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CRIPtic Arts Podcast, Episode One - Jamie Hale

Hello, and welcome to the first in a series of CRIPtic Arts Podcasts where we get to meet the creatives behind the 2021 CRIPtic Arts Showcase, and Pit Party, it's gonna be called, being held at the Barbican Pit Theatre on November the 19th and 20th this year. I'm Mik Scarlet and I'm very privileged to be the producer on this amazing event. For the first show, we obviously had to meet the brains, the heart, and the soul behind the entire CRIPtic Arts Project, the one and only Jamie Hale. So, thanks for coming on, Jamie.

Thank you for having me, Mik. (Mik laughing) I would never miss an opportunity to talk about CRIPtic, quite frankly.

Excellent, excellent. Now, obviously in our industry, we tend to be asked, "Oh, could you give us a one line bio?" And because we're so professional at that, I'm gonna make it a feature of the podcast. So I'm gonna get each of the artists to give me their one line bio as an introduction to who they are. So, could you give me yours?

I am both a creator and a creative. I focus on my own creative work, whether that's through poetry, writing for stage, monologue, essays, television, or whether it's through kind of, the work involved in supporting other people to create, so CRIPtic and the artist development program, mentoring, workshops. And then outside of that, I am what one calls either multidisciplinary or indecisive. (Mik laughs)

I was going to say it, but it's definitely harder for you than, I think, for most of the other artists, because you are a bit of a poly bag. (Mik laughs)

Jack of all trades, I think.

Yes, I see. The longer you have a career in the arts, the more you become a Jack of all trades, because it's the only way to make a living really isn't it? So before I venture off into the world of asking about CRIPtic, I wanted to ask what made you want to be an artist and a creative?

I think everyone is creative and I don't necessarily know what one means when one says artists, because to me, art is something that isn't, and shouldn't be, reserved for a group of people that are called artists unlike the rest of the population. And I think honestly, it's a privilege to be in a position where I can spend a lot of my working time on creating art. Why did I want to do this? I'd always written and enjoyed writing poetry, but I'd never really thought about a career in poetry. And honestly, I hadn't really thought about a career because for many years, post graduation, I was too old to work, but I was given the opportunity to read a couple of poems, on stage, in the Pit at the Barbican, as it happens, at an event curated by CN Lester and I really enjoyed myself. So I was invited back to do a full set the next year. And by that point, I'd started to pull together the bones of a kind of series of poems around my experiences of mortality. So I was talking to producers at the Barbican and they said, well, why not apply for a residency here to develop it? So I did my R&D residency at the Barbican developing my show, which was called Not Dying, and then suggested to them that rather, like, the trans showcase I've been in, why not curate one made up of deaf and disabled artists? And these conversations were

happening back in 2018. And they said, well, that sounds like a great idea, make your solo show part of it. So I went on to do that.

I applied to the arts council for funding. I pulled together a creative team and we put on the first CRIPtic Pit Party, 2019. And by that point I'd also had, by sheer chance, some work in writing for television and had ended up in a position where I was able to come off unemployment benefits and work. And of course that ties you to keeping on finding work because you don't have that security. But I was so pleased to be in a situation where I had the care package and the support where I was privileged enough to be able to focus on this work with income from kind of part time jobs that made it possible that I just sort of became an artist. I, or rather, I just sort of became somebody who is able to make art as a core part of their employment, because I critique the idea of artists. And honestly, it's that being self employed is a far more accessible career.

[Mik] Mhm. Yeah.

I set up, I set up CRIPtic arts. I'm the artistic director. If I want to have all of my meetings in bed, who's going to tell me I can't, like, (Mik laughs) I wouldn't be able to do that in a lot of office jobs. I set my own hours. I work when I want, I don't work when I can't. You've all had the email saying "Dreadfully sorry, in the hospital, sepsis, will reply in a few hours". And it's just a world that I built so I can move in it.

It's funny how it is the way that I think many disabled people discover this type of life is that it is one where you can be flexible and still create your work. You know, that, and actually almost becomes part of your work. Doesn't it? I know that with you, a lot of your work is about your own lived experience and it challenges what people think. And I think that's really important. So you've answered nearly all of my questions in that one question, which I love, but so what I'm going to do now is, I'm afraid, go a bit free fall. So when you start making a piece, where do you start with that? How do you go about creating your performances?

When we talk about my performances, I've only really done my solo show, Not Dying and smaller poetry sets, and generally emerges from a word, a fragment, a line, something that kind of catches my eye and I wrote it down and it grows into a poem. And then from that is a direction. So the work that became Not Dying, some of it I did during my degree, some of it I wrote specifically for the show, but I was able to see in my body of work and sort of through line that allowed me to create something that explored that.

Whereas with my poetry pamphlet, Shield, which was published in January, 2020 and written in March and April, 2019, about the early days of the pandemic, about being warned by my doctor, that I would not be a high priority for intensive care treatment that I wrote in about three weeks. It was, it was fire. It was fury. It was, it was everything that I felt, but I also feel to some extent that creating work about one's lived experience is also quite self limiting. And I think as a marginalised artist, it's easy to be pushed into a creative space in which you are considered an expert by experience on your own work, but where there's no universality. And in many ways, disability is such a universal theme because so much of my work explores the medicalised body, the frail body facing mortality. And I think that people face those themes. And that's why it doesn't necessarily break through into the mainstream. Because as a disabled person, you often become the kind of spectre of the future for people in the future that they're afraid of. But I'm also, I just want to write about other things.

I've got a big writing project at the moment that may not, that has some disability work within it, but very little. I've done some author and legend work, which doesn't particularly relate to disability. I was given some very good advice by Daljit Nagra about, I suppose, having permission. He, he's a fellow poet. I think he was our chair of the Royal Society of Literature. We did a project called Rush Across London where, is that how I worked with them? Yeah. Where he said, you know, you thought that I could move beyond that. I had permission to write about other things. And that's what I'm trying to explore now, how these themes can be brought into work that doesn't have to just be, this is my life as a disabled person. And that really fed into the work I chose for CRIPtic cause choosing work is another kind of creating art because it's pulling together these themes and these narratives. And I really wanted people that were bold and exciting and doing things differently that were working from Lyft experience, that weren't limited to only being able to talk about the personal.

I tried so hard in Not Dying, not to create a show that was about trauma and tragedy, and then ultimately overcoming that. And I think to some extent I failed in that goal. I think there's the, there

were audience members who went away thinking, oh, you know, poor Jamie, they went through so much and look at them living so well in the face of it. (Mik chuckles) And that was kind of the opposite of what I was going for. I wanted to shove their complicity in all of the barriers into their faces, not have them be inspired. So I wanted to really work this year at not having work that fitted into that or jumped into that inspirational box. I wanted artists whose work escaped outside that, forcefully.

Yeah. I definitely think you've achieved that the, the pieces that you're putting Dino they've curated, it's a journey. We'll ask a bit more about that in a minute, but it is going to be a great show. And it is funny as well. I remember when I was a 20 something musician disabled, obviously, but I tried to sing songs about love and flowers and you know, all the things everybody else experienced just by experience too, and found that many people in the music industry couldn't believe that someone disabled wouldn't want to write about being disabled all the while. I think I had one A&R man go "Don't you have a song about, yeah, yeah, it's not fair, I'm in this chair"? (Mik laughs) And it was like, no, no, that's not what we're about. And that's the driving force behind CRIPtic, isn't it? Is that this idea of our lived experience can be more than just this inspirational tragedy.

Yeah, I suppose it is. I think there is so much tokenism in the arts in general. And I think while I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have been able to get to the Barbican the usual way by performing on ever bigger stages, and making a name for myself because that route just isn't accessible. And instead I was incredibly lucky to have had the support of CN Lester. I had the support of the producers at the Barbican and to be able to kind of break onto the stage there without doing the preliminary work. And it's that preliminary work that cuts out so many incredible deaf and disabled artists.

[Mik] Yes.

And I guess for me, my passion with CRIPtic is particularly to capture not just deaf and disabled creatives, but deaf and disabled creatives whose accessed needs just wouldn't have been met under any other circumstances who wouldn't be able to do that slowly stepping up and who really need the space. What I'm wanting to do is open doors for people and give them opportunities that they could use to change their career and lives in the same way that my initial work at the Barbican and just going from leading a couple of poems changed mine.

So how are things shaping up for this years showcase?

Excellently, honestly. We've got an incredibly talented creative lineup. I am blown away by everyone's performances and they're all so bold and vital and different. And as a director, I suppose my responsibility now is to collect all of them and bring them in together into something that's more cohesive, more gathered. And that's a great position to be in because there's so many wonderful through lines.

So, with the showcase nearly upon us and everything coming together quite nicely, what would you say? And the tickets are nearly on sale. They aren't, in fact, they all are on sale now, if I remember rightly. I'm going to ask the, nearly the last question, there, Jamie. What can the audience expect from the 2021 showcase? What, what can they look forward to as the lights come down?

The lineup is so incredibly varied in art form, in mood, in style. And I want the audience, I want the audience to feel like they've been invited into a space, but expected to listen. And the work itself is going to be anything from slightly uncomfortable or unnerving into loud and joyful and celebratory. We've got such an incredible range of pieces and moods and artists. And there's a sort of narrative through line in it all about staking one's place in the world and telling the story that you want to tell rather than the story that you're expected to tell. And that's what I want the audience to hear the stories that these incredible deaf and disabled artists want to tell, rather than the stories about disability the audiences are asking for.

It's going to be joyous. I know that, I, I've seen the, one of the sharings where we were looking at the very early works and they were wonderful so you can't wait. I'm really looking forward to it.

It's going to be a show not to miss. Now before we go, I want to just say, what are you working on for yourself after the showcase?

Going to divide this question in two, because part of what I'm working on is CRIPtic. And I want to partially establish a kind of range of artistic commissions where we're bringing together great artists and really finding work for deaf and disabled people in all sorts of spaces. I want to do some sort of professional development to the organisation. I want to find a way of running an ongoing program so that CRIPtic just becomes this hub where things are happening. And I want just to move into more and more of the kind of training and development work for other organisations that so many people involved in CRIPtic have so much experience with and that I really want to bring together. And for myself, I just turned 30 last month and I'm going to make this my decade.

[Mik] Yeah.

My twenties were not easy between kind of eldest progression and other health challenges. I spent years unable to do much at all. And if you'd asked me whether I would ever enter the world of work, I would have looked at you and just said no, because it felt so unfeasible. And so then they were about stabilising and getting health stuff to a point where it wasn't, I wasn't in that place anymore. And it was then finding work and doing work. And for me, in my thirties, I am branching out and I'm focusing on my creative work. I love my charity and policy work. I'm not dropping that, but my creative work is the only work that only I can do. And so whether it's some exciting and sadly still secret poetry and television projects, or whether it's all of the work behind that, about learning a discipline, self, and community care that doesn't allow me to fall into a place of not creating. But it does allow me to extend compassion to myself when I'm struggling.

[Mik] Yes.

And maybe learning to say no a bit more, because that's not one of my strong points.

No, no, no. Working with you, I have learned that. (Mik laughs)

Would you like more work, Jamie? Why not?

It's not even that, you go seeking it. It doesn't, it comes with a lens.

[Jamie] I know.

And then when you are swamped, you go, I know, I think I'll go and look for some more.

Well, my partner says I have two hobbies. One is complaining about having too much work and the other is going out and finding work. (Mik laughs)

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Jamie. There's going to be a series of these podcasts, where I get to meet all the wonderful artists that you're working with and that we're working with, but I'm nowhere near as involved and it's going to be one to watch. So stay tuned for more and don't forget, the tickets are on sale now. If you go to the Barbican website and search for Pit Party, you will find it and they are available now. So with that, I'll say goodbye to Jamie. And goodbye to you all and see you next time. And don't forget, get those tickets. They'll be selling out soon.

Thank you so much, Mik. Lovely to talk to you as ever and have a wonderful rest of your day. Thanks.



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