



CRIPtic
2021

CRIPtic Arts Podcast, Episode Nine Rylan Gleave

Yes, it's that time again. It's the CRIPtic Podcast, where I, Mik Scarlet, introduce you to some of the artists that are gonna be performing or creating wonderful work for the CRIPtic Pit Party that's gonna be at the Pit Theatre, at the Barbican here in London, on November the 19th and the 20th. I've said it so many times, and I still have to think about the date. But don't worry, it's also gonna be streamed live on the Barbican website and it will be there for about two weeks, I think. So you can catch it, even if you can't get to London. So today, we are joined by a musician, Rylan Gleave, who is up there in Glasgow, I believe. How are you? Hello, Rylan, hello.

Hi, Mik, how are you? I'm actually in Manchester at the moment.

[Mik] Ooh, are you in Manchester?

Yeah, typically.

Ah, you see, I read your bio and it said Glasgow. I thought, oh, well, you know, but no, you're in Manchester. (Rylan chuckling) And you're recuperating, aren't you at the moment, from surgery?

I am, yeah. In week two, no, week one? Early stages of like a six week recovery process.

Yeah, no, I was gonna say, week one, blimey. Thank you so much for doing this. That's still super ouchy. There am I, before we, you know, I was making poor Rylan laugh far too much, and it was getting a bit, I was a bit worried I might be killing one of our artists (Rylan laughing) before we get going. So now I know it's week one, I'll tone it down a bit.

Moderate it accordingly. (both laughing)

Probably won't, but there we go. So, what we do, everyone, is we ask them to introduce themselves to the wonderful CRIPtic audience. Tell us who they are, a little bit about what they do, and their creative practice. So introduce yourself, Rylan.

Hello, I'm Rylan Gleave, I'm a composer and vocalist. I'm currently based in Manchester, but normally now in Leith, just outside of Edinburgh, moved house not too long ago. I've re-emerged as a composer/performer in recent years after training as a contemporary classical composer at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. I originally trained as a mezzo soprano, which you probably heard from my speaking voice, isn't the case anymore. And when my voice finally dropped, and I came into my voice as a bass baritone. So that kind of extra confidence has come from that, has meant that my practice is now a lot more informed by my voice than it used to be.

Well that's fantastic. It's funny, I used to be, when I was a little kid, I used to sing in the choir. And of course, because everyone knows, if you're going to win loads of competitions, 'cause you'd do a school competition and you'd wheel out the sweet little disabled kid so... (Rylan laughs) (Mik singing in a falsetto) ♪ Walking in the air ♪ And then puberty kicked in and then I was banned from singing for about five years.

[Rylan] Couldn't do it anymore. That's a shame.

Well, cause it didn't just go (Mik singing in a baritone) ♪ Walking in the air ♪ (Rylan laughing) you know, it's bass, goth singing

There is no inspiration planning that, it's that low.

You know, when it's first kicking in when those hormones, so yes.

You're right, it's not linear, is it? It's very wonky.

You go to sing, something comes out and you go, that wasn't right. (Rylan singing poorly) (both laughing) Yeah, that didn't mean that at all. The joy of it all, hormones are such fun.

[Rylan] The little things. (Mik laughing)

So why, what was it that attracted you to the CRIPtic project? Why did you apply?

I'd actually been following Jamie Hail on Twitter for like, for a little bit prior and I kind of familiarise myself with their work and the kind of the human element of storytelling in their

performance, but also in their curation, I found fascinating and just really something that I wanted to be a part of.

So what was it that drew you to music? Was there a moment where you think, ah, music or has it always been there? I'm always interested in why someone wants to become a musician.

Great question. I'm not sure anyone does. I think it just happens. I think as a kid, like I also did a lot of choir, kind of chamber choir at primary school. And then I joined the Highlight Youth Choir as a kid. And I think, cause I had a really loud voice, that was kind of it. I could make myself very much known. It was a means of self expression that I didn't really feel like I could get in many other places. And as I spent more and more time being loud and being dramatic, I think that kind of merged its way into my writing as well. Yeah, a gradual thing, but it's very much underpinned by, I guess originally one thing to be the centre of attention and then switching to be a composer, and really not wanting to be the centre of attention. To hide behind the conductor and go, oh no, it's fine, you do it.

Yeah, so it's a bit of a switch isn't it. I want to be the, you know, I'll just compose, that's nice and [Rylan Laughing] away from it all. (both laughing)

But now the flip side of coming back to being a performer

[Mik] Yes.

and again, being at the centre, it's weird, it's different.

Wow, you know, artists,

[Rylan] We're fickle.

We're a multiple faceted creature, aren't we? How do you go about writing a piece? Where do you get your inspiration from?

Really great question. I think currently most of my writing comes from my own vocal improvisations, which means that lines can be, to put it bluntly, like really flawed, like really quite ugly. When like, when we're talking about hormones, when you're trying to access a specific part of your voice and the wrong sound is coming out, I find that can sometimes be a lot more interesting than the sound that I intended. So my writing can be quite micro tonal. It can be quite stuttering. It can be really rhythmically, atypical based on, you know, autistic speech patterns. So I guess it kind of draws on those things to influence it in some senses. Also I'm very moved by personal and political matters. I think there's some level of social change that we can bring as artists that I feel really strongly about.

So when you do that, how do you go from having this atonal thing to making it something more?

So I guess my kind of my day to day writing, if I was to sit down and illustrate it, would be like, I set up my home recording studio. It's like a little microphone, plugs into my laptop, and I make lots of weird noises into it for a few hours. And then I listened back to those weird noises and I look out for any patterns or things that are different or interesting. And I move those into, I'd love to say I sit and write them out by hand and I was really dedicated, but I have software that just does that for me. Like I just put it straight into the software and yeah, that can then be transposed for any instrument. I don't always keep them exactly the same. It's just, I guess, about generating that material and then I'm taking aspects of it that you like and building them for a specific performance.

It's funny because many, many years ago I used to have a little sequencer that had batteries in. And if you took the batteries out, it blanked all the memories.

[Rylan] Oh

and there was a mirror, a window, where if you put it in banking quickly enough, it randomised them. So you,

[Rylan] Oh, that cool.

so basically you'd put a load of sort of step sequences in, then you'd pull the battery, stick them straight back in. And they'd have completely ruined them, but there was something there and you'd spend all day just going, no, that's awful. No, that's awful. Ooh! Ooh, I like that. I mean, you rip that little bit out and put it somewhere else. And then you just do that. So it's very much that kind of working, so I can completely see how you do it. And it's a very interesting, it's very experimental, but you ended up with some great stuff. You didn't, it's almost like Bowie's cut up technique. It's sort of,

[Rylan] Yeah!

you know, that kind of accidental genius.

I was talking about that with my friend Maya, whose stage name is Mora the Moth. And the kind of concept of The Exquisite Cadaver, like that game that even kids have where you, like, you draw something and you cover up most of it and someone else finishes your drawing. So it could be

like half a horse and half a seal. But doing that musically, we thought it was like, cause it really, it's not new to music, Luke Cage did it, but a really interesting way of like generating material without necessarily committing to it. But yeah, letting it be free in its movement and kind of seeing where you end up with it.

So we know the process, we understand it. So what are you going to be creating for us for CRIPtic?

Yeah, so Rufus and I have been working on a piece that's viola, voice, and kind of found sound recordings. The vocal lines that I've been doing for that have been, again, coming back to hormones. Like, I finally grew a falsetto after years of not really having one or not a very distinct one. So that kind of starts off the piece with this very like soft, quite fragile sound alongside the viola. And yeah, it's quite static, I think. I think as a timbral exploration in a lot of ways, yeah.

It's funny 'cause Rufus described it and it was, it does sound very fascinating. So I am very much looking forward to hearing the finished piece and it's, it's gonna, you're not going to be performing, are you? It's going to sit as a kind of soundtrack to the whole performance really. It's going to be played before, played during any breaks. So it's sort of going to be there. It's going to wash over the audience, so I'm quite looking forward to that effect as well.

[Rylan] Yeah.

Are you planning that within it? You know, are you planning it to be that rather than have that kind of, Bah! (Rylan laughing) Is that kind of it, that it's gonna be created in that situation.

Yeah, I guess one of the really nice things about it is that you can kind of dip in and out of it. It's almost, I guess, timeless in the sense that it could have started or ended at any of those points. And I feel like that was quite an accessible thing to have to accompany anything really, but especially the kind of CRIPtic showcase, cause, yeah, it means that you don't necessarily have to be actively listening from the beginning. You can of kind of come to it on your own terms.

Brilliant, and what are your hopes for the future? What are you planning to do next? Cause you know, I'm quite intrigued about where we're all going. I did my interview for this earlier. And one of the reasons why I'm really passionate about this is I want to see where everyone goes and I've not asked anyone really, what are you doing afterwards, but I want to ask you. What's the next step along the way?

I guess the next pressing thing is I'll be going to Cromarty in the Highlands for a month long residency.

Oh, wow!

Yeah, so the Student Prize Residency that I was awarded with a fellow sound artist, Rory Green. We'll be spending a month up there, I guess kind of influenced by the environment and how that might feed into the music that we make. And kind of engaging with the community there, which I'm really looking forward to. And I'm working with the Royal Philharmonic Composers Society Program, which is very, very cool. Really, really happy to have been selected for that. Yeah, lots of little commissions. I'm working actually with Momenta Dance Company and Crossing Borders Music in Chicago. They're an integrated dance company. They do a lot of really cool wheelchair choreography. So I'm really excited to be working with them as well.

Cool. So I was gonna say what barriers have you faced in your career, but it seems to be going quite well. (both laughing) But have you, because I think anyone who is deaf, disabled, or neurodivergent, there is this, you know, there's more barriers to fight than most. And I wondered if you faced any.

Yeah, I would say a fair few. I think you're right. Currently I seem to have found a way that works for me, but obviously that's very different for everyone. I think, funnily enough, the biggest issue is that I come across very differently on emails than how I do it in person. And sometimes if someone sends me, like, a really formal email, I'll reply in a very formal manner and I'll be, you know, matching that. Then they'll send me a really casual email and I'm suddenly like, oh, oh, what's the dynamic of this relationship? And as soon as I'm like caught on the back foot, I can feel myself becoming more and more autistic in the situation. And I'm like, oh, okay, well, I guess we're best friends now. And I've got to say, hey and pal. And so yeah, a lot of like matching other people's social energy and that kind of, that networking aspect that isn't handed neatly to you, yeah, is problematic.

Do you know what, it's funny, cause I have similar issues with emails or at least I did at the start of my career, where people didn't get my tone. I'd write an email and in my head it went, hi, how are you doing? (Mik speaking gibberish) And then they'd come back, and say, there's no need to be so rude. I would be like, what?

[Rylan] Oh, no!

But then I'd read back. You don't need to be so aggressive. And I read back and I think, oh, I suppose if you read it in an angry voice, it sounded angry. Because I'm thinking in my head. (both laughing) I lost so much work from people going,

[Rylan] Oh, no!

there's no need to be so aggressive, Mik. And I'm like, what, oh, hang on. But I was thinking it, so yeah. So my wife actually made me put a lock on my email. So I couldn't decide to reread everything before I send it. I think it's weird, how it's those little barriers that do stop people getting on and it also knocks your confidence.

Yeah, oh, hugely, hugely.

It's funny that one of the big things that come up is the fact, this whole thing about core confidence and the idea that there isn't anyone like us. Big enough and well known enough to make other people think, well, I can do it. And it's been interesting all the way through that people are, you know, that they, when I was young, I had to endure it. So I mean, and that's scary to think that, you know, I was at school then and I'm now old enough to be most of the performer's granddad. So there should have been someone else. I mean, are you hoping that you will be the generation that changes that?

I mean, that'd be great, wouldn't it? I think I remember seeing Jamie tweeting that you were that person for them, you know? So I think that we do see people doing it, even if they're not, you know, you might not think you're as big as you would want to be. I think there is a lot more positive representation than there would have been when you were growing up, you know?

Oh, well, see, there you go, you see. Jamie's kept that quiet. I'll have to go through their timeline going, oh, there it is, ooh, hee hee hee hee. (both laughing) The scary thing is I'm in awe of them. Cause, you know,

[Rylan] Understandably.

One of those super talented people that just can do everything. And you're like, wow, polymath.

I think like that is such an imposter syndrome thing that comes with disability, isn't it? Like, I think all of us feel that to some extent.

Yeah. Anyway, we are coming to the end of all wonderful chat. So, how would you describe the piece that you're writing? So someone just went, that's it, I have to hear that piece of music, got to hear it. So I'm gonna, over to you to, to create the, almost the album sleeve, the sleeve notes for the release that makes people go, that I've got to hear.

It's weird, it's a weird piece of music. It's divergent. It doesn't sound like anything else really? You know, I think Rufus has done some fantastic things with the mix and the sound design on it. And I really, yeah, I really think it should be heard because it's totally singular.

There you go folks. So it's, we know from revisiting it, it's spooky and there's some weird bits and stuff, and I've forgotten, but there was different moods and you end up with pixies or something. And we now also know it's singular and weird and divergent. It sounds like it's going to be one of those pieces that challenges you, but at the same time you have to hear. So if you want to hear it, you know, you can come to the CRIPtic Pit Party. Tickets are available on the Barbican website. You can tune in to the video on the Barbican from the Saturday, that's the 20th, for two weeks. And then of course, I'm sure that it'll come out somewhere, you know, released on Bandcamp for a small fee, you know, all that kind of stuff. I've fallen in love with Bandcamp. So I'm getting everyone to use it. Anyway, and with that, I will say, it's been wonderful to meet you, Rylan. And good luck with everything you do. I can't wait to hear the piece of music and from that, it's bye from me, Mik Scarlet. Bye bye and

Bye, thank you.

See you soon. Bye bye, folks.

The image shows a black background with several bright yellow lightning bolts scattered across it. In the bottom right corner, there is a white rectangular box containing the text "CRIPtic" in a bold, sans-serif font, with "2021" in a smaller font below it.

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