** Yeah!

**SKS:** —you kind of really — your character is really key because you kind of wake me up a bit. Like I kind of find, I'm kind of in my little loop, and then you happen to call me.

**MX:** While you're looking, before you get to 12 can I give him a real quick synopsis of beats One, Two, Three, Four? Which is: Shlo is sat in his house, probably because of lockdown and Covid, and unable to connect with people physically. He remembers where he found this energy of performance and what that could give to people, and performs 'Bellydancer' in the garden, having run out into the space to get away from his own thoughts. Whilst out there, he then wanders back in and something triggers the fact that he's approaching a birthday tomorrow — a birthday card on the side or something like that — and he remembers his first rave set, which was a celebration of a birthday and how that created the being that is Shlomo. And then he kind of gets lost in thought about the past and about what that was, and while he's reminiscing through his box of old flyers and his first microphone and some stickers that he used to put up on lampposts promoting something, at some point, you interrupt that with a Skype call or a Zoom call. You both buzz over the music, and I think that's probably where we are now — beat Five.

**SKS:** Beat Five, yeah.

**ABT:** 'He remembers raver, friend, promoter.' — I was a promoter for the Underground for a little bit — 'He was also feeling very low but excited by the music. Adds in five other friends to the call. Each of these friends feels a sudden connection, shared excitement.' Cool. I'm imagining it's going to be like jungle or something.

**SKS:** Andy, can you do the sound of Skype please?

**ABT:** Okay. [*Mimics sound of Skype.*]

**SKS:** 'Aw, what?'

**MX:** Laptop photo of Andy and the words 'Testament incoming call'.

**SKS:** 'Hey Andy!'

**ABT:** 'Yo Shlo! You didn't show up for the Zoom quiz, are you okay, bro?'

**SKS:** 'Well, ah, no. I'm okay. I wasn't okay. But it's just been too much man, this isolation, these losses. You must be feeling it too, man. We've both lost, like how many friends...? But hey, listen to this!'

**MX:** 'Hits play.'

**ABT:** 'Oh man, haven't heard this in time — this is like your birthday but with the minibus.' [*Laughter.*] 'Hang on, isn't it your birthday soon?'

**SKS:** 'Yeah, in about three hours.'

**ABT:** 'Hey happy birthday! Oh man, this takes me back. So many emotions! What was that like, what's that club night called? Like, Elevate or something.'

**SKS:** 'Oh, you mean Reconnect.'

**ABT:** 'Yes, yes, yes, do you remember those nights? Those mad nights that went on for weeks.'

**SKS:** 'How about this tune?'

**ABT:** 'You're killing me, man!'

**SKS:** 'This is what it's about I swear. We can all sit here trapped, stuck, isolated.'



**MX:** 'Andy's image is stuttering.'

**SKS:** 'Trying to connect, at least in some way, you know. Like try and let our pain out in a joyful way. Maybe we can just rave out, you know?'

**MX:** 'Glitch, glitch, glitch.'

**SKS:** 'This music, these memories, this nightmare. All I'm saying is, there's no point squashing all our emotions inside. The pain is only going to come back harder and eat us up.'

**MX:** 'Andy's still freezing.' – So Andy, you're getting none of this, you're not hearing any of this. – 'Shlo turns down, stops the music.'

**SKS:** 'You know what, I've got to stop hiding, I don't mind telling you, bro, but I've been having some pretty dark thoughts.'

**MX:** 'Connection cuts out.'

**SKS:** [*Makes noises of frustration.*]

**MX:** 'Would you like to reconnect: yes, no? Hits reconnect over and over. Andy pops up again. Shlo's frustrated with Andy.'

**SKS:** 'Andy!'

**ABT:** 'Uh, Shlo?'

**SKS:** 'Yes, Andy, did you hear any of what I just said?'

**ABT:** 'Mate, you cut out.'

**SKS:** 'Ah man, I'm feeling something. Honestly, the only way through this is if we let our guard down and reconnect. Does that sound ridiculous?'

**ABT:** 'Yes it does. But I love it! I'm calling Monique, she needs to hear this.'

**SKS:** 'Oh man, Monique. She used to love this tune—'

**MX:** Turns away from laptop.'

**SKS:** 'Really love this tune.'

**MX:** 'Hey guys! What's going on?'

**ABT:** 'Hey Monique! I'm adding in Mikey and Sarah Jane.'

**SKS:** 'Hey Monique, are you up for some digital raving?'

**MX:** 'What, like right now? Come on, I'm in my PJs.'

**SKS:** 'Living the dream on.'

**MX:** 'This tune, I remember this.'

**SKS:** 'Yes guys, how are you doing? Guys, listen, I want to try something. If you're feeling like you need to reconnect with the world, add some friends into this call right now. We're going to have a digital rave.'

**MX:** A digital rave. 'More and more faces appear on the screen. Snippets of everyday noise – who's out on a thing.' [*Makes people noises.*]

**SKS:** 'Everyone, can you just mute yourself? I've got something to say. I need you on your feet, I need you to kill the lights. If you're feeling anything like I am, we need to let something go right now. If you've got party poppers, go get them, glowsticks, neon wear, I don't know, disco lights, smoke machines, confetti cannons, anything ravey, just go get it now!'

**MX:** 'Quick montage of callers grabbing UV kit, applying neon face paint, snapping glowsticks, putting on hi vis, turning on UV lights. Shlo talks to the laptop.'

**SKS:** 'Listen, are you ready to go crazy? I'm talking to you too! This is a special space. No room for blinkers, blaggers or bores, no bad eggs, barriers or borders, no BS, no baggage, no bad attitude. So let me ask you again – are you ready to go crazy?'



**ABT/MX:** 'Yeah!'

**SKS:** 'Are you ready?!' [*Dancing.*]

**MX:** 'Beat drops. Everyone on screen going rave crazy.'

**SKS:** 'Ladies and gentlemen and everyone else, friends and strangers! Man, I've missed strangers almost as much as I missed friends. Thank you for joining me in this moment, but let me ask you something. Can we take this feeling of reconnect and pay it forward? Can we look out for each other? Can we drop our judgements right here in this moment? There is no past, there is no future, there is only the music. This is our family of choice, this is our religion: the holy altar of rave, the shrine of bassline. So drop your personal protection and become your true self. Place your hands on your chest, feel your lungs beating, feel your heart pumping. Despite all we've been through, our hearts are still beating together. So let us synchronise, let us recognise our similarities more than our differences, let the struggles of others concern us just as much as our own. Together we have the power to create big change, together we are the majority, together we rise united in rhythm. If you're with me, I want you all to try something. Are you ready to let all your grievances go and move your body like nothing else? Are you ready to go wilder than you have in years? I said, are you ready?!'

**ABT/MX:** [*Rave noises.*]

**CB:** Once you engage all the other people in this kind of Zoom set-up, it exists, I think staying in that Zoom set-up makes more sense as opposed to cutting out of the room and seeing the performance, and the only cut being is back to the reveal that it is in your imagination.

**SKS:** Okay.

**MX:** Yeah. What does that do? Can we still achieve within that the two audiences as it were?

**CB:** As in the audience that has been with us the whole time and now this new audience? I think that's the question really. I mean we'll – we can film it as both again.

**MX:** Yeah.

**CB:** We would do that anyway. But there's just something about not leaving this Zoom set-up and seeing Shlo in that context that feels right, and being able to cut between the different participants.

**Raver 1:** Thanks for giving us a project.

**MX:** We'll just try a record where everyone's off mute and it's as if you've just joined. So literally just imagine you might see someone you recognise – 'Hey hey, Oggi, yeah what do you say?' You know: 'What's going on?'

**SKS:** Oh, look at the glowsticks!.

[*Raver 2 laughing and waving glowsticks.*]

**SKS:** You know, you know we've been locked down for too long when it's just really exciting to see someone holding glowsticks on a Zoom call. Like, that's exciting for me.

**MX:** Just imagine you've just connected, and whatever bit of life is going on that you're coming in from is also happening as you then see whoever you see. Jonathan?

**Raver 3:** He's going to do it in five minutes, he's going to be there. Hey guys! Hey DJ! What's happening man?

[*Laughter.*]

**MX:** Wicked. Uh, cool! DJ...

**Raver 4:** Yeah give me – yeah hold on, yeah Shlo, what's going on, bro? What up there, you good?

**SKS:** Yeah...

**Raver 5:** Yeah okay whatever, like just– Shlo, what's up? Hey you look great.

**SKS:** Thanks. You're a good liar.

**MX:** Samir?

**Raver 6:** I've got too many windows open, I can't see– Ah there it is, cool, cool. Yo, can you hear





me? Can you see me? Yo Shlo, don't blame me.

[*Laughter.*]

**SKS:** This is a fun drama game.

**MX:** Improvise, now.

**Raver 7:** Okay try and log into the rainbow, yes. Shlo, yo bruv, you good?

**MX:** Wicked, wicked. And now we'll do one where everyone just kind of does all of that in a slightly staggered fashion.

[*Other ravers check in.*]

**SKS:** That's the moment you wanted right, Matthew?

### **[01:04:15] INTERVIEW WITH SK SHLOMO 3, 24.07.2020**

**DR:** And did you miss, or did you feel you had enough of an opportunity to improvise as part of making the TV, the cousin, you know – was there enough scope for you to still get a sense of creating in the moment?

**SKS:** Yeah, I think so. I mean it is a different – it's a different discipline, isn't it, like making recordings rather than making live performances. When you're doing it live, it's kind of more forgiving, like if it's rough around the edges, and also you do it lots of times, so if one night goes a bit dodgy, it doesn't really matter. But saying that, you also only get one go with your audience, you only get one attempt, whereas with a recording your standards have to be a lot higher, you can't kind of be quite so scrappy. So you can be a bit more perfectionist, but you can have as many goes as you want, like, time permitting, so you can do lots of takes and then you can edit it afterwards and you can polish it. So, like, quite a lot of the music in the film version, I was kind of improvising on set at the shoot, and we used that as a kind of basis for the music. But then I went home and then put way more onto it in the studio and made it much bigger and slicker – which you can't obviously, you can't do that on stage. So yeah, there's real pros and cons. I did improvise a fair amount in the shoot, but I think the real magic actually happened in post. Not the real magic, but a lot of the magic would have happened in post.

**DR:** And shall we then talk maybe about your collaborators a bit? So Matthew was – Matthew Xia was also the director of the BBC piece. He was going to be the director of the theatre piece but he also directed the short film. And then you also had crucial collaborators taking responsibility of other aspects of it. So when you say a lot of it happened in post, of course there is Chris, who is like the editor, I presume, of the video, right?

**SKS:** Yeah, film-maker.

**DR:** Film-maker. And you've worked with him before as well?

**SKS:** Yeah, so he made the Channel Four version of 'Bellydancer' so it was really natural, and we've done lots of other stuff together as well. But yeah, it was a natural choice to go straight to him – once I got over that it wasn't going to be live and we had to sort of restructure the whole plan. In my original proposal I'd planned, the budget had been planned on what we needed for a livestream. It was very similar to what we planned for *Homeskool*, so like I had different team members, different collaborators. It's like, no, if you're making a film – so we canned all of that and it's like, no, we need to do this totally differently. So then Chris came in and it was quite late, like, because I got the commission, I got the news about this BBC commission in like the second week of *Homeskool*, and that was a six-week process and a very, very, very intense process.

**DR:** What does Chris normally bring to the collaboration with you? What are his particular skills or his take on the process that you enjoy?

**SKS:** Well, there's a few reasons why he's really great: because he's distinguished, I'd say he's a really distinguished film-maker anyway, but he's also a secret beatbox fan, so he does know a bit about beatboxing – and he's not 'secret', he's just a beatbox fan. He knows about music and he's



brought so many suggestions to my process that I wouldn't have thought of because he's thinking of it from a musical point of view. And I think that's really, really good, that's really gold. And he's made lots of music videos, he just, he gets it. Yeah, so I feel – and also because we've got quite a long-standing relationship, he's not afraid to just tell me how it is and push me quite hard and be like: 'No, go and do that again.' Like, for example, we had this sequence towards the beginning of the show that, I don't know, it was kind of working but I wasn't that sure about it. And we sent it off to get feedback from Lucy and Andrew at BAC, and they were like: 'No, it's really good but maybe you could lose that first section because it's not really adding anything.' And I was like: 'Great, let's cut it!' – I kind of was waiting for that permission. And then Chris was like: 'We could cut it. Or you could go away and make it way more badass!' And I was like: 'What do you mean?' And he sent me some videos and some inspiration, and I was like: 'Oh!' And then I went off, and it just only took me a couple of hours, and I just came up with a whole new thing for it. Just lay it up over the visuals he already had, and then everyone loved it. Like we just got the sign-off today from BBC that they love it, so it's good. He kind of saved that bit–

**DR:** Great.

**SKS:** –just by not being afraid to tell me to push myself a bit further, which I don't know if you always get that from people you're working with. Like, they might not feel they can push you. So that's really good.

**DR:** Okay, so you had these two kinds of speaking parts and then the ravers, and you auditioned the others to take part in that scene?

**SKS:** We were planning to audition them, but it looked like it was going to be a bit too much work and not really that necessary. The main thing we wanted to do is ensure that there was diversity in our group. We want to make sure we're promoting diversity and, like, yeah I've made a commitment in my work to just be like explicitly anti-racist in everything that I'm doing. So that was just really important. And Matthew as well, he's a big figure – he's been doing a lot of work with sort of big, big change-makers about how to work towards eradicating racism in the theatre industry. So he's obviously well placed to help with that. So we just wanted to make sure that – because I think a lot of my audience is middle-class white people, that's just... Such a huge amount of people who go to theatre in the UK or go to shows or engage with the type of content I'm creating is middle class and white, and it's like, well, this doesn't have to appeal to just those people. But also the people who – the public who applied actually were super-diverse. That's really nice, it was a nice balance of gender and colour. So in the end we just asked people to upload a selfie – we didn't make them audition. We said: 'Upload a selfie and have you got any like ravey stuff, like flashy lights or neon clothes or whatever?' And everyone seemed to really enjoy telling us what they were going to bring. So that created a sense of anticipation. And yeah, it really worked, it really, really worked. Justin was just instrumental in doing all that, as well, like, he kind of took the whole leap at that.

**DR:** The home-schooling project happened at about the same time when you were about to go into this production process. I just want to rewind back there and find out a bit more about that project.

**SKS:** Well, *Homeskool Beatbox Adventures* was a six-part weekly mass beatbox lesson that I created to raise money for charity and to try and connect people, because it was at the height of the lockdown when people were – like, kids were just completely confined and, yeah, really struggling. And I'd kind of been watching Joe Wicks who was on day one of the lockdown, he was ready, and I really admired what he'd done and felt quite inspired by what he'd done. But also I'd watched it and thought of so many things that I'd do differently. Like it didn't really feel like he'd got really any structure to what he was doing, he didn't have time to make a plan, I guess. This isn't me criticising him, it's just me thinking about what I wanted to do differently. And I thought I want to create a journey from start to finish, so people can measure how they've changed and how they've grown. So I'd wanted to start with the very basic sounds and end with us all creating this performance together that we could somehow do remotely from each other. And it was a bit – it all happened in a whirlwind. Like, I kind of realised I would need some help, so I made some announcements online saying I want to do a project to help the NHS and I need creative people, and I just got swamped, honestly. So many emails like from film-makers and producers and designers, and so many people wanting to



volunteer, because they were all stuck as well and wanting to do something to help. And it was during the height of the fear as well, like the height of the kind of emotional pain of lockdown, where everyone was like: 'I can't – I don't feel in control, you know, and we're like doing our weekly clap for the NHS but, like, we don't feel like we can help.' So this really felt like – I think this has helped people feel like they could do something positive and creative. And so yeah we put a team together, and then I also messaged lots of high profile people who I kind of had in my phone book and just said: 'Do you want to come on the show as well?' So we had some really great guests and that helped raise the profile of the whole thing. And obviously they had nothing to do either, they were up for it. So yeah, it came together. And then we wrote this song collaboratively, after lots of experimentation with different technologies and different ways we could present it, and then in the penultimate episode we had like a remote recording session so everybody who was watching filmed themselves singing this song that we'd written together, and beatboxing and then sent in their videos. And then we had a week to turn that into like a mass – and we had over 100 people send them in – which we were kind of secretly hoping that not many people would, but mm!

**DR:** You've raised all your funds for the NHS and all of that?

**SKS:** Yeah, we set a kind of arbitrary target and then we kind of smashed straight past, and then in the last episode we also set up another campaign for Black Lives Matter, because that was just after all of that stuff had been kicking off in America. So we dedicated our last show to Black Lives Matter and then we raised some money for the Black Lives Matter Foundation.

**DR:** Excellent, fantastic. Well done!

**SKS:** When we did the rave shoot, remote video shoot for the BBC, we had like 30 people, and almost all of them messaged straight after, being like: 'That was amazing! Can we do it again? Can I invite some friends? Can we just – because I need it in my life!' And I was thinking: 'Okay, I might do a regular livestream'. For me, it's like I'm just figuring out what my show is, and how it works, and how people respond to it, and how to kind of get people into that state of mind and how to kind of achieve that euphoria, that I just can't wait to do it in real life and get – because I'm learning all the time and I'm refining this all the time. So by the time next summer comes, yeah, I really feel like I want it to be emotional, I want it to be cathartic for people, I want it to be, like, feel like a real big release. And like, livestreaming's not ideal, but it's still a way to connect with humans and for me to learn how to do that, or learn even more how to do that.

**DR:** Excellent, that sounds great, sounds really great.

**SKS:** Thank you, thank you.

**DR:** Thank you.

#### **[01:16:05] CODA: REHEARSING THE ESCAPE, 02.07.2020**

**SKS:** I think the one I'm most questioning is the intro one, the kind of 'escape, escape', all that kind of stuff. How are we feeling about where that's going?

**CB:** I just thought it wasn't crazy or hectic enough in where it reaches the crescendo, you know, for me, the way the sound was, it didn't – it wasn't hectic enough.

**SKS:** So do you think throw more at it, but just make it more of a horrible wall of sound?

**MX:** Yeah, wall of sound, isn't it? But it's like, I guess, I don't know, I always think through metaphor or analogy: as that sound takes up more space in the room you can't be there because it's so oppressive that it crunches you down smaller and smaller and smaller until you just have to get out to survive.

**CB:** Hm, I like that.

**MX:** Because I like that you – there was one little pop you had in there. You just went 'ah!' and that was in there, and so that became part of the texture and that was interesting. That felt like: 'Did he really make that noise or is it–? Like did he make that noise to make the noise, or did he really scream in pain?'



**SKS:** Yeah. Just so you know that they're super-improvised and they're coming out – those soundscapes are coming out completely different every time, so I don't really know what's going to happen. I could do a couple of takes of it now just to show you like the differences so that we're aware of what we might get. Because if we do it in a call now, then you can be like: 'Try this, try that', and it might just come up with more organic things. What are you thinking, Chris?

**CB:** I can see you're itching. You want to just try a load of stuff out, don't you?

**SKS:** Hello, can you hear me?

**MX:** Yeah. Have you just flipped to another camera? That was very smooth.

**CB:** That was really slick, wasn't it?

**MX:** Yeah.

**SKS:** Okay, so: 'How can I escape?' So the mic on here, on the loop station until I say – and I'm sat down, aren't I?

**MX:** It's not that you don't know you're doing this, you know. Like, you know that you're fucking with sound to try and express the chaos that's in your head at this moment in time. So I think after that 'escape, escape, escape, escape, solitary confinement, confinement, confinement', it doesn't equate to the chaos that you need it to at that point, so you kind of go to work on it.

**SKS:** 'I can't feel anything. How can I? I'm running out of ways to escape. How can I escape, escape, escape, escape, escape? How can I escape this solitary confinement?' [*Loops. Beatboxes.*] How can I escape myself?!' [*Loops feedback.*]

**SKS:** Oh, it gets really horrible really quickly. Do you want it to be that horrible?

**CB:** Yes.

**SKS:** Yes.

**MX:** Yes.

**CB:** There's a certain point where you start feeling something instead of listening.

**MX:** Yeah.

**SKS:** It becomes that 'errrrgh'.

**CB:** Yeah!

**MX:** And that makes sense that that's what you're trying to achieve, Shlo, you're trying to achieve feeling, essentially.

**SKS:** Okay.

**MX:** And until you manipulate that sound where it affects feeling, you can't shout over it, I think. That worked that really worked, I think.

**SKS:** Is that is that now hectic enough, or do you want me to go even more?

**CB:** For me? I'd want you to see – I want – I'd want to see how far you could go. Like, what's the most extreme? Like, with you literally, you know, almost shouting, going crazy, you know, like find your inner anger.

**SKS:** It's going to freak my neighbours out.

**CB:** Yeah, like that's it, isn't it? Freak the neighbours out.

**SKS:** They must be used to it by now.

**CB:** If no one's calling the police, then it's probably not right.

**SKS:** 'But I can't feel anything. I'm running out of ways to escape. How can I escape, escape, escape? How can I escape this solitary confinement?' [*Loops. Beatboxes. Crescendo of feedback.*]



## Clips Summary

[00:00:23 to 00:02:03] BBC Culture in Quarantine *Reconnect: Digital Raving* (2020)

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