



CRIPtic
2021

CRIPtic Arts Podcast, Episode Six Oli Isaac

Well hello everybody, and welcome to another of our wonderful CRIPtic Arts Podcasts, where you get to meet the wonderful, wonderful artists that will be working as part of our CRIPtic Arts Pit Party, this year at the Barbican Theatre. It's on on November the 19th and 20th, and it's also gonna be available online for about two weeks on the Barbican website. So if you can't get to London, you can still catch the show. Today, we are joined by the one, the only Oli Isaac! (cheers) Hello, Oli!

Hi, Mik. (Mik laughs)

Sorry, I do like doing my best Kermit the Frog. I don't know why, but it's just whenever I introduce everybody, I feel that it needs a bit of Kermit there.

[Oli] Mm hmm.

So, what I'm gonna ask you to do first is to introduce yourself to our wonderful CRIPtic Arts audience. Tell us a bit about yourself, your artistic sort of practice, and anything else that you feel is important so that people know you well. (laughs)

Thank you for a glorious introduction, Mik. (Mik laughs) I am Oli Isaac. I like to call myself an artist, who works across poetry and film and theater. I always like to say multi disciplinary, 'cause funding applications like that a lot. But yeah, I think, I've never been formally trained in the arts or anything, and it's just been learning by doing, and there's been a lot of doing and a lot of mistakes along the way, but hopefully I've learned a lot. And things that I'm interested in, which will sort of play into my piece for CRIPtic, is exploring the failures of language, and stuff around, like, because I had speech therapy growing up, and have and used to have, and still have a speech impediment. I'm dealing with that. That sort of, like, plays in a lot with my work, yeah.

Now I've got to ask, what was it that made you think, "Ah, CRIPtic. I must apply for that." What was it that drew you to us?

Well, I've known of Jamie's work for a while, and I saw them when they did Transpose at the Barbican a few years ago, how every many years ago that was, I don't know. And so, I've kept up to date with their work, and seeing that they were putting on something in the same vein as Transpose, but around disability, I thought was really interesting. I got sent the information from a friend who said, "This might be something you're interested in." And I thought, why not? I had a kernel of an idea that I'd kind of explored a little bit in poetry but not really on stage before. I thought, I think there's like a really fun, interesting way to talk around, like, speech therapy and a stutter on stage. That could be really interesting for audiences, so let's just see how it goes. I didn't expect to actually to make it through honestly, but yeah. Yeah, it was just like I threw it at the wall, and now I'm here.

Yes, right. I must admit your piece scored very highly on the scoring. So we are very interested to see it, and it was well worth it. And as we said, that was only the sharing. You know, there's all stuff that's happened since. So, I can't wait for the big night. I can't wait for the rehearsals, but for the big nights, it's gonna be great. So what is your piece for CRIPtic about? Tell us about it.

So my piece for CRIPtic is a piece. So, it is a performance around looking at my speech therapy exercises I had to do growing up but in, I think, an interesting and comedic and absurdist way. It involves a lot of movement and clowning, and being silly on stage. Also, there's a lot of projection and stuff with (indistinct). You'll see that when he comes. But, it's just about me. It's been like 10 years or so since my last speech therapy thing. So I was looking back on it and thinking back on it earlier this year, and just looking at it from my vantage point now, and some of the exercises themselves were quite absurd from the outside eye. And looking back at it, I felt it was this really interesting, something that really lent itself to performance, such as, there's exercises I had to do

around facial warmups. I had to do self tapes, sort of thing, like auditioning. But I would perform in front, or like read something on a camera and then watch it back. So it was like, I was always a performer. And it always felt like something that was quite performance heavy, and something that I was surprised hadn't been explored on stage before, or maybe it has, but I haven't seen it, so.

So, there's more to you than just obviously CRIPTic. So tell us a little bit about your Clumsy Bodies. What is it?

So Clumsy Bodies is a artistic duo that I am a co lead artist with my partner, Jess. So, we're both trans and we sort of talk about how we can reclaim narrative, but sort of like, talk about things in the trans community, but sort of like I'm doing with CRIPTic and speech therapy, but in a new way, a new frame. So for example, something that we're working on at the moment is called Clumsy Body Doubles, which we're sort of developing at the moment. So obviously, Clumsy Bodies, Clumsy Body Doubles, and it's about us. Well, it's a real life thing, but we were once told, but we then take it into a fictional sense. But we were once told that they liked our autobiographical stories about being trans on stage, but not necessarily us as the performers of them. So it's us, then, recruiting our cis doppelgängers, (Mik laughs) who then perform our shows for us. But then, they start to take over our lives. So, it's a comedy horror around that that we're developing at the moment. And it's a sort of, just looking at things in new ways. We're also developing a residency with (indistinct) around like, similar to Clumsy Body Doubles, around getting a summer camp sleepover residency, or like making up a residency, like summer camp vibe, but, like, in a building probably, where we have tents and stuff and it's just about talking about the relationship between horror movies and the trans community and stuff. And how sort of talking about how something that often quite in the past is demonised (Mik vocalises) in the trans community, in terms of being like, often, the villain, or the (indistinct) in it, but how it can be something that can be like a place of creativity for us now, and play around with it, and find new ways of talking about trans stuff basically, but yeah.

So what is it that inspires your work?

Well, a lot of stuff inspires me. Currently, I'm doing a lot around like, how to make stuff that feels personal but isn't directly me, which is something that I'm negotiating around. Like, for example, when it comes to Body Doubles, it's how we play ourselves on stage but they're like characters of us, basically. Basically, it's about someone taking control of our lives, so that's a whole 'nother thing. And then, also with the CRIPTic performance, it's like how I talk about something that's quite autobiographical, but in a way that is distanced enough so that there's a sense of safety in exploring it. And, I just like talking. With my poetry, it's often just about like how to talk about things that you can't talk about in any other art form. Poetry was my first sort of artistic love in a way because well, one, my speech therapy. The therapist told me to memorise poetry and recite them in the mirror because the rhythm and pace of it would activate the singing kind of brain, which is where you don't necessarily stutter. So, I would have to talk in a way that was quite rhythmic. I would often see me get made fun of in school, but you know. So I've had an interest in poetry for a long time, and I feel like the way it fragments and sort of doesn't line up as much was something that interested me a lot in how it mirrored some of this, like, not being able to get words out of my brain. So, a lot of things inspire me, and whether it's just from my own personal experience, or just generally around looking at issues that have been talked about a lot, but trying to find new ways of discussing them, this sort of, like, my modus operandi. And yeah, and that's kind of it. (laughs)

I must admit, having seen the piece in its early stages, that, you have succeeded in. (both laugh) And I'm asking, I'm addicted. I wanna see more, and you've now gained a fan here. And trust me, you wonderful CRIPTic people, there's more, so go see it. So what I am interested in, what sort of barriers have you faced? 'Cause obviously, the point of CRIPTic is to assist people that faced barriers getting into the arts and furthering their careers. So what barriers have you faced, and sort of, how have you overcome them or have you overcome them? (laughs)

Barriers wise, I feel like, well, a lot of it was the values embedded in some of the earlier speech therapies that I had, in terms of, basically the way you speak isn't the right way to speak. And therefore, you need to speak the right way to speak in order to get where you are. I remember the first time I went to speech therapy, Gav Gates was around.

[Mik] Yep.

And, I remember he was on the cover of a paper when I went there, and he was just like, in order to become something, you need to excel in something where you don't stutter, basically. Yeah.

And I couldn't sing, so that was never a plan for me. So, I feel like I've come to arts very belatedly, in terms of, I never really did it. Well, for example, in school, you know, when I had to be forced into theatre stuff in school, it was always being the comedic old person or playing the random person 'cause I would then use a different voice, which would mean I didn't stutter. So, it was a lot of avoidance strategies around it. And it wasn't until my early twenties that I began to accept stuff around my speech, and sort of not fight it as much, or avoid it as much. So that in itself, in terms of an internal battle, that conflict sort of, like, opened up a lot in my eyes in terms of barriers because I've not been formally trained or whatever. I've had to just apply to countless things and see what happens. And, something like this, I can't imagine. Yeah, I don't know. Being able to explore this on stage, is something that feels very, like, I can't imagine doing it before this opportunity came up. It would have just sat in the back of my head, I think, and gathered dust. And yeah, I feel like also, it says, you know, typical, around trans stuff or around speech stuff. I guess there's still stuff around. Well, there is stuff around that. So it's just around how I've sort of plugged away, and sort of tried to curate a little supporting community, which is sort of what CRIPTic is in a nutshell as well, that sort of sees you, and can support you. And so, it's sort of just been me in the wild in London, just trying to get along with it and apply to as many things as I can, and yeah.

[Both] Yeah.

It's funny because one of the threads that's really coming out of all of these interviews is, you know, there's all the external barriers, but the really big one is the fact that so many disabled and deaf and neurodiverse people are kind of not told that they can do it. And it's whatever it is! (Oli hums) And so, you know, loads of people, and this was the same when I was at school, you know, and I'm ancient. So the idea that, you know, that generations of kids are being told, "That's not for you." is really sad because it's time that it is.

And I think that's one of the things I'm most proud about being involved with CRIPTic, is the fact that not only are we supporting you at the moment, but it's a family. Like you said, it's gonna grow all the people that did it before, our mentors, it's gonna grow and grow. And I can't wait to hopefully be part of that bit as well, but, you know, the job applications will be in. Anyway, (Oli laughs) well, we're coming to the end. So what I'm gonna get you to do, you've already, I think, sold it quite well but could you just say to the audience, what is your show? Do a kind of pocket pitch that will get them to go, "Well, I must buy tickets now. I've absolutely got to come see that." You know, not putting you on the spot or anything. (both laugh)

Well, I think you should all come and see the show because it is not, basically, what you'd think a performance would still typically be around a speech impediment. This is not it. It's talking about something that is quite serious, and could easily delve into quite sad stuff. But I feel like it talks about something quite serious, but in a way that is just like a good time as well. You'll see me struggling and sweating on stage, but, you know, we're always having a good time. And you'll get involved. You'll be cheering me along. (Mik laughs) And yeah, I think you should just come see it.

Thank you, Oli. That's fantastic. So don't forget, you can get your tickets online on the Barbican website. It's on the 19th and 20th of November. It will also be streamed, as well, on the Barbican website. So that's it, really, for another one of these wonderful chats with our wonderful CRIPTic artists. I'm Mik Scarlet and you've met the wonderful Oli Isaac. (both cheer) Thanks a lot, bye! (laughs)

The logo for CRIP TIC 2021 is centered in the bottom right of the page. It features the word "CRIP" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, followed by "TIC" in a smaller font size. Below "CRIP" is the year "2021". The text is contained within a white rectangular box with a thin black border. The background of the entire bottom section is black, decorated with numerous bright cyan lightning bolts of varying sizes and orientations, creating a dynamic and energetic visual effect.

CRIP TIC
2021