**Hello, and welcome to Graeae and Disability Arts Online's podcast Disability And… Bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month Sandra Alland talks with Shafiq Ghafoor, Mattie Kennedy and Cate Lauder, about disability, the working class and LGBTQIA+.**

Sandra Alland:

Welcome to Disability And... I'm Sandra Alland Guest Editor at Disability Arts Online from 30th of March to 26th of April. I'm here today in a gloriously sunny Glasgow. [LAUGHTER] I just asked everybody about the weather before we started because when I wrote this, I thought "You never know, I can always hope." And this morning there was some sun. But anyway, we are not in a gloriously sunny Glasgow, but I am with gloriously sunny people. So I'm here with Shafiq Ghafoor, Mattie Kennedy, and Cate Lauder. We're in the lovely accessible buildings with genderless toilets at Rockvilla, National Theatre of Scotland next to the Glasgow Canal. And we're going to have a wee chat about things relevant to "Disability And... Working-class LGBTQIA+", so that's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual and related identities. And I also have to add in brackets "in Scotland". Because everyone here is from Scotland.

Sandra Alland:

So we'll chat about what it's like for some disabled artists in Scotland who are also queer and or trans, and also from working class, working poor or skint experiences, backgrounds and cultures. So I'm thrilled to bring you these three artists. First of all, we have Shafiq Ghafoor. And the bio says, "Shafiq Ghafoor does not do binaries. When asked about their race, sexuality, gender or class, they tend to respond with 'a bit of both'. They are fascinated by music, dance and physical activity. They dance with a couple of community groups and exercise with TransForMotion, an exercise group for trans and non-binary people."

Sandra Alland:

Cate Lauder has had an on-off career in theatre, film, and TV for over 27 years. She has qualifications in script writing for film and television, television production, and technical theatre. Cate is transgender, working class and bisexual, and has a stammer and depression. After recent sacrifices and changes, she hopes to reignite her passion for community arts work. Mattie Kennedy is an artist filmmaker and writer, living and working in Glasgow. They have so far made four short films, their most recent one being Enid and Valerie. Their films range from animation, to LGBTQIA+, to learning disability subjects. Hi, everyone, and welcome.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Hi.

Mattie Kennedy:

Hi.

Sandra Alland:

So, I want to talk with you a bit today about why you make art, what kinds of arts projects and communities you're into and want to have more of in the world, and what future we can dream together. So I'm going to start with a question for Shafiq.

Shafiq:

Ooooooo.

Sandra Alland:

I've known you to be a singer of traditional Scottish songs, a samba dancer, and also into fibre arts. What draws you to art right now and particularly community arts?

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Well, I've always been into art and music. It's less of a thing that I do as activity or actions, and more something I've realized is very important to maintaining a good quality of life. It's being a dancer. And dancing, singing, performing in front of groups of people gives me more energy than I put into it.

Sandra Alland:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shafiq Ghafoor:

I really, really love doing things where you wind up, you get something back from at the end. You get something from an audience, you get something from a random person walking down the street because I am practising my dance moves at the bus stop. [LAUGHTER] You wind up with something, a knitted garment or a skein of yarn at the end. It's doing something before you get something back at the end.

Sandra Alland:

That's beautiful. Cool. Can you tell me a little bit about how you got into Samba?

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Started with when I was doing activities with a group in Edinburgh called Beltane Fire Festival, which is a seasonal festival. And I realized after taking part in it several times that doing a seasonal event when you have seasonal depression was really exacerbating my mental health. So I wanted to do something where I got to do performance that was all year round. So I did a taster with The Samba School, started as a drummer. And then I did a taster with a dance teacher that we had come to one of our weekends away. And I realized then that I had to do this.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

It just made something change in my soul. And interesting, this was about four or five years before I transitioned. And starting to dance and do that made me realize that how much discomfort I had in my body, which itself led to a couple of incidences of dysphoria, which led me to realize that I needed to transition. Which yeah. It's... I know people who do things the other way around, they get into doing some kind of artistic or performance thing after transitioning, being that's of change in the person, in changing what kind of things you want to do. Whereas I, me being me, I do things backwards. But doing Samba has been really, really fascinating not just for me as a person who enjoys dancing and having the opportunity to flirt with random people, which I absolutely do. [LAUGHTER] But also Samba, coming from Brazil and of course, we're a diverse group group in Scotland. We have some contact and connection with groups in Brazil in Sao Paulo, in Recife.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

But getting the chance to learn the history, and hearing the different ways in which colonialism, imperialism and race have affected in a different country and a different space was really important for me coming to terms with myself as a person of colour living in Scotland. Where there are not very, there are many people of colour, but not always also queer and disabled and also Muslim. So yeah, come to terms with identities that are expected to be so disparate and disconnected. So Samba has changed my life, seriously.

Sandra Alland:

That's brilliant, thank you. Cate, you're passionate about theatre and film. And like Shafiq you're into community-focused arts. Can you tell us about some of your community work and your dreams? I mean, you were telling me a bit about work you did with LGBT Health. I don't know if that's something you want to talk about?

Cate Lauder:

Well, I started doing the voluntary post at LGBT Health after a period of being a carer for my mum as she was passing away. And also sortof comes back as I was starting my transition really. Because I worked in theatre, film and whatever else pretty much all my life really. But it was always on and off, on and off, on and off. It's still kind of the same now. And I just found that working on those events, it just made me feel like myself again after a period of not being me and having to sacrifice everything for other folk. And I just started to take my life back again for me, and also whilst doing that I was still helping other folk, which is a big part of me as well. But I found also with caring, that it takes a big toll on you. And I'm still trying to get my head around all that and...

Sandra Alland:

Yeah it's a lot, it's a lot. When we chatted last week, after that terrible film we will not mention.

Cate Lauder:

No.

Sandra Alland:

You talked about having some dreams of doing community arts and that sort of thing in your future. And is that something that is sort of taking form for you, or is it something that's sort of like still kind of ambig-...

Cate Lauder:

It's still very much a dream. I started off doing a work experience when I was 15 on a production, and I just fell in love with the whole thing then. And the more... I remember most of it. And the first day of it, I was very stressed out that day. That day was when I was holding up this flat and this carpenter attached it the floor to his drum, and suddenly I was like, "Yeah, this actually isn't that glamorous." It's just folk doing a job, it’s folk telling dirty jokes, it’s folk just trying to do their thing in a creative way.

Sandra Alland:

And you were saying to me that you would like to start some sort of company...

Cate Lauder:

Yeah.

Sandra Alland:

Where you could offer help to people starting out and things like that?

Cate Lauder:

Someday, yeah. Because I worked a lot with Pilton Video. I started out working on films with Pilton Video in Edinburgh. And before that I worked on community theatre events and stuff, so it was just a very easy transfer of skills. I just took to it like a duck to water really.

Sandra Alland:

That's brilliant. I think you'd be a great mentor. I think maybe a bit later, we can come back to maybe this idea of what our dream of a project in Scotland might be like for working-class queer and trans communities and skint people. What kind of space we'd like to see. And maybe dream big as well because I think, we talked about that too, we can kind of limit ourselves because we can feel kind of disheartened.

Shafiq Ghafoor:  
Yeah.

Cate Lauder:

Yeah. Pilton Video, to put it in context, was a community-based film production company that was based in West Pilton, a rough council estate in the North of Edinburgh. And they made documentaries, short films, the occasional feature film, and often filmed various events and all kinds of things. I just loved being there because it taught me a lot of things technically, and also personally as well. But it made me... it planted seeds. Because when I started out there, I had big dreams of obviously going to Hollywood, being a big writer and director. But then life got in the way and then I started thinking, "Well, even if I was that successful I would, you know me, I'd make sure I made enough cash and then just disappear back home and make things I’m actually interested in doing and seeing." And that also involves helping other folk put their things... So that's the dream, to set up a small theatre and film production company. Which would be, I would say I guess, a facility where I actually let folk do their own thing. Whether it's a film, a documentary, a stage play, a radio play. Whatever they want, and let them just have their say.

Sandra Alland:

Right, that's brilliant. I hope it happens, let's keep scheming. Mattie oh gosh, I think I last saw you in October. Is that true? That's terrible. I saw you when your short film Enid and Valerie was showing at the fab Oska Bright Learning Disabled Film Festival in Brighton as part of Matthew Hellett’s Queer Freedom Programme. For our listeners and readers, Mattie made Enid and Valerie with animator Vitoria Bastos, and it's this wonderful short film about a femme witch's tea party/incantation. [LAUGHTER] I hope that's an okay description. You can check it out online. And Mattie, I thought maybe you could talk a wee bit about Queer Freedom, and what it means to you to have a queer learning-disabled film community.

Mattie Kennedy:

All right, I'm just going to get stuck right in.

Sandra Alland:

All right, get stuck in. Oh, they're rolling up the sleeves.

Mattie Kennedy:

Right, well, I have to kind of go back a little bit to 2015. And also just a little sort of introduction to listeners to Oska Bright. Oska Bright is a film festival that started up in 2004. And it was started up by learning-disabled filmmakers who were frustrated at the climate of the fact that there weren't enough, I don't know, not enough spaces or not enough representation for learning-disabled filmmakers. So, in 2004 they decided, "Right, let's start up our own little film festival." And they did, and it started off as a one-day film festival. And they screened films by learning disabled filmmakers, and a lot of the films also featured learning-disabled subjects.

Mattie Kennedy:

And yeah, it's kind of grown from that really and I think it's just bloody brilliant that they've been able to keep that going for such a long time. It's also a biannual festival. It's not on every year, it's once every two years. The actual festival committee is also made up of people with learning disabilities. And it's not just featuring people. It was made by people with learning disabilities for people with learning disabilities, which I... it's got such a unique take to it. In 2015, it was my first visit down to Oska Bright. And I think I got funding from Creative Scotland, don't get me wrong I was really nervous because it was my first time getting funding.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

No pressure, no pressure.

Mattie Kennedy:

So I was like so, so nervous. But they managed to give me it, God knows how they managed to give me it, but they did. Because I know that the arts funding system can be really like, they don't give out money unless they really, really need to. But I suppose that's just the way the system is. But yeah, 2015 and it was just honestly... that visit was such a breath-taking experience. Sorry for being so cheesy about it, but it really was but...

Shafiq Ghafoor:

No, no.

Sandra Alland:

No, I understand.

Mattie Kennedy:

Just like a whole bunch of just learning-disabled filmmakers and creatives just in this one space, watching learning-disability sortof filmmaking. I was just like, "Wow, this is bloody brilliant." And my film, it's my second film Just Me that got screened there. And it was seeing it on that screen in front of a community that I’m a part of was just a really, really great feeling. Also Sarah Gordy who's an amazing artist, she did the keynote speech at that edition of the festival. And she was great as well. And it's actually where I met Matthew Hellett as well. I mean that's kind of where the basis of our working relationship kind of took off.

Mattie Kennedy:

And we just, we hung out one night with the film committee and we just we kind of talked over Chinese food, and we just talked about our identities as LGBTQ+ learning-disabled filmmakers because he's a filmmaker too. He made a really great film called Mrs. Sparkle. And it's just about his drag alter-ego, Mrs. Sparkle and how his drag alter-ego brings him a sort of happiness, and how it kindof brings him into the world as a sortof...

Sandra Alland:

I love that film.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, it's such a good film.

Sandra Alland:

So good.

Mattie Kennedy:

Such a good film. And yeah, I mean, that meeting also sprang forth a side project of events called The Matthew and Matthew Events, which took place in Brighton and the second one took place in my hometown of Glasgow, and that was the Glasgow Short Film Festival that took place in. Really, really good crowd, like a lot of my friends actually came down to support me during that event.

Sandra Alland:

Brilliant, that's brilliant.

Mattie Kennedy:

So, I was like, "I didn't even send out invitations, what’s going on here?" Literally! But yeah, that was brilliant. And also Brighton is where Matthew lives, so it's kindof like one event in his hometown, one event in my hometown, which was really, really great. And yeah, obviously Queer Freedom strand which you brought up, that started in 2017 at the... Not the last one because that was the last festival was just there but the festival before. Matthew just had the idea for it. He was just like, "Right, we need an LGBTQ+ strand for not just for learning-disabled filmmakers, but for LGBTQ+ learning-disabled film as well." So they weren't just including filmmakers, but also including just films themselves, like the representation within the films, which was really, really good.

Mattie Kennedy:

And Matthew's like a total cultural advocate in terms of that, he was really pushing for it, he obviously got it and he was just really, really... But I could just tell how proud he was. Also, I got to do the keynote speech for that year to open up the inaugural strand, which I was bricking myself about. [LAUGHTER] I spent a fortnight doing the keynote speech, two weeks, just every day writing down, writing down because I mean, I had sleepless nights doing it because I was just writing, so I'm like, "It has to be a good keynote speech because, it's a keynote speech. It can't be a sloppy speech."

Mattie Kennedy:

I know, I mean literally I got a standing ovation from people after the speech. So I was just like, "Oh my god." It was just such a... that edition of the festival was just such a ground-breaking sort of event, obviously, it's kind of like the first time. I'm not a fan of saying first, but it was kind of like, maybe not the first time, but it just felt like a sort of time where it was a vital time where LGBTQ+ learning disabled filmmakers and just LGBT learning disabled films were being at the forefront of a festival that is so accommodating and so inclusive. Because it's not every day you get to hear or see LGBTQ+ learning disability representation being shown within a film festival.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah, it's really rare.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, as it's really, really rare. It was just, I mean, I remember actually going back to the first festival, it was like I remember going back home and I got really, really emotional going back on the coach, going back home and I was just like, "Oh, I really, really needed this. I needed to be here". It just so vital and I remember Lizzy, on the last night of my first visit to the festival, she came out, looked at me, and she's like, "We are a community now, you're part of a community now. It's important that your voice is heard."

Mattie Kennedy:

And that kind of, I mean, I went back to my hotel that night and I just started crying. I was like, "Oh, it was so lovely", but, yeah, shout out to Lizzy and David and Matthew and the rest of the Oska Bright gang, big shout out to them.

Sandra Alland:

Hi everyone.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Hello.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, I think the work that they've done and the work that Matthew's done as a sort of cultural advocate is really, really, really great and they deserve all the praise. And it's not even that, it's not just LGBTQ plus learning disability representation they're working on. They're also working on representation for BAME learning disabled films and filmmakers, and they are also working on representation for female learning disabled filmmakers and films. So, that kindof just shows the willingness to grow, and to learn and to really like, "No, we don't want it to be just learning disabled, we want it to be kind of inclusive of all that."

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And doing that, actively working on bringing in groups who would even be marginalized within that community, and not waiting until people are going, "Wait, there are these amazing films that no one is looking at." And that's something which I think is incredible in these types of spaces, where you've got a group who are a minority within a minority who are often forgotten or left out, or left to be an afterthought. We've got a little bit of learning disability support here. And when you take that, and give... Or when a group takes that space and makes it their own, and makes something wonderful out of it is really, really powerful.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, definitely, I definitely agree. Definitely.

Sandra Alland:

I went for the first time this year to see Queer Freedom. Saw you there! And it was one of the most brilliant places I've been, just the whole vibe of the place from the moment you came in the door, or even before I came in the door. They made sure everything was going to be just how it needed to be and people felt comfortable. And yeah, seeing that power of people being in charge of their own space and not just being like... Because we've met each other at other events, that I will not name.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, of course.

Sandra Alland:

But we're included as disabled people or learning-disabled people as a tick box strand, as an afterthought, and it doesn't feel anything the same. It's just sortof to say, "Oh, we did disability." This is the exact opposite of that, it was brilliant.

Mattie Kennedy:

I think also the genuine fact that, for me I think it was in 2015 that I was actually researching learning-disabled films or learning-disabled filmmakers. And it was honestly, the difficulty. Even typing into Google "queer learning disabled filmmakers"… I was like, "Good luck Google!" [LAUGHTER] Or even just "queer learning disabled films" that's like, "Aye, good luck Google. I hope you find some treasures in there." But no, I actually found one film though. And it was, I think it was actually screened at one of the Queer Freedoms, at the very first one, John and Michael.

Sandra Alland:

I programmed that film at Who's Your Dandy?, but it was years ago and I'm terrible with names.

Mattie Kennedy:

Oh, really? I didn't know that.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah. It was after Queer Freedom.

Cate Lauder:

Animated film, right?

Sandra Alland:

It's animated. Yeah, you saw it!

Cate Lauder:

Yeah.

Sandra Alland:

It's brilliant, yeah Shira Avni that's her name I think.

Mattie Kennedy:

And obviously Matthew's films, I saw them.

Sandra Alland:

Mrs. Sparkle.

Mattie Kennedy:

So I kindof felt some sort of isolation while trying to research.

Sandra Alland:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah, of course.

Mattie Kennedy:

Basically I'm just like, "Where the hell is all this stuff?"

Sandra Alland:

I have this found poem from 2006, that is, "Did you mean to search for 'queer plus Edinburgh plus *trains*'?" [LAUGHTER] When I moved to Edinburgh that's what I got, when I searched. So I feel ya, and I wasn't even adding in "disabled" or "learning disabled". It's like, "No, we don't mean trains!"

Mattie Kennedy:

No, but you know that's the algorithms or something like that.

Sandra Alland:

Aye, yeah. I think also in Scotland too, at that time, yeah. So, things have moved in a positive direction I think in some ways. I mean, it's not always a "things get better" narrative, but that's definitely a case of Yes with Oska Bright. Cate, we had a great chat the other day about some of us not feeling like we're artists if we're not producing things, and I think Mattie and I, we've talked about that a bit too. These feelings of unworthiness or not having something important to say, I think that can be really hard for artists. When you have to work other jobs and people who are disabled or ill in ways that affect energy, pacing and pain, that can be especially hard.

Sandra Alland:

And I've been trying to personally reject the pressure to make finished products all the time, to think that art only matters most when it's something tangible that we have to promote or sell like, "I've made a book or I've done this film." Or when a so-called important person or festival approves our work in a sortof official way, like a screening or publication. So I wanted to ask you, Cate, about your thoughts on that and what you feel. And it is a big question. But what is the purpose of art? And you can start with what's the purpose of art for you? Doesn't have to be answering everything, like "What Is The Purpose". But why do we make art?

Cate Lauder:

The purpose off art for me, sorry frog in my throat there. It's that it is not actually about the art, it's about the expression. I suppose someone having their say, whatever the topic is, whatever they need to say. The art part only comes into it if you do it in a so-called artistic way. But I think, essentially, we all need to have our feelings and thoughts about things in some way, shape or form whether it's dance, film or books or whatever. But also if you think about it, the drama classes at school, they're actually mostly about getting people to actually stand up in front of others, in front of a crowd and speak. And obviously here everybody speaks the same lines of dialogue. But obviously if someone's got say, a job interview, or to make some kind of speech at a rally or at work, that training is really important.

Cate Lauder:

Also, with my education in scriptwriting, it struck me generally I suppose that the human mind has adapted to letting things... listening to other opinions or whatever, if things are tackled in a way that’s got some kind of structure to it, a beginning, a middle, and an end, essentially. I’m currently learning French, you start with just basic words. And then you get onto slightly longer words and longer words or more complicated words, but it's still all a mess at first. And you've got to find some sort of narrative in your head that makes sense of that. So you can do it, and start to express it to others as well.

Sandra Alland:

I like that, it’s about finding the narrative.

Cate Lauder:

Yeah.

Sandra Alland:

That's really cool. Yeah, you had said about like, the idea of ideally art existing to give people a voice as well.

Cate Lauder:

Yes.

Sandra Alland:

Did you want to talk about that at all?

Cate Lauder:

Well...

Shafiq Ghafoor:  
Oh!

Sandra Alland:

Oh, oh?

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Actually yeah, what you were saying about people creating art and producing things, putting their own voices out there. From my thought process, that is... putting your ideas, your thoughts out into the world is part of the human experience. It's part of being a social animal. And that comes back to my idea of getting that give and take, that you send something out into the world, and you get something back. It may not be what you expected. But that's part of how communities come together and build one another, around people putting something of themselves into a work of art, a film, a piece of music, a dance choreography. And that is what brings people together.

Sandra Alland:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). [35:41]

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And when there's always that, when you put something out there, when you step out in front of an audience, there's that intense vulnerability as well. And that's a very human thing, it's a thing that you don't really see in other animals. Human beings are a type of animal, but that sort of vulnerability, that creation, that performance is something that you don't see to the same extent in certainly other primates.

Cate Lauder:

It’s an interesting thing when you watch big politicians and powerful folk. At the start of their speeches, it doesn’t matter how experienced they are. You can always tell a slight wee moment of hesitation at the start of what they say because that’s just human nature. And they just try to suss out their audience, which currently with politics these days is a really scary, right wing, I don't even want to think about or talk about it. But anyway.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Ahhhhh!

Sandra Alland:

Aye. Collective "Ahhhhh!" [LAUGHTER] We could all have a collective silent scream. "Ahhhhh!"

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah. That kind of hesitation that you tend to have when one is starting to communicate. Is that something that you think.. is there a difference in how that happens when you're working in, for example film, as opposed to live? That's not something that I have experience of yet, so I'm asking.

Cate Lauder:

Not really, no. Because filming it's really umpteen takes.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Cate Lauder:

So, to say the same thing... they are performing live, but in a more kindof fragmented way. You just put it together later on.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Cate Lauder:

Kindof like my speech and my stammer! [LAUGHTER]

Sandra Alland:

I'm going to move on to a question for Mattie. I think feeling like a quote unquote real or successful artist can also be tough for people who don't have access to mainstream arts networks. It's framed as you know, "something you'll achieve if you're good enough and work hard enough". But sometimes that's just bullshit, right? Like it's not that easy. Not that hard work is easy, but. So how does, for you Mattie, how does being a working-class and learning-disabled femme affect access to mainstream arts? Or even at times to disability or queer arts?

Mattie Kennedy:

Right, okay. I've got a lot written down here so I'm gonna take, I'm just gonna take it and just get stuck in.

Sandra Alland:

All right!

Mattie Kennedy:

Right, I'm gonna go back to education. So this is way over a decade ago. I went to special needs schools all my life, primary school, secondary school. This is talking about secondary. I think it was my second work experience that I was doing. I was in fourth year, I think. And basically, I was given the list of what I wanted to do, what placements there were. There was just all like sortof construction, catering, working with old folks, which I did actually in my first work experience and actually did enjoy it. Childcare, I think mechanics, and all that stuff. I'm like, "Where’s all of the art stuff? Where's all the media work placements?"

Mattie Kennedy:

So I was just there and then I was like, "No, nothing here I want to do." So they were like, "But you need to pick something." I'm like, "Well, what about working on a radio station?" Because there's a community radio station that was not that far away from me. So I was like, "What about that community station?" And the reply was, "Oh, you can't do that." And I was like, "What?" And their reasoning for that was, "Oh, erm, health and safety regulations."

Shafiq Ghafoor:

What?!

Mattie Kennedy:

So yeah, I was a bit like, "Hmmm, okay." I didn't delve further into it, I thought I'll just leave it but I'll be reporting it to the mother, of course. So yeah, I went back home and I'm like "Aye, erm..." Because usually when I come back home from school my mum always says, "How's your day been?" And I'm like, "No good the day." And she's like, "Oh, what's up?" And I'm like, "Work experience is coming up again. And obviously my second one, and they basically said because I offered them a placement that I could possibly do, working down at the community radio station. And they basically told me that health and safety regulations need to be kindof brought forward." And she's like, "Oh, is that right? Oh, I’ll just be getting a meeting sorted out then". So aye, she phoned up the school and she's like, "Right, I want a meeting sorted." And then so yeah, there was a meeting.

Mattie Kennedy:

I'm literally trying to fast forward through all this because it's quite a long story, I'm trying to cut it down. But I'll fast forward to the meeting. And basically, we started chatting amongst ourselves. And then it kindof got down to the nitty gritty like the list came out again, the dreaded list of like, work experience stuff. And they were like, "Oh, well what about this and what about that, what about this?" And by this rate, my mum was getting irritated, she was like, "You know what? Give me it." And she literally took the list and she actually ran through everything with me. And she's like, "Do you wantae do this?" And I'm like, "No." “Wantae do this? Or this?" "No."

Mattie Kennedy:

And she was like, "Do you see now? They don't want you doing any of these. We need to get, we need to come up with an alternate solution." And they just looked at us and there's just silence in the room. So they just got to the point, my mum just got out of her seat and we both left the meeting room with them still in it. She's like, "Right. We'll do it. We'll do it ourselves then. Come on, Mattie, we're leaving." And aye, we both left. And I was just like, "Oh God, my mum was like total batter."

Sandra Alland:

Ah, she is. I can imagine.

Mattie Kennedy:

So yeah, basically, like a day or two later, she actually got a meeting set up with the radio station that I wanted to do my work placement at. And they were more than happy. It was a woman that works there. And I think she probably still works there. But she was like, "We would love to have them. We’d really love to have them." But she was like, "Well, there's one thing that they'd have to get over and that's the health and safety regulations. That's what they've been saying to us. So can you get in touch with them?" And I think mum wrote down the school's number. She was like, "Yeah, get in touch with them." Or something, I think that's what happened. And then I fast forward a day or two later. I got confirmation I was able to do that work placement.

Sandra Alland:

Brilliant.

Mattie Kennedy:

And that was all down to my mum.

Sandra Alland:

Yes, being an advocate...

Mattie Kennedy:

My mum literally came through for me that day. And I was just like, "Oh my god, I don't deserve you. I literally don't deserve you." Like, literally. And I'm getting really emotional when I talk about it. Because it's like my mum's practically been my advocate for most of my life. I mean, obviously, I've been able to self-advocate now, but there's nothing wrong with other people advocating me. That's not what I'm trying to say. Like, if you've got someone advocating for you, that's great. But also self-advocacy is good too. All types of advocacy are good. That's what I'm trying to say.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

But you know, I mean, yeah...

Shafiq Ghafoor:

But for a child who needs that person standing behind them and saying, "This needs to be done. And it can happen, and it should," and being the person who's standing up and saying this needs to happen when and when your voice is being ignored. Which is what I'm getting from what you're saying.

Sandra Alland:

And how many people didn't have that. That's the.. the fact that you needed that, is really something.

Mattie Kennedy:

But I will say this. I will end this debacle on a positive note. The next year, I think it was my last work experience and I was in fifth year, they actually managed to get me a work placement at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall.

Sandra Alland:

That's brilliant.

Mattie Kennedy:

And that was without any, they came up to me like, "Oh, we've got a work experience position for you at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall." Mind you, I think that again that was down to my mum, they really she can kindof drummed it into them, really taught them a lesson. There needs to be more. They learned, I'll give them that, I'm no gonnae completely shame my school. You know they did learn, so I mean that yeah, again, most of the credit goes to my mum, really. And I will say that on record. So yeah, thanks mum.

Mattie Kennedy:

And sort of financial barriers, well I started filmmaking in 2013. I had no film training or no art school, no film school training, no art school training. Completely DIY and self-taught. So I basically went into Toys R Us one day, and I got a little tiny kids camcorder for 21 quid and it was like hot pink, a little, tiny hot pink kids camcorder. And I made my first two films, What Is Femme Anyway, and Just Me. And this was in late 2013. I was 22. So a couple years ago, 6, 7 years ago, can't remember but. My twin brother, he did the camera work. So that was kind of the beginnings of that. I've been given a platform by film festivals such as Scottish Queer Film Festival, Whatever Film Festival they're like a queer film festival in London. Cachín Cachán Cachunga!, big shout out. Oska Bright obviously, and Heart and Soul who are a learning-disability arts organization based in London, they've given me a platform. And Project Ability as well, just to name a few.

Mattie Kennedy:

And also a couple of years ago I actually got a camcorder, a proper camcorder. I wasn't even expecting it, I think it was my birthday. And my mum, my big brother and my twin brother all clubbed money together to give me it. And II was nearly in tears. I was just like, it was a genuine... I had been talking about it to them, "Oh, I've got to get a new camcorder soon, but money and all that stuff." You know, like a proper, state-of-the-art, not state-of-the-art but high-end camcorder. And aye, it was like a Sony camcorder they got me.

Mattie Kennedy:

All of them chipped in money, and I was just like, "Yous are... Honestly, what are yous like?" It was really, really good. So that's part of the financial barriers that I had was trying to get state-of-the-art equipment. Because obviously, coming out of college with like £100 of your student loan left, I was kinda like, "Yeah, what am I gonna do here?" So yeah, the 21-quid camcorder was kindof the beginning of that, but they made sure that "Right, we'll get you a reasonable camcorder at some point." And this is my last point.

Sandra Alland:

You're fine!

Mattie Kennedy:

But no, I'm pure talking. But I think this is a really important one. Personally for me, being down in Brighton and seeing all the work that Oska Bright has done, and the fact that they've got a learning disability filmmaking community... It really makes me feel... when I come home, like there's nothing really here. And because all the opportunities I've been mostly getting, have been down in England. And that's great, that's fabulous. I'm not knocking that at all, but I don't live in England.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

I don't live there. You know what I mean? So I've written down here... I feel like there's a need for more learning-disability filmmaking initiatives here in Scotland, because I don't feel that there is enough here. And I can't stress that enough because as I said, I'm literally having to come back home and there's, "Oh, right. There's nothing here." There's not a hub.

Sandra Alland:

Aye, yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

For learning disabled, not just filmmakers, but I suppose artists as well, just to come together and maybe learn how to set up a camcorder or do some film training and you know, just basic stuff. And learn how to make animation or just learn how to shoot a scene or a sequence. And I think that would be really, really great. And me and my mum have been talking about this because my mum's getting quite frustrated about it. She's like, "Well, you live here. There should really be something here for you."

Mattie Kennedy:

I mean, as I said, Oska Bright, and I wouldn't have a bad word said against them. They've done brilliant by me and they've represented me brilliantly. And they've given me a platform. But there needs to be something here and it's just, it's just not good enough. It really isn’t. I mean, sorry to sound so disappointed but it's just like, no, there needs to be a learning-disability filmmaking initiative here in Scotland for people.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

So that there's a community here.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

When I hear that you’ve been going down to, Oska Bright?

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And that when you've been in that kind of space, when you're in that kind of community, when you leave it, it can have a really strong effect on you.

Mattie Kennedy:

Aye, it's a comedown.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah. And having a community here would stop some of that happening. And maybe make it less of a huge change when you go down south, and then have something to come home to essentially.

Mattie Kennedy:

Definitely. Yeah, that was a lot of stuff.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah, no, it's brilliant. You covered various... yeah, like some film festivals... I mean, you've been involved with a good collection that you talked about. But also, most film festivals, because I don't know if people know this, but they charge to submit your film. And those include short film festivals, like the ones that happen in Scotland. Most of them, not all of them. And that can be a huge barrier for someone like yourself, if you make a film and then you've got to put out between £25 to £50, roughly, to every festival internationally. Who has that kind of cash sitting around?

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And if your on JSA, then that is what, a quarter to a third of your weekly income.

Sandra Alland:

So immediately you've got limited screening capabilities. And then of course, there's also the fact that people don't necessarily screen queer, learning-disabled films, as you've mentioned. So breaking through those barriers is difficult. And I think you've hit on something really interesting talking about Scotland. Because I hear this again and again from different people, from different kinds of marginalized communities. Like, a lot of friends I have in the deaf community are all moving to England because there's no work here. This is still happening in Scotland. You know, it's still...

Shafiq Ghafoor:

I finally meet another queer person of colour, and they're here for four years while they go to university. And then they go away again. It's like, ugh.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah, yeah. Right.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah. Or someone who's, yeah, queer person of colour. And yeah, they're going to London because that's where all the brown queers go.

Sandra Alland:

Argh. It's difficult.

Cate Lauder:

I've actually got an analogous story, about the work-experience thing. I had a fairly similar-ish experience with applying for television and radio back in 1994. At that time I was finishing off my technical theatre course, which was a national certificate, and I did a really good job at it. So I thought I'd apply for another course in television and radio. And I got an interview for it, but at one point they made me record an audio tape of me speaking into it, to see how much I stammered.

Sandra Alland:

Oh god.

Cate Lauder:

And then after that, I recorded that tape in the room on my own and they came back after 15, 20 minutes. They must have had I don't know, a coffee and a fag or something. They came back and I gave them the tape and they told me that I couldn't get on that course because of my stammer. A few years after that I worked in theatre and film behind the scenes and community shows and festivals and stuff, and at Pilton Video. I applied to a different college and got in no bother at all. But I also applied to that other college, from way back in the first place. And they still said I wouldn’t get on the course because I stammer. But I told them then that I already got on this other course and I was only doing this interview basically to tell them, "Ha ha! I got on a course anyway." And it was one of the same guys that interviewed me the first time. So I really put him right in his place.

Sandra Alland:

That's brilliant. I think it's interesting that you're talking about how people kindof shut doors on you before you've even started. And I think with learning-disabled people and working-class people in general, there's this idea of streaming that happens quite young a lot of the time. You're saying they offer you a career that you can go be a mechanic or whatever.... not that there's any problem with any of these things, but it's the stereotyping of "this is what you should be doing".

Mattie Kennedy:

But it's also the age as well, most funding streams are like 18 to 25. And that's the cut off.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

And it's just like, no, that's... no.

Sandra Alland:

You've got educational streams, which are crap, and then you've got funding streams which are also crap. Because yeah, they expect everyone to be starting out when they're young.

Mattie Kennedy:  
Emerging!

Cate Lauder:

Ones that are crap as well.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah. And that streaming, and being pushed into particular career paths, says more about them than it does about the person they're trying to shove around. And yeah, it shouldn't be like that.

Sandra Alland:

No. Definitely not.

Mattie Kennedy:

Just as well I've got a gobby mum. [LAUGHTER]

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Sandra Alland:

It is. It's very good, she's most excellent. Something I struggled with and I've seen a lot of people talk about is this pressure to seem as artists as productive and successful online. And the reality is that, as you were saying earlier, some of us have like £10 pounds or £5 in the bank. And no work. Maybe we don't want to or can't work in ways that we're expected to, and we've been lying in bed for three days, but there's this pressure to appear kind of like "attractive to prospective employers" or, I guess what I would call a largely middle-class arts community. That's kind of the reality of it in the UK, and in Scotland. And I feel this is replicated even in disabled and queer communities a lot of the time.

Sandra Alland:

As disabled people under austerity, we're supposed to look like we're working all the time. But then we're also supposed to look like we can't do things. It's an impossible situation to be in if you don't have privilege. And I think BIPOC, for listeners and readers that's "Black, Indigenous and or people of colour". BIPOC and disabled people who aren't from posh or middle-class experiences are specifically targeted in a white supremacist culture that's based on all of the isms. Like ableism, cisheterosexism, classism. And I thought maybe, Shafiq, you might want to talk about Edinburgh specifically, although you do move between Edinburgh and Glasgow so feel free to expand, but how you feel about how mainstream arts are structured in Edinburgh and in Scotland? And how that impacts on BIPOC ,working-class queer and trans people?

Shafiq Ghafoor:

In Edinburgh, I have a friend who's looking to get funding for work at the moment. And yeah, they're... the choices in Edinburgh are: You doing something for the festival? Are you doing something for the art school, the art college? Or are you going to do something with very little support and backing on a shoestring for some of the groups of people who live there all year round? I'm not going to put something together for half the "expletive deleted" from London to come and see in one month of the year. All the money, all the attention, all the funding, also "exposure", gets squished into a very narrow space of time. When the people who live in Edinburgh, and are doing things all the time, get forgotten about. It's almost a two or multi-tier system where...

Cate Lauder:

It’s a weird dichotomy.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Where you have, the proper artists who have a pile of money from mummy or daddy or have access to resources that other people don't have. Who were able to raise £1000 to put on a show at the Fringe. As opposed to someone who is like, "Well, that is a sixth of my annual income." That's not something that... The number of dreams that never get past the space between someone's ears because there's not much point in thinking about it. There's no way I can afford it. When it comes to BIPOC activities and representation spaces... there is, let me see. I have one, maybe two, queer POC meet-ups in Edinburgh per year. That's it.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

There are a couple of people who I know as personal friends who I see on occasion, but that is relatively recent. There is a group now, called Vogue Scotland…

Mattie Kenedy:

I’ve heard of them, aye.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

I dance. I’m not up to standard. I walked at my first ball in October, but I wasn't up to standard. The judges chalked me. But I got... it's one of those things in Vogue and ballroom culture is, actually you probably get this as well. You get feedback. And even when it hurts to be told you didn't make the grade, you get really useful feedback on what you need to work on, where you went wrong, where you can go next.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And dancing with Vogue Scotland has more than doubled the number of queer POC I know in Scotland. Which, 5, 10 years ago, the nearest LGBT POC I knew of were in London. Some of those things were going on, but the communication of that, the outreach aspect, finally reached me. And it's like, "Yes, yes! I can go and be viciously, violently, queer, with other people! And not be the brown person in the room." Which I'm sure other people understand. That being that person who is representing so much of... Being the diverse person in the corner.

Mattie Kennedy:

Yeah, yeah, that is there's a lot of pressure on us.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah, it's exhausting.

Mattie Kennedy:

So much pressure because it's like, "Oh, you're the token this, or you're the token that."

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

So there is that added pressure because it's like well, it's not like... It's hard because you wantae say, "Well, I never asked for it. But then you're automatically, you're kindof automatically put in that situation."

Shafiq Ghafoor:

On the spot.

Sandra Alland:

And you're the monolith, right? Because it's like you represent everybody from... Everybody. And what you say is the final word, so don't mess it up.

Mattie Kennedy:

I know the feeling.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Totally. But it's something in Scotland. There are... I mean, it's something in Edinburgh particularly, they're not the... There are fewer, per head of population, people of colour.

Sandra Alland:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And it's something that I often come back to is the... I think I mentioned earlier... that a lot of POC in Edinburgh are students. And they may or may not decide to settle here. But they're... it's an extra barrier to creating community that, if you can connect with someone and share experience, but not know if they're still going to be around in 10 years’ time. And when you know, I live in Scotland, I live in Edinburgh. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. And you know, that feeling that some people will come and go. And I'm still gonna be here.

Sandra Alland:

Aye, yeah.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And that also comes back to what Mattie was saying, about DIY. That if there's going to be a community... Because I'm the one who's going to be here, I'm going to have to be the one who, well don't have to, but if I make something it'll still be here. If someone else does it, it's something that they may take with them when they leave. And as so many people of colour in Scotland do, that we go away somewhere and go, "Actually, I'm going to stay here." I've noticed when visiting Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester. Visiting Leicester was my probably my first experience of being in a place with a lot of British Asian people, and it was a really transformative experience in some ways, because I got off the bus and I realized thinking about it later that there's something that I do. There's a look when you see another person of colour, a Black person, an Asian person, you make eye contact, there's that moment of connection.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

You get off the train in Leicester, you're doing that to everyone on the street. And they think you're weird! [LAUGHTER] Why is this guy looking at everyone? Are they... I didn't realize what I've been having this behaviour. And it was actually, it took me years and several visits to London to realize, "Oh, I now realize why that sort of getting off the trip and going to BiCon was so strange. Because I was moving through an environment that I'd never experienced, where the white people or white-passing people were in the minority.

Sandra Alland:

Cate has just psychically connected with me on the fact that we are getting close to the end of our time. And she suggested that this question maybe could go out to everybody as we wrap up. What kind of art world would we like to have in Scotland and the world, instead of what we have? What are some dreams that we'd like to see come true here? I mean, I think from what you've all said, we can kind of guess a few of them. Like "people staying". [LAUGHTER]

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And more access for people who don't have resources. More groups and communities coming together and making spaces.

Cate Lauder:

That's a big one. Even if it's just more communities start off doing, say, little... Things which are just for their community, it could be anything. And when those things start happening here in Scotland, it would make a huge difference. It doesn't matter what it is, whether it’s a writing or singing group. There's got to be more of those things. And that will hopefully filter up to folk thinking, "Oh, we could apply some funding streams there maybe." And they might think, there’s folk with quite a lot of talent there doing X, Y or Z. So we could employ them. And maybe possibly create an actual industry.

Sandra Alland:

That would be perfect. I'd love to see a space, like an actual community centre for...

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah. A community arts space that isn't dependent on when the building or space gets sold off to developers. Because that is something that I've seen in Edinburgh, I'm sure happens in Glasgow as well, where some group or community space lose access to the place that they were working out of. Trying to find a place to set up and they're offered, usually by local authority, a place that is probably old office space. That is...

Sandra Alland:

RIP The Forest.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah, well it is happening now with St Margaret’s House.

Sandra Alland and Cate Lauder:

Yes!

Shafiq Ghafoor:

What happens is that, once you've seen it happen several times. Yeah, they get offered a space on the understanding that at some point the land will be going out to development. And they spend time and money and energy, and people put their hearts and souls into a space. And then it starts coming around to developers and big piles of money, and what's the word for it, planning applications going out. Going ‘Yes, we're going to build another 5000 student flats’. That would be little pasteboard boxes for lots of piles of money.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And then having not just the artists but the communities that they're embedded in, standing up and going, "No, we don't want to lose this space. This brings value to us." And then the community then comes together to fight to save the space. But money talks, and eventually that space disappears and you have to find another place for everything to move to.

Sandra Alland:

Mm-hmm (affirmative) And with gentrification, that's becoming harder and harder. Especially with Airbnb in Edinburgh, oh my god.

Cate Lauder:

With the money talks part, that also applies to us at the shitty end. That's very true, because we've got bills to pay, families to keep.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

And we don't have the resources to go "Oh! We'll just fundraise the money ourselves." Because you don't have...

Cate Lauder:

You get the folk going, “We’re going to do this big project, blah blah blah”. “And how much am I getting paid?” “No, you’re not getting paid anything.” It’s that bizarre situation, when you have to talk yourself or them into hiring or not hiring you depending on... Because at some point they're going to say, "But you’re getting exposure", and like okay, whatever.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah, yeah, it's a tough one. I think councils and arts councils need to be putting money into spaces, like smaller spaces. It's interesting to see how the arts have changed in the past even 20 years. Like things are focused in a way that have gone away from people having their own spaces, and everything's about touring or really, really big spaces getting lots of funding and supposedly representing everyone. Which we know doesn't happen.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Trickledown economics doesn't work for representation just the way it doesn't work with money.

Sandra Alland:

That's true. Did you want to add to that, Mattie?

Mattie Kennedy:

I just think it's a total geographical shift. As I said, most of the stuff just seems to be happening down in England.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

And it's just a total, like, "No, we need to do more stuff here." As we've all said really, it's just not good enough. It really, really isn't. And it's the financial hierarchy happening. It's like, we the self-taught DIY artists... because we're marginalized, we are right at the bottom. Because we're at an independent level.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

Yeah.

Mattie Kennedy:

Because we haven't, some of us may not have, or all of us, had this formal education. We just haven't had that. So we're having to literally just to get off our backsides and do it ourselves.

Sandra Alland:

Yeah, and Creative Scotland spends so much money sending Scottish projects elsewhere, which I think has its own importance or whatever, but it's this sort of way of branding what's "best about Scotland". Whatever. But they're not putting enough money into what's happening in these communities and here in Scotland, and sustaining that.

Cate Lauder:

I started making films, not two years after Trainspotting came out. There was a big "Trainspotting Effect", that's what it was called at the time, the Trainspotting Effect. There was a surge of Scottish filmmaking, especially the low-end... Communities getting into filmmaking, and I was part of that and that was fantastic. But I think we always kindof knew it was not going to last.

Sandra Alland:

Aye... Well, you've all been absolutely brilliant. I could talk to you all afternoon, for hours more. But we have to wrap it up, sadly.

Shafiq Ghafoor:

We've only got so much battery power. [LAUGHTER]

Sandra Alland:

Yeah. We can go off and continue our conversations somewhere else. Thank you to everyone who's listening or reading this podcast. This has been "Disability And... Working-Class LGBTQIA+", and some other things, including "in Scotland". I'm San Alland, Guest Editor at Disability Arts Online from 30th of March to 26th of April, and you've been listening to or reading the words of the fab Shafiq Ghafoor, Mattie Kennedy and Cate Lauder. I can't thank you enough for being here today. It's been awesome.

Shafiq Ghafoor:  
It's a pleasure.

Cate Lauder:  
My pleasure.  
  
Visit www.graeae.org and www.disabilityarts.online for details of productions, events, interviews, opinions, reviews and learning opportunities.