

Message in the Music: Christian Noelle Charles and Zakia Sewell

Alaya 00:01

Hi everyone. My name is Alaya Ang and I'm the Associate Curator at the Centre for Contemporary Art. Welcome to this listening series. This is a collaboration between the CCA and Subcity radio in Glasgow. I'd like to open up the show with a quote from the Nathaniel Mackey: 'music is wounded kinship's last resort'. And in this series, I'm shaped by my encounters with the radio, a close companion of mine, especially during the lockdown period. And I've begun to dream about the kinships I'd like to build and have through a radio space. And so the series invites you to deepen the act of listening, using music to build out and map sonic biographies, associations and journeys. Today, we also celebrate Black History Month in our opening session, by spotlighting a brilliant artist, Christian Noelle Charles, as she discusses her first solo exhibition, 'Reflective Jester: It's just a feeling' which has just recently closed at the CCA. We have also invited radio producer, host and DJ Zakia Sewell, you can hear her show 'questing' a weekly jazz and soul radio show on NTS. Her practice expands to include narrative storytelling, archival foraging and musical curation and so we welcome Zakia and CC Noelle.

MUSIC 01:31

[Sandy Barber, Don't You Worry Baby (The Best Is Yet To Come)]

CC 06:06

I think that one's really special to me, I think it's like, I would say that this is probably the song that represents my personal journey in general in terms of kind of growing up and hoping for like, I guess opportunities and things from, and making it happen. I think at the same time, it's that kind of confidence that you kind of push forward that, as like I guess, as like a kind of a black woman to achieve success. I feel like I always use it in a way to remind myself that good things are always happening and the best is yet to come. And there's never any doubts that you should have behind you in your journey and the music itself, especially with Sandy Barber's voice, it really kind of boosts my confidence really quickly especially in terms of walking in the street or something that feels like it's been accomplished it always kind of lightens the spirit in terms, I feel like it's like personally my song of hope, in terms of finding things that are better.

Zakia 10:04

Yeah, lovely, positive message, but also like lyrically, but also just in terms of the sound of it, you know, that kind of disco-y sound from that era, it's just very, very kind of instantly uplifting isn't it? It's just kind of full of sunshine, which is a nice thing. Yeah I mean, I'm interested to know, kind of what, obviously, you know, your exhibition, you know, there are obvious musical themes in it, but I wanted to know, you know, do you sort of listen to music as part of your process, when you're kind of making work when you are thinking about themes and ways to express things, you know, as well as it being part of the subject matter? Does it also play a part in the process?

CC 10:54

I would say it plays a part of like, the narrative and structure of how I have to present what my thought process and thinking is, in terms of like how music is kind of composed, in a way like you kind of start with like, either like a note or a beat, to kind of figure out kind of the crux of how you should walk or flow into hearing a song or a narrative, I kind of apply that method with the video and the layering, collaging process of like, this is kind of like my beat. And then literally almost, like, rise it up into like, figuring out like, the rhythm and what's the layer on top of it. And then especially with video, I would say that is the way I have to create my narrative or stories to make the video kind of pass through. I usually kind of rely on the music that I am interested in at the moment to help support kind of the narrative and hear the notes to create different shots or scenes, almost like music videos, but I think in a way it's just almost like not, I guess with music videos, it's like they have kind of like a story I feel like I think about it as like an auto rhythm response that really kind of makes me think of the note at the time and figure out 'Oh, that's where the edit should be' and 'that's where you should hit it' or something.

Zakia 12:39

So it's like it's like kind of compositional, you take that kind of structure of music making. Yes, that's fascinating.

CC 12:50

Yeah, I think it's like, I probably mentioned it with Alaya, it's how like with Charles Mingus, I think like that was like the biggest inspiration of that way of storytelling, because I mentioned 'The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady' as my biggest inspiration in terms of figuring out like the narrative and structure because he was making that piece into the ballet. We can play a little bit of it to have like a listen and I can kind of expand in terms of the flow or what he meant. So this is 'Track B – Duet Solo Dancers'

MUSIC 13:36

[Charles Mingus, Track B – Duet Solo Dancers]

Zakia 20:18

Wow, it's so beautiful. I've never listened to that album. No, it's one of those you know, you know, there's one of those classics that's so classic that you kind of think that you know it because you just seen the album cover a million times and you've heard the name, but you haven't. It's really beautiful.

CC 20:36

I think Mingus is such like, in those realms of like the like, it feels like Mount Rushmore or like artists that you just assume that you know. I came to this album, like probably two years ago, and really deeply listened to it and then I became so entranced because it was such a way of playing with, I think, yeah, the piano, the brass and, and even the almost like Mexican guitar that it was so structured to me, in the way that he put it together because he's usually improvisational. Just like let it free and open. But this was such an almost 180, because he wanted this to be used for a ballet for dancers.

Zakia 21:42

Well, that's what I was thinking. It sounds very orchestral doesn't it? It sounds like I think it's obviously because of that kind of that wall of sound with the horns. And you know, it does, it feels it feels like you can hear these different blocks of music, blocks of sound moving in a way that, what I associate with Charles Mingus is, as you say that more kind of improvisational thing, which is kind of sometimes

harder to you know, you can't visualise it in the same way or it kind of feels and looks, you know, in the Mind's Eye, very different to that piece you just played.

CC 22:19

No, yeah, I think I was like on repeat with that entire album, I had to listen all the way through, probably like 500 times last year. And literally, it feels like every time it's just so, there's a different rhythm that like almost catches it with the flow. And that, and then I feel like that was like probably like one of the few pieces where I was like, deeply analytical of how he created that structure, and what he kind of prioritised for the musicians that he had in the collaboration to say like, this had to be highlighted in a certain way. Like, I feel like it's the trumpets, and especially in this track that we just played, was literally trying to highlight a couple's embrace, or partnership, that literally kind of flowed back and forth. It was like the first time of really figuring out a new character.

Zakia 23:23

Maybe it's worth like, would you be able to just outline what the kind of musical influences are. So I know you mentioned this album as one, and Cab Calloway as another, and how do they kind of appear, as inspirations, how did they kind of guide or, you know, move you in this exhibition?

CC 23:46

I would say it's like, the ones that were definitely kind of prioritised are the ones that were definitely emotion based, but I think I really mostly focused on the influences that applied to my, the dancing that I grew up with. Like I would say that my mom ran a dance studio for 20 years and the artists that were always applied to, who I was performing with, these are some, in and outside of the show where it's, like it's pretty mainstream, because it was like, Stevie Wonder, Janet Jackson. And if we kind of go into the time period that I was really into, it was Cab Calloway, Eartha Kitt, Nina Simone, Dinah Washington and it's kind of like the song switches and live scat performers that felt like uncompromisable attitudes and know like where their performance stood and gave to the audience. That really put me in a position where I wanted to share that kind of energy forward, of how the gesture was. To go specifically into Cab Calloway, it was that immediate, almost jazzy, up and down presence that was forward. And to create an exhibition that I wanted to say that this was me, I kind of use almost an autobiographical tone. And Cab Calloway was similar to my uncle, my Uncle Al, who was almost, I wouldn't say like the exact type of performer or character, but like, a Zoot Suit similar to those of the 30s, he was like wearing almost like zoot suits of the 90s and then like wearing like Kangol hats, and then always had like a strong presence coming in.

Zakia 26:05

90's zoot suits, [laughter] I've got a very strong image.

CC 26:12

It's like, I know with black American families, that everyone has that type of uncle that was almost like Steve Harvey-esque, in a way, or like Cedric the Entertainer, like the kings of comedy, per se, and they dressed up like that immediately to stand out.

Zakia 26:35

Extra, that's what we call it in this country, 'extra'. [laughter]

CC 26:45

Yeah, it was always those kinds of types of musicians that really put on the map in a way of how I applied my own dance performances, as a kid. As a dancer, specifically in ballet, you're always thinking about your body, and how do you analyse your shape, but I was always picked for pieces or performances because of my energy. It was always that kind of, like giving out of charisma and smiles, or almost like feelings that the audience respond to easily. Yeah, expressing those sides between almost feeling the music, so put that all a melting pot, that creates this concept of why the gesture was so important because it relied on those kinds of feelings.

Zakia 28:10

We spoke before and we're talking about, you know, like, early experiences of music, and while I was selecting some tunes to play I was thinking about my early experiences with music and I didn't grow up in a dance studio, but both my parents played music, they weren't musicians by trade, but you know, I grew up in a very musical household, my parents were in an acid jazz band together. Acid jazz, I don't know if you know acid jazz is like...

CC 28:36

I love it, yeah,

Zakia 28:37

...the kind of UK, like 90s, kind of like rare groove jazz revival in the UK that like a lot of like Black British or like actually quite a lot of mixed bands, like people like Jamiroquai, Incognito, and others that I can't remember right now. But you know, it was this kind of like Black British reimagining of like some of this American jazz from the 60s and 70s. So already, there's a kind of interesting connection there because it's this sort of like, you know, British looking over and trying to do what they saw in America but giving it their own flavour. And obviously, a lot of the people who are involved in it are like Caribbean immigrants, which adds another kind of flavour and another pool of influences, but, so my parents were in an acid jazz band together and I grew up, you know, around a lot of rehearsals and music. My dad is really into jazz, so I actually grew up with quite a lot of it through him. My mom, who is from the Caribbean, my dad's English, but my mom was really into her house music and more on the kind of soulful house and dance music and things like that. And so that was the sort of musical influence when I was growing up, but actually one of the songs I selected, an Alice Coltrane track, 'Journey In Satchidananda', I never know how to pronounce it. But this is like a song that my dad used to play a lot when I was growing up and I kind of came back to jazz when I got a bit older because you know, like the things that your parents try and play you, you're sometimes like, Oh no, [laughter] and then I rediscovered it for myself and this was this kind of spiritual jazz, this free jazz which is quite different to the Cab Calloway and the Charles Mingus, in a way, it was sort of my entry point into this music and this sort of very expansive, free aspect of jazz that is still kind of really something that I'm really drawn to so maybe we should hear a little bit of that one.

MUSIC 30:42

[Alice Coltrane ft. Pharoah Sanders, Journey In Satchidananda]

CC 34:45

[laughter] It's a bit like, what was it, like my Alice Coltrane song, or jam, is 'Galaxy in Turiya' with the strings

Zakia 35:00

Actually kind of in a way similar to the Mingus, bringing that kind of orchestral kind of almost classical aspect to jazz

CC 35:09

No, yeah. But I would say, Yeah, Alice Coltrane, because I grew up with John Coltrane with her husband in the early days, and then hearing like almost a juxtaposition between the two artists. It feels like it was just like her journey, all the way through. It's like, it's such a major difference in terms of like, I would say, the interpretation of the joy of each other's music even within it. Because I would say especially during the pandemic, Alice was like, almost the place of coming back, at the moment, almost like coming back to yourself and like, almost into a sphere, like a spiritual hole from the stresses and struggles whereas when it came to John, in listening to John's music, specifically, you're like, I don't know, it's two different moods that are set.

Zakia 36:23

Yeah, very different. Yeah, I mean, I just love I mean, obviously, Pharaoh Sanders's playing on there is incredible and, you know, it's obviously drawing on, you know, Eastern traditions and it's kind of, it's quite expansive. It takes like, what is the kind of Black American musical expression and then it suddenly begins, it kind of reaches out to other places, and other and even with all the artwork, so much of the artwork, and the kind of whole culture surrounding that kind of moment of jazz, you know, it's like, it's very expansive. It's kind of global consciousness, unity, kind of spreading out. And I kind of love that about it. And yes, I mean, it's just totally hypnotic, hypnotic music. And very, yeah, as you say, has a very kind of healing quality that I think I've always been drawn to. But what's quite interesting for me about my relationship to jazz is that it was through my white dad that I really learned about jazz, because my mom, she's, she was born in the UK, but her parents are from a place called Carriacou, in Grenada. And although she likes jazz, it's not really, she's not really into it, it's really through my dad that I kind of learned about this kind of Black American music. And I didn't really grow up with my mom, I grew up with my dad. And I think for me, like, the music that he showed me, he also like, you know, he's a big music fan, he also kind of put me on to a lot of reggae and dub, I've got like a bit to play later. But I think it was almost through the music that really enabled me to connect with this kind of black aspect of my heritage that was kind of actually absent in my life at the time. So I guess my relationship to these expressions is slightly kind of like a bit wiggly, like a bit not not entirely straightforward. But I think for that reason, it was sort of very important to me growing up to sort of hear and feel this music that was sort of connected to me and part of me, although albeit through my white dad.

CC 38:36

It's interesting to hear, like, kind of like the journey of like how that encounters because I would say I, I wouldn't say that neither of my parents really pushed my personal love for jazz or interpretation in the beginning, like I mentioned that my dad was a radio DJ, but it was between the late 90s and early 2000s. And that r&b, the hip hop, r&b kind of pinnacle was just in the forefront constantly. And so it would be, I think there was like a mix of like Kem that I would hear all the time and then it would be Lil Bow Wow, or Busta Rhymes or, I think Alicia Keys was like at the forefront of everything and I think I went to concerts with Ashanti. But then my dad ran jazz festivals in my hometown, and then I was able to like kind of see like Smokey Robinson and Aretha Franklin, so like, he wouldn't tell me, but he would just put me in that place. It feels like as if he wanted to make me build my own music vocabulary. So anytime that I was playing like Coltrane, like Alice or John or like even kind of like Mingus or even Gates, he would kind of be surprised because he didn't expect me to go that deep in a dive of the music

Zakia 40:18

But proud, I'm sure as well like secretly proud, he probably thought like, yeah, I've done good [laughter]

CC 40:24

It's like secretly proud, but then acts sarcastic as if I like don't know, I think there's a story where one time I played Phyllis Hyman, and I decided to play her at a barbecue. And then he immediately judged me. He was like, why would you play Phyllis Hyman at a barbecue? And I felt like that moment was like, oh, okay, I'm doing the right thing. Like, it's like, I'm listening to the right stuff. Because it's like, he's critiquing the music that I was playing in the moment.

Zakia 40:57

Yeah, you pissed off your parents, yeah, it's probably a good, probably a good sign.

CC 41:03

But I guess like, um, in terms of like to answer your question of, I guess, like the UK artists, it's so difficult because of how, I guess being here, I've been approached more about Black American music by people, wanting to have a kind of conversation. And this is specifically, let me say this is specifically in Scotland I would say, because the POC community was very, it's very small. So like, the influences feel more, I guess, American, especially who they bring up as well, sometimes. So I felt like I would have to go myself to find artists or push places to listen to at the time. So does that make sense?

Zakia 41:57

Oh, so this is about, because, yeah, I was gonna ask you about, you know, the musical landscape here and how you feel it differs? Because obviously, as you say, a lot of the music that you selected is, you know, Black American music. And I wonder, have you experienced it differently? I mean, what do you notice about the way that people listen to music here, whether that's like the POC community that you've encountered, or like, or just in general?

CC 42:24

I feel like that's been the hardest thing because it's like, it doesn't make me feel homesick, like missing the music back home, or the interaction with my audience, because of how much American music has expanded internationally, it's kind of scary, because it's like, you hear those all the time, you hear the music that you listen to growing up all the time, just in the forefront, in the cities. So then when it comes to like, almost the other side, it's so much more complicated. Like bringing UK music to the other side. So I would say like, like Jorja Smith and who would be almost like features. Like the bigger artists, that's how you kind of like, get to know everyone in terms of kind of new UK music and interaction with it. So and I think it's like, I would say it feels like I'm sometimes pigeonholed because of how present is in the forefront, and trying to open up that space, and who is it? MF DOOM was British American, where it almost felt like that hybrid was back and forth. Like, but it's one of those things where it's a certain collective group who really invested in the music.

Zakia 43:52

This is why maybe I should play the Dizzee Rascal track next because particularly, I know it's a stereotype but like I think probably, I know grime has now sort of crossed over a little bit. But like when people think of British music, they don't necessarily think of Black British music. So they're more likely to think of like Oasis or like, you know, Blur or like, I don't know, like The Rolling Stones or the Beatles

or like, you know, like White British music and I've heard you know that like some Black Americans are even surprised to know that there's like a whole Black British community it's not just like all kind of like country houses. Because I guess what we export to America is like period dramas and like, you know, certain kind of movies about like the upper classes in the Victorian era and stuff like that, but not really kind of like contemporary Black British, the contemporary Black British experience. Yeah,

CC 44:44

I would be really surprised because like, as an American, especially, say like if you're sitting at a bar or like a social scene, and it would be entirely like, Black British friends hanging about, and then you would hear almost like a set of like American music kind of go through but then you hear like more Black British stuff coming on. And I'd be like, Oh, what's this? What's this? And it just be like, this small disruption of like, what am I missing here? Like it would be like you see, like how the community gathers and it's like that sense of the hype in the moment and it almost feels personally genuinely embarrassing, not knowing enough going in. And but then, but if you could see that, like the same type of community and hype with like, Black American music, as well,

Zakia 45:40

Totally, I guess it's just like, it's not what's exported as you say, like American music and particularly black American music is like, so pervasive, it's like it's everywhere. It's like, you know, a massive cultural export and like to the point where, you know, people hear things like you know, that I was saying the acid jazz, like people sang in an American accents, even rapped in American accents, like in the 90s this is all like the UK Hip Hop people, but still like almost pretending to be American. And I guess this is why I wanted to play this Dizze Rascal track because grime was kind of like okay, it's obviously influenced by American rap but it's like in the production it's a totally different sound. The accent, like he's from Bow, which is like deep East London. His accent is so like, it's so London like it couldn't come from anywhere else and I think it's really intense as well it kind of draws on like sound system culture from the Caribbean from you know, from Jamaica, and it's kind of like it's obviously influenced by American music but it's its own kind of distinct Black British thing and I think it's quite nice. This is kind of like what I when I was about 13-14, I think this album came out and I'd be listening to it on the way to school mixed in with like the Ashanti and everything else like this was kind of like proud to be British.

CC 47:03

Let's have a listen, Oh my goodness.

MUSIC 48:41

[Dizze Rascal, Stop Dat]

CC 49:56

It reminds me of like kind of trap music now in America. That sense of like, literally kind of getting a hit, with it's like I guess techno and EDM in that way. But it's like, the first time that I see like, it was that type of energy. Like, especially Black Americans now dancing and responding to, so I don't know, like, were people in the UK like in that kind of almost mood and like literally nodding heads and in a way?

Zakia 50:25

Yeah, I guess it's got that kind of, it's quite like a harsh energy, isn't it? It's quite like and, you know, to set the scene, you know, this is a music that came out of like, you know, young black guys often in

estates in London in quite like harsh, you know, concrete environments, it's very much a kind of expression of that, that experience. And it was also connected to, it kind of came out of a genre called UK garage, which was, again, it's this kind of, like cyclical relationship or this kind of, you know, this kind of intermingling of like American influences and UK influences because there's a sort of whole lineage, which was like American house music coming over here, that being kind of reimagined as UK garage kind of sped up version with like MCs spitting over the top, that turned into grime. And then the grime maybe goes back to America and influences trap so it's like there is this kind of like, I guess it's that idea of the Black Atlantic kind of expression, you know, that it's like, although, you know, these disparate communities that are like very separate in ways, but like, they're also these commonalities, there are these themes, these roots that are shared and then there are sounds that kind of travel around and kind of metamorphose and I love that, I guess, that's what I love. That's what kind of inspires me in music and gets me excited is when you start to hear these connections and parallels through sound,

CC 51:57

I think because it's like, especially with black music in general, it's always about the experience and then bringing that experience to a conversation. And literally, I feel like the Black Atlantic exchange experience, it literally is like, you literally find elements that are easily relatable to feel like that we are almost like united as one in the community. And that really, I feel like that's the biggest connection I have, personally in terms of like my work in my practice. I felt like if I could do it like in an autobiographical sense of where I come from, and where I grew up, it's easy to communicate and find people who relate and feels like almost, especially for black people, like safe and secure in that process so, oh gosh... [laughter]

Zakia 53:02

Have you got another track that you want to play?

CC 53:04

Oh, yeah, I guess in terms of the mix and everything, I think the songs I've chosen were like stuff that was just always been stuck in my head. And I'm still stuck in like that 70s realm now so like I guess I'll play like Come to My World by Michael Wycoff, I think it was made in 1980 and I feel like it is the closest thing to, like easily, self expression in that it was just willing to just give just positive light as much as possible, so I'll have a little play with it...

MUSIC 54:14

[Michael Wycoff, Come to My World]

Zakia 55:08

...very different to the Dizzee Rascal, [laughter], just hearing it is so kind of, it's just so hopeful and I guess so much of the music from that era is, it's like hopeful, it's kind of also about escapism isn't it? It's like about going onto the dance floor and like, escaping the difficulties of the world. Whereas I guess like, the Dizzee Rascal is kind of like an expression of like, all that's wrong, like and all the difficulty of being like a young black guy, you know, living in Bow at that time. It's in the music. It's not like, let's go and dream a new world. It's like, this is the world and it's harsh, you know, it's a very different thing...

CC 56:49

It's unique forms of releases. And I feel like, what's interesting, especially in these times, now, a lot of people especially this current generation, are looking back to artists that kind of give that sense of release and care, in terms of like how they're feeling in their souls and their bodies, like how they feel and like in their opinions and communities, it's almost that straightforward confidence that they all have kind of together. So it feels like it almost doesn't matter what decade. I feel like now personally, for me, I'm stuck in the 70s in terms of like the albums and the music, because I feel like that was definitely the decade that I see the most release, that I feel like I wanted to convey in terms of like, my personal message in how I wanted to share it with people and express in a way. But it feels like, I would take an example of my cousin who is all about like the 90s and listens to the rappers of the 90s and it was like, that's her attitude and energy that she gives out as well. So yeah, do you feel like Dizzee Rascal kind of gave you that sense of form of release? Or was there any kind of particular songs that you feel that you really... This is definitely, 'Come to My World' is like the song I will not stop dancing on the street to, regardless. Like because it gives out so much in my soul and my system that if it's held in my body I wouldn't feel well.

Zakia 58:37

Yeah, it's like you gotta, it would be like against the body not to move to it. Yeah, I mean, like, I wouldn't say like, these days, I was just thinking about like, I was thinking about selecting tunes that somehow tell a bit more of like, my story in terms of like, you know, what it is to be black and British and the influences. Like the Dizzee Rascal is a particular, isn't it, like that grime, it's very harsh, it's quite masculine as well, in ways, it's quite like aggressive. And so it has its place you know, it's like a venting of frustration. Like maybe if I'm, like walking down the street and I'm like, in a bit of a bad mood and I just want to like stomp, stomp down the road, I'd listen to that. But I think more in general I'm probably more like you, I go for the slightly more like expansive, more like kind of healing, like hopeful, utopian tunes, I think, you know. Probably my kind of dance selections wouldn't be dissimilar to yours. But every now and then I feel like we need to kind of like embody that kind of darkness, that harshness, I think at times. But it goes back to I mean, you know, I wanted to ask you a bit about performance and just thinking about, you know, these kind of musical icons, the figures that we have that represent different aspects, almost like different archetypes, and that we reach for them at different times. So you know, as I say I might reach for the Dizzee Rascal when I'm like, in a bit of a gnarly, kind of like, just stomp down the road mood. But then if I'm in a kind of like, you know utopian mood I might listen to Minnie Riperton, or something like that. And but like these people, these figures, these artists they kind of are, like the jester, almost like, you know, some of them, in a pack of cards, like the Tarot, almost become these representatives of different parts of us. But that can also be a burden. I mean, is that something that you think of as a performer, like, you know, who are you representing? What kind of part are you playing, and how that's going to kind of tie in with your audience?

CC 1:00:48

I think it's like, I value the energy of the people that I listen to, and the way that they kind of apply the music into their performances. I think the music that I've been sharing recently is like almost this kind of like positive hype, that kind of makes the motivation of feeling of wanting to dance kind of consistently. And with that feeling, it was, oh, I felt like it was very precious, especially for me as like a black woman in the way of performance because I know, I can respond to it easily. Because it was meant for, like, these kind of rhythms and movements, that were almost kind of specific. But I think it was also a way of feeling guarded, especially if you look at it from like, the white gaze that looks at the black, the black female gaze that goes out to the like, almost a white audience sometimes, especially in a predominantly white area. Me being in Glasgow, it felt like, you know, how like, if you like are in a

different country, you know, how like, say, artists like Hazel Scott and like Dinah Washington, like these artists would kind of go to Europe and they're almost kind of exoticised, it's like being Josephine Baker, like being the black performers surrounded by the white audience. In terms of kind of giving it out. I always, I felt like that kind of mentality when giving it in performance. So it's like using that music to represent like, you know, where you came from. But then not to feel like you're being configured in a way of like, expressing that you're like, almost a prize item, in a way towards people. So because like, you definitely are coming over there to like, just feeling like you just love performing and giving that sense. But there is that still almost racial barrier of the way that you feel inside, in terms of kind of response with it, if that makes sense?

Zakia 1:03:17

No, totally, totally makes sense. Because you're so much more visible. And then there's this kind of, I guess, in the history of black music, you know, there is this relationship of extraction, there's another form of extraction that goes on, isn't there, when you think about like, black artists who almost like, their work, their value, their love, their spirit, their inspiration, their creativity has sort of been harvested by the white gaze by, you know, by kind of white industries, and then taken and then you know, the value there, there's no kind of, nothing is replenished, or it's finished elsewhere. I did a podcast with a dancer called Okwui Okpokwasili, I don't know if you've heard of her, I'm not sure where she's based. But she was talking about this because she does a lot of dance performance and in one of her performances she just kind of shakes on stage for like 30 minutes and it's kind of about the kind of the exploitation of the black body, but but even for her to perform that is kind of also a reenactment of that, what you're saying, because often the spaces that you enter into as a black performer particularly in the kind of art world I imagine now, you know, there is that kind of divide and there is that, you know how to protect yourself going into those spaces so that you're giving but you're not giving so much that you are depleted. You know,

CC 1:04:53

I feel like with the music that I consistently listen to and surrounded by, it feels like as if it's like an orb, that is kind of protecting me and my energy. Because it's like the easiest kind of way of just responding to, and express with, it feels like it's sometimes music I can't really kind of share and understand with people because it really kind of almost drains and trains you when it feels like it's being almost like out, like coming out. No Yeah, I think the performance comedown is like probably the worst, the best and worst feelings in that you can hold in. So I feel like every time that I held a performance, that really, that I was kind of coming out, not in the best feeling in the best way. It felt like it was more for them and not for me, in the space. The way the music that I chose or the topics that I wanted to share, it was, yeah, things were depleted very much more quickly than the moments the performances that I knew that were that like I just couldn't stop smiling because it just felt like it was a different kind of release that was like almost feeling like it was surrounding me and like giving an aura. So like, so it was like an aura that was like almost surrounding myself instead of like almost the energy literally just almost giving out to someone else. And they collect it, instead of letting it free

Zakia 1:06:49

or sending it back to you. And I guess that's, you know, applause is that, you know, applause on people like screaming, like hey, you know, even as a DJ like or whatever, when people, when there's that release, that's when it's kind of like sent back, you know, sometimes, but it's like, I guess that's this kind of reciprocal thing that happens in performance. And I chose a couple of songs, we don't have to hear both of them. But I chose, just thinking about this, you know, I guess like black performers, also like the

black female body in relation to performance, like there are two people that came to mind. And one of them was Nina Simone. And the other one was a British artist called Poly Styrene. And there's a really amazing film about her that's just come out called 'I am a Cliché'. And she was half British half Somalian. And she was part of a kind of British punk group called X Ray Spex. And this film that's just come out is about her, you know, grappling with being, because, you know, she grew up in a time where there were really not many mixed race people in Britain. And where there were definitely not many, in the punk movement, she was definitely one of the only non white women, POC women, like in that scene, and but like, part of the drain and exhaustion of that and constantly having to defend her identity and constantly being in these spaces where she's the only one and you know, she ended up having a mental breakdown because of it. And I wanted to play this one song which is called Dreaming which was like the song that she wrote an album that she came out with basically after she'd had this breakdown, she made this album which was kind of just like a lot softer from all of her stuff before, all of her lyrics were kind of about identity and the bondage and oppression and it was like, you know, giving so much like standing up fighting, fighting, fighting. And this song is just like an expression of you know her after that when she's kind of in like a slightly different phase, broken down, but then there's a kind of softness, and I guess it's just her story, I think is a story that you hear over and over again, whether it's Nina Simone or Billie Holiday or you know, there's so many who have given so much and kind of almost pay the price for it. I think she just represents that.

MUSIC 1:09:22

[Poly Styrene, Dreaming]

MUSIC 1:09:22

[Nina Simone, Compensation]

CC 1:14:43

It's funny the having on Nina Simone now because the second half of the title of my show is 'it's just a feeling' and it's responded to, have you seen the documentary that she kind of presented, it was highlighted in the clip of the interviewer asking Nina Simone, like, what it means to be free. Or what like, what it's like, or asks about fear. And she talks about how she, as a performer almost wants to shake, shake up the audience, and like, give... and she's was like 'everybody's half dead. Everybody avoids everybody'. And then, 'everyone tries to avoid everybody, and I'm one of those everybodys', but like, instead of a performance, she's just like, I just want to kind of shake people up. And it's like, what does freedom mean to me, and freedom means to me, no fear, no fear in her life at all. And she's like, freedom is just the feeling. And it feels like that kind of search, where you feel that you're almost free and almost letting go. It feels like one of the biggest values I apply in my own work and actions as an artist as a performer just as a black body, to not be, like, compromised from, like, the society that is structured today. So

Zakia 1:16:50

yes, it's, um, it's a quest. [laughter] To be free. I mean, it's particularly, you know, as you say, as a black woman in the world that we live in today. There are so many constraints, labels, expectations, projections, you know, that come from outside, let alone what we have to kind of grapple with internally as well. But it's, you know, I guess it's worth fighting for freedom. And I imagine, you know, I've not sort of performed in that way. But I know a great performance movement artist, called Elaine Mitchener. She's based in London, she does a lot of kind of experimental work from like the Fluxus movement, but also she's a real big fan of of Abbey Lincoln. And Jeanne Lee, and the way that they use their voice,

because she does movement, and she's also a singer. And she talks about them being inspirations, because they just turned upside down all the expectations, conventions of what a kind of, you know, like a female jazz singer should sing, like, you know, and I find her very inspiring, because she just, she'll make these strange noises, and she'll move her body in these strange ways that are just kind of not what we are expected to do as women. And the bravery it takes to get up on stage in front of these audiences and kind of completely turn that on the head. But it's, you know, she talks about it as a fight. It's something you have to fight to get to that free space, but when you can get to that space in front of an audience, it's like incredibly liberating, she says, and, you know, it sounds like that is something that goes beyond the performance, you know, being able to do that.

CC 1:19:04

No, yeah, it's courage, you're really just almost building like almost a tree inside your soul that's really aching to kind of come out. And then it feels like, I wouldn't say it sounds like it was about to say saved, but like, it feels like yeah, it's saved. You feel like you're saved for yourself. I feel like that performance is like, the way of being found again, in terms of, it almost feels like a baptismal moment, because you're really just trying to give yourself to the world, like give God praise and give God the glory that He deserves. But yeah, just as an independent black woman in what we all have been through, it's like it's our saving grace as performers to kind of give, to have that space. Yeah. Oh god, like I don't know where to end after that, like it just feels so like I'm getting a little emotional because... [laughter]

Zakia 1:20:29

It's that Nina song isn't it?

CC 1:20:31

It's hard

Zakia 1:20:33

but also the lyrics that I always find quite like they're a bit of a riddle almost. But um, yeah, I mean, maybe we could just end on but no, there's one song that you'd like to play

CC 1:20:50

Hmm, I like the last view I have here, it's just like my childhood idol Janet Jackson.

Zakia 1:20:58

Maybe that's what we should end?

CC 1:21:00

No and like, go on an escapade. I would say that is the most positive song that I have every year, so like, and just frolic into the sun. [laughter]

Zakia 1:21:16

Yeah, exactly. Well, I think it's like you know, on this quest, like on this journey, on this search for freedom, it's like you need, I guess this is the beauty of music and you know what I always try to do and I'm putting, you know shows together if I'm doing a radio show or you know, it's like you need those songs that you can, the tear jerkers because you need the kind of deep soul searching song. And then you need the kind of you know, like 'I'm angry at the world and I just need to express it' song and then you need your kind of like you know, fun flippant and then you need your... you need a kind of

constellation, or for me anyway, I like to just have this kind of constellation of different sounds and people that I can draw on for different moods so that kind of like you know, you need the kind of blend of them all, I guess.

CC 1:22:07

You know, the body you know, your music that your soul responds to and then that is kind of like the playlist, it's almost like your soundtrack of your life that you're almost collecting, every vinyl that people collect I think every song that you add to a playlist, it's like almost the journey of like your personal soul and mentality that helps you carry through, and I feel like without that it's like you make it, that's how music was always formed. Yeah, but let's outro with escapade with Janet Jackson

Zakia 1:22:52

Lovely to talk to you

CC 1:22:53

And to you as well! Thank you so much for all of it?

MUSIC 1:24:56

[Janet Jackson, Escapade]