Episode 13 Disability And…Race: Alexandrina Hemsley and Deborah Williams

**Hello and welcome to Graeae and Disability Arts Online's podcast, Disability And..., bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month, Alexandrina Hemsley chats with Deborah Williams about disability and race.**

Alexandrina:

Welcome to Disability And... Podcast. I am Alexandrina Hemsley and I'm joined by Deborah Williams. This morning we are in the Graeae Studios and I am wearing an orange jumper and a white dress with some copper tights and my hair is at quite an Afro. I've been lying down, so it's a bit square at the back. And, I have light brown skin.

Deborah:

I don't even know how to follow that. I'm Deborah Williams. Today I'm wearing a Black Data as Culture T-shirt and a pair of green, almost McCuan Tartan. I've got a very short afro because my hair is falling out, it's gray at the front. Very dark light brown if that makes sense, so I'm Black but not really black, and no left hand.

Alexandrina:

So, Deborah and I are here today, we were asked by Colin to discuss the historic exclusion of Black disabled people from the arts. And we were both excited by the proposal, but we would also like to come at it, or come at this conversation from the position that exclusion has already... Well, it has happened and that it isn't solely our responsibility to scrutinize why this has happened.

Alexandrina:

We feel that doing so in some ways is an act to honor the mechanisms that Whiteness users to erase and exclude and more and more, it feels as if... well, I feel anyway that it's for White people to begin to understand Whiteness, or do more to understand Whiteness.

Alexandrina:

So where we're coming from is we're going to discuss together today how we, as artists have traveled through this erasure, how it has impacted our practice, how we've survived it, how we continue to make our practices and the practices of others visible through this backdrop and knowing that this historical and present erasures are the backdrop for the practices of many, many Black disabled artists.

Deborah:

I think it's important for me, especially in the work that I'm doing at the moment, the day job I'm doing at the moment, that you spent a lot of time justifying yourself in spaces, and as a Black disabled woman, I'm tired of doing that. So to be present is my gift to the world. Really that's the way I see, I don't have to... I've stopped justifying why.

Alexandrina:

And your day job Deborah?

Deborah:

My day job at the moment is this Chief Executive of the Creative Diversity Network. So I work with UK broadcasters to help them look at diversity across the entire supply chain, so production, commissioning, employment, recruitment, contracting, everything really.

Alexandrina:

Where... I've got it down here. Where have we been so far?

Deborah:

Ironically, I think we've been everywhere but we've been hidden and we've mostly been invisible or silenced. The experiences I've had, whether in the work I'm doing now or in the work that I was doing 25 years ago when I started with Graeae, I was visible but invisible. And I think a lot of Black disabled artists feel that way globally.

Deborah:

The reason I realized it was when I sort of started my own production company in the late '90s early noughties, I built a website and I was getting emails from people around the world from Canada and the U.S. in particular, from Black disabled artists who were saying, "Thank you, thank you for putting your work online, because I can see it.and I know that there's somebody else out there like me."

Deborah:

And mostly individuals, so have not had the chance to either build companies, build organizations, build creative teams around us, but mostly individuals who have just sort of been left to their own devices and fighting through all sorts of barriers and prejudices and assumptions. It was nice because I wasn't the only one. That's when I sort of found out I wasn't the only one, but it was shocking that it was everywhere and everybody had experienced it.

Deborah:

And I think the more I talk about what I do and my experiences, the more people come to me and go, "Yeah, I know what that... Thank you for saying that. I know what that feels like. That's my experience." And very rare, is it people come up to me and go, "Yeah, no, that's not been my experience. I've been welcomed with open arms and just encouraged to come in and be creative and built a nice company and if we're talking within the culture of where we are, I'm an NPO and I'm supported."

Deborah:

There's one person, that's Maria, Maria Oshodi, and she's the only person that has been able to continue to fight and push her way through the barriers and everything to come out on the other side and say, "This is what I do, this is who I am, and I'm an artist and I do this."

Alexandrina:

Because we're in different generations and there's something I really resonate there when you were saying around this double experience of being seen and unseen, and all of a sudden the power you're speaking of being seen, and when you're seen by others or you have your experience seen by others. And I think it's almost like a flood gate somehow like... And I never know how to really navigate that. That these things are suddenly quite hypervisible, but that we still... it feels still such a kind of embodied almost like need the experience to be truly seen.

Alexandrina:

And actually there was quite in terms of generations, there was quite a bit of tension actually, between different generations of Black women, in a way that I now have quite deep compassion for, because the fight is hard and it is continual and it is so old, you know?

Deborah:

I mean, I think it was for about 15 years, I lived as somebody else. I tried to be the person that everybody else wants me to be. So I tried to be non-disabled. I tried to be a girl. I tried to be White. I've tried to be invisible. I was silenced and I'd silence myself. I was complicit in my own silence and erasure. And I went to America in 2000 to study what I thought was just contact improvisation. And it turned out to be something completely different. It opened my eyes and my soul, my creative soul in a way that I just never anticipated, because it was isolating parts of... One of the exercises, the core exercise of the organization was to isolate parts of your body and to presented monologue. And when I had to do it with just voice, I couldn't do it.

Deborah:

I had no voice. And the director I was working with said to me, "I give you permission." And he was an older White man obviously, and he wasn't being facetious, but he was like, "You no longer after this day, you no longer have to be silent. You have the right to be who you are and to use your voice the way you want to use it." And that's when I really came into my own personally, within myself as a performer and as an actor. And I love theater, it cuts through everything I do, since I was seven, I was acting. And to only ever have barriers was incredibly difficult and hard to sort of understand what I was doing wrong.

Deborah:

And there are still moments where I think, "What am I doing wrong?" When people push back or push against me or shut me out. At the moment the work I'm doing, we presented a report last week on diversity demographics within UK broadcasting and the people that were shouting us down the most were Black men. They are confident in their arrogance. They are incorrect and spreading untruths about the work that we do. They don't talk to us, but they feel that because they are Black men and they have the status that they have, which is acceptance from White people-

Alexandrina:

I'm sorry just for clarity, so these are Black men in different cultural institutions?

Deborah:

Some in different culture institutions, but mostly working across UK broadcasting.

Alexandrina:

Right, I see, yeah.

Deborah:

And because they have acceptance from White people that they can say whatever they want, because they don't have to have the truth. They can just tell the lies. And it's very difficult to go back to what you talked about at the beginning, to not be fighting that erasure. But the coping mechanisms, they're good and bad I guess. I've sort of over time, I've found lots of different coping mechanisms, some of them completely self-destructive, of course, because that's where you go first, because that's what we're taught, that you are the problem. So you try to solve you and when you can't solve you as the problem, you try to erase you as the problem and those bad habits come into being.

Deborah:

And then I did a lot of... I did meditation now. I did a lot of coaching. I coach now as well. I'm a coach, so I'd self-coach sometimes, which is dangerous, but on a day-to-day level to be able to get up and say, "Okay, I'm here today. I'm present today."

Alexandrina:

But I like what you said, this thing around always calling out erasure is also exhausting.

Deborah:

Yeah.

Alexandrina:

Processes of self care become even more important for people of color and disabled people of color. These internal erasures and this, what you were speaking of for that... when you were doing the concept improvisation workshop made me think around the importance of voice, finding a voice. I wonder about strategies for finding a voice. I wonder if you could speak a bit about... I don't know if the word is alter ego, but these kind of like performative strategies and strategies in performance that we each use in our work.

Alexandrina:

I'm thinking about Sister D or I'm thinking about for me, I use like sort of afrofuturist projections almost, into other space and making other spaces where we can be more fully ourselves.

Deborah:

It's a funny thing you bring up Sister D, because Sister D started as a show that I did in Edinburgh, and it was actually called, originally called The Good Little Nigger, right?

Alexandrina:

Right.

Deborah:

Double and I was a full on black face, white glove buffoon on the poster. And it was a fully improvised show. And I did it because all those years ago, we were talking about television and news and what you were seeing and how people were represented on television, and I just didn't see myself. So I created an alter ego, which was a TV evangelist. So this TV evangelist got a space on TV, but because she was atypical, so she wasn't necessarily saying what all the other evangelists were saying, but what she was saying was sort of shoot... A lot of stuff she was saying was shooting herself in the foot. But it gave me an opportunity to talk about things that as a Black disabled woman, I'd never been allowed to talk about.

Deborah:

So to talk about sex, to talk about intimacy, to talk about hate, to talk about self-loathing, sort of about all those sorts of things, and actually developed into the Sister D show, which is what the full show then eventually became. It was very much about a TV evangelist who was born disabled, but because she was so ashamed of that, she created a lie and told a story of how she saved a child and became disabled. So she found a way to justify her impairments-

Alexandrina:

In a rescue or like in a heroic act.

Deborah:

Yeah absolutely.

Alexandrina:

A traditionally heroic-

Deborah:

Absolutely.

Alexandrina:

... White western mythological act.

Deborah:

Absolutely. Because that was the only way, because of the self-hate was so inherent in her. And in many ways it was my way of saying, "This is what you do to people," to the world, and especially the theater world, "This is what you do to people." Because at the time theater go back... I mean, even now when you're reading about it, there were still no Black disabled people really working in theater, in mainstream theater, in the institutions. There are no opportunities to run venues or be executive directors or be artistic directors or be associates. You've got Amit who sort of sits within Graeae and watched your show and et cetera, but there are no women, there are no women. And that seems to be acceptable to people. People would go, "Oh yes..." People don't even think about that and look at that.

Deborah:

So if I want to spend some time now writing something I feel like writing or supporting myself through Arts Council investment or whatever, then who are you to tell me I can't? What makes you think that you have the right to tell me that I can't? You do not know who I am. And I guess that's part of the downside of having an alter ego. Having an alter ego that is vocal and will say the things that other people won't say, will walk into a room knowing that there is an expectation and living that expectation of saying stuff that nobody wants to hear, that everyone is embarrassed by. The downside of that is that people think that that's all you are. You become your own stereotype.

Alexandrina:

Yeah. These stereotypes are really interesting. There's the quote, isn't there, by Chimamanda Ngozi, that stereotypes are true, but they're incomplete. There's something about... yeah.

Deborah:

Absolutely.

Alexandrina:

Because when you were speaking about the title of the show, I was thinking about my own video work and how I think in 2015, I made a video where I put one newbie in for the boys, and I was in a leotard and I painted a really like really pseudo African with a capital A, vague kind of mask on my face. And I was just... Again, this invisible disability things and my quiet task for myself when I was filming was to just look at this camera that I found very invasive and very phallic and male, look at the camera for more than a minute, like not duck away from the gaze, whatever this loaded White male gaze was, just look and stare it down.

Alexandrina:

And what I think then surfaced or got expressed was a lot of rage and anger and there was a kind of like purposely heavy metal low key track they had playing. And I was kind of only in a leotard and I filmed it in a tiny flat that I was staying in [inaudible 00:17:12]. And I showed it. I was part of this professional development training program for choreographers. And we all had to go around and show our work and I showed it and everyone else got a lot of like very detailed feedback.

Alexandrina:

I think I realize now because there were a lot of shared reference points for a lot of the other work. And for my work, there were no reference points. All the tutor could say, he put his hand up and said, "It's interesting that young people now make work that is so disturbing."

Deborah:

Wow.

Alexandrina:

And from that moment on I felt, "Wow, I'm just outside of this circle. Whatever is going on in this group, I am outside." Rather than own that position as a White man and say, "I found whatever the content of that work, I was disturbed by it. Something in that rattled me." They were able to use that position of power as the tutor, and label my work, and therefore me and my body, disturbing, which is so different. It's such a different thing. And I think you're right. I think that came from naming and trying somehow to harness a stereotype of angry Black and then in brackets and the kind of invisible brackets, disabled woman.

Deborah:

I say, I'm lucky about being a disabled woman because physically I look disabled. I look like I'm supposed to be. I'm not all human, so people can instinctively... when they're able to look, because other... First of all, I get, "Sir," all the time. So I'm always a man-

Alexandrina:

Yeah that's misgender [crosstalk 00:18:52].

Deborah:

... which is just you know. So it's interesting now in the trans conversation, the transgender conversation, people constantly tell me that I don't know what it's like to be misgendered. And I'm like, "You have no idea," and then that goes back to childhood, right? That's a part of one of my non-visible conditions that nobody bothers to think about. I now walk with... like I've got a broken body, which I never used to do, but I take pride in that because it's my body. And it took me forever to wear T-shirts, to not wear long sleeved jumpers, to not constantly cover myself up, to not try and make myself small and fit into that invisible space. Because exactly what you said, that people found it threatening.

Deborah:

And instead of people finding that threatening within themselves, the assumption was I... and I still use the term, although I stopped using it about a year ago, because my seven-year-old nephew reframed it for me in a different way. I use, "I scare people." I use that a lot, but my nephew said to me last year, and he just said to me, "So do you impress people?" Actually, he was six, he wasn't seven, because he wasn't seven until the summer. And I went, "What?" And he went, "No, no, you impress people."

Deborah:

That was when I thought... That stayed with me. And that's the term I now use. My fear is that my ego then it turns into... I turn into an egotistical maniac. I hope I won't, but it's a fear of mine, but actually that made more sense to me than, "You scare people." People are scared of me because of what they see in me, but ultimately that's not down to me. That's not my fault, which comes right back to again as the beginning, I'm not going to apologize. We need to stop apologizing and stop trying to explain racism, xenophobia, disablism, sexism, misogyny-

Alexandrina:

Transphobia.

Deborah:

... all of those things because they're not ours. Well, they're not mine anyway. Do you know what I mean?

Alexandrina:

Yeah.

Deborah:

They're not mine and they're not mine as a performer, and they're not mine as an artist, as a writer, as a director. It's just not mine.

Alexandrina:

I wonder if something, this one of like nuanced wisdom of your nephew is something that I see a lot around me in the practices of Black disabled artists. It's like in their understanding, there's multiple ways of being, because there has to be. There just has to be, we're constantly navigating so much. We're holding so much. We're expressing so much. We're constantly in negotiation with so many intersections of identities and histories, visible or invisible.

Alexandrina:

I think this is where we are. If we have anything in common, it does feel to be this kind of capacity for movement, internal or external. In a way I think of also calling out what does appear to be invisible to others, because I think of an experience like embodied experience, like you're saying, even around being misgendered that's like embodied experience of violences.

Deborah:

Yeah. The trading term now is microaggressions. People now can make money off microaggression training. I'm like, "You've got no idea. It's absolutely it's violence and it's constant. It's never ending." And even with people that you know. So people that I know who work with me or want to work with me or like my work or whatever, something will happen and I will respond to it. And the other person, which is usually a straight White man gets very angry and very irate with me because I haven't responded the way that they want me to respond, which is usually they want me to be violent and angry because the myth of the angry Black woman will justify that behavior.

Deborah:

It happened on a plane a couple of weeks ago. Some man was putting his bag into the overhead and all the tassels were all smacking me in the face. And I just put my hand up to just move it out of the way. And I was sitting next to somebody who I'm traveling with and he's White and straight and the man was White and straight. And the guy was shouting at me, "All right, all right, all right." And I just literally, I hadn't even said anything. I just put my hand up to make sure the tassels didn't smack me in the face.

Deborah:

And then afterwards when I spoke to my friend he went, "Oh yes, but what I saw in him was fear." And I said, "Fear of what? Fear of what?" And he spent a lot of time trying to justify that man's behavior towards me. And I said, "Look, he saw a Black man and thought it was going to kick off." And my friend went, "No, I don't think he did..." "No, he did. Trust me, I've lived this life 100 times over, that's what he saw. And because I was quiet, he didn't know how to respond to it. So his response, which was his natural response go to, which was 'Come on then, have a go.'" And I'm like, "I don't care. I mean, I'm sitting down in my seat. You snapped me in the face with the bag, you didn't even say, sorry, but it's my problem."

Alexandrina:

It comes back to be seen and not seen.

Deborah:

Yeah.

Alexandrina:

He didn't see you because his belongings were hitting air.

Deborah:

Yeah.

Alexandrina:

And then he saw, and yeah, responded aggressively. I'm sorry that happened.

Deborah:

That's not your fault. It wasn't you, was it?

Alexandrina:

No.

Deborah:

No, but I appreciate the apology but don't, because it's not for you to apologize. That incident, it's not for you to apologize, it's for them to apologize, and it's for them to own... And not even apologize, own it.

Deborah:

Own [crosstalk 00:24:59].

Alexandrina:

I don't want an apology. I want you to own your behavior.

Deborah:

I mean, we want... it's the thing, isn't it. We want the system to see. We want the way that the systematic oppression is unfolding to begin to be seen by those who are benefiting from the way that this is unfolding.

Alexandrina:

Exactly.

Deborah:

And that will include Brown people, Black people, White people, disabled people, non-disabled, feminists, et cetera, especially across the establishment of the arts, and for me theater, for you dance, but especially across the establishment of theater. I mean, the nonsense that came out the other day about, so many arts organizations being metal-strong and that created cultural diversity at the Arts Council. It made my stomach churn because it's lies.

Deborah:

And the fact that there are so many people inside these institutions who are benefiting from work by artists like yourself at the moment who are working independently, constantly trying to live hand-to-mouth, and they're being told that because they've employed somebody once, probably underpaid that person-

Alexandrina:

And on a short-term contract.

Deborah:

... on a contract, on a very short-term contract, they are somehow meeting the requirements of the only funder in the country where as an individual artists you can get money, it doesn't make any sense to me. And it makes me so angry. And people won't own that, won't accept that, won't acknowledge that, won't talk about it.

Deborah:

And I've started writing again. And I've started thinking about, where I want to put my shows because I'm a traditional text-based, almost classic theater aficionado. That's what I love. I love words. They excite me. They generate things in me. My words sometimes when they're read back to me, but when I read plays... When I was working in the Midlands doing piecework, putting together clocks or whatever, I was reading Bernard Shaw, and I was reading O'Neill and I was reading all these books and these plays and people would look at me very strangely and like, "I don't care." This was my fuel. And I fueled myself for so long with that, and then now I feel like all of the spaces that I wanted to work, all of the spaces that I loved, all of the spaces where I just naturally assumed I would be able to perform and present my work, none of them, none of them are open to me.

Alexandrina:

I think this is so real, isn't it? And actually, I don't think this has been said enough, that maybe every Black disabled artist goes through this process of disillusionment.

Deborah:

Yeah.

Alexandrina:

So as part of this healing, recovery, whatever, we also have to heal from this disillusionment.

Deborah:

And it's hard, for 10 years I didn't write anything. I just had writer's block and I couldn't write, which was my voice going again. Having spent 12 years creating my voice and all of a sudden it disappeared again, because in particular, disability shut me out. The Olympics came and all the people that hated sports and thought the Olympics were horrible and didn't like super-crips and all the rest of it, suddenly they were the ones who got all the money ironically. Ironically, they were the ones who got all the money. And I think that disillusionment is the biggest one, is the hypocrisy that I then had to live through and watch all this stuff happen.

Deborah:

And most of it not very good in terms of verse but there's no critique. So we're still in that place of, "Let the poor little disabled do their thing and let's not critique it." And now when I want to create work, when I think about... I wrote a play. The play I wrote when I was in the Tallow Writers Group was the play for the Olympics, was a play about two girls growing up, one disabled, one non-disabled sort of tomboy, and how that relationship grew over sports. And I wrote it for the Olympics, and it was presented at the Young Vic as a read-through, but no one picked it up. Nobody picked it up, and that told me everything I needed to know.

Deborah:

So as a writer, as an artist, I'm completely lost and bereft, I have nowhere to go. So unless I go back to creating my own work, which of course people belittle, because you're not commissioned by... "Why aren't you commissioned by the Royal Court?" Or," Why aren't you commissioned by X, Y or Z or the National Theatre and..." "Well, I'm not commissioned by them because they don't see me, and when they do see me, I'm seen in the news and then passed over, but make their numbers look good. So when you then come a year down the line and say, 'What have you done this year?' They go, 'Oh look, we did this, this and this. Oh, you're great because you've met our criteria but the artists that you've used, I'm sorry, who are they?'" You don't even have to name them or present them in any way.

Deborah:

And that's where I am at the moment, is the struggle of I'm writing, I want to make theater, I don't feel there's anywhere for me to work theater in this country. I don't want to go abroad and become one of those, "Oh, I had to leave England to become famous," people. I'm like, I just want to make theater. Do you know? I want to write plays, I want to perform them, I want to direct, I want to work with collaborators who are interested in the stories I'm writing, which are warped and odd and very dark, very, very dark humor.

Deborah:

They sit in the Melbrook space of humor and the Tarantino's space of violence, but that's the work I like. That's the work I write. And it tells stories that... I'm not hearing a story of a Black disabled woman, anywhere. That story is not being told. That's not being shared, those narratives aren't in public space and public domain.

Alexandrina:

Or when they are like, I'm thinking about, Selina Thompson's Salt, I think they're extraordinary, and then they are still very few and far between. What is the relationship to writing that you value? The relationship to writing that you value for yourself?

Deborah:

Peace. Peace and joy. The peace and joy I get when I write or at the moment, there's a poem floating around in my head, which is about a love affair that was never to be for me. And I'm just liking that. It's a very painful experience that I'm reliving constantly, but I'm liking the fact that when I go to bed at night and try to sleep and don't sleep, but these words are running around in my head that I find peace. Because ultimately I'm an artist. No matter which way you cut me, like a stick or rock, I've got artists, artist, artist, artist, artist written all the way through me.

Deborah:

And that's been lacking for the last in particular four or five years, where I've just hunkered down into a sort of day job, but the peace and joy that come from that, the peace of knowing that it's still there and the joy of knowing that possibly it will resurface.

Alexandrina:

Yeah. I think that's really lovely to hear. I like what you said about peace. It's just this sort of... Because it's kind of... writing is solitary, isn't it? But you're right, it's also quiet. I hadn't really remembered. I wonder why it's all so quiet, even if there's like so much going on outside-

Deborah:

Exactly.

Alexandrina:

... even if there's just like someone else's in the other room, and I have two cats and they're like... fighting or whatever they do, sorting out their own little disputes in cat land or whatever, yeah when I'm writing it's like there is a level of focus and I guess a way like you were saying, of visiting all these lives that we've lived.

Alexandrina:

I'm currently writing a series of retrieval poems. I'm trying to revisit moments where yeah my body has frozen or been blocked, because I think when you were speaking about not having written for 10 years, I definitely experienced in the last four to five years, a real diminishment of voice. It's what, thankfully when I did the guest directorship with Disability Arts Online in July, 2019, I was somehow like riding the cusp out of, or like really trying to, and wanting to kind of resurface from this real inertia over words and language, just feeling like... What was it? Not that I didn't have nothing to say, but that there was almost too much to say that it was all getting caught in my... like really caught in my throat, and that was just in an overwhelming way.

Alexandrina:

So I'm trying to revisit these sites and rescue myself. I think again, these narratives that feel really important as a Black disabled person that, a different way of maybe understanding endings or understanding violences that our subjectivities and our subject hurt and our survivals aren't the ends of us.

Deborah:

No, absolutely.

Alexandrina:

That we're still present.

Deborah:

Yeah, absolutely. What you said about being stuck, the words being stuck, because for me it's fear. I mean, I don't know what it is with you, but what you say has never been said, or if it has been said, it's not been acknowledged. And when it is you saying it, this goes back to the activist. The very fact I am alive is a political act. The fact I exist, the fact I do the work I do are all political acts, and when everything about you is a political act, you are open to so much abuse and so much damage and danger and your control, the control of your larynx, the control of your words, how those words come out of your mouth, how they are used, how they are landed, how they're used against you, for you, which is quite challenging because I'm reliving my childhood because my mom's passed.

Deborah:

And I'm trying to think of all and remember the good things, the best of my childhood. And it's difficult, but I'm trying to really work hard to do it. And there are some moments in there that I remember, I'm like, "Oh my God, those are brilliant moments." And then I look into the world I work and what I want to do, and those moments aren't there. The moments of a five-year-old or a six-year-old or the young disabled person's not there, not visible in theater, not visible in television, not visible in film. The young, Black, disabled child who's an overachiever. We're never overachievers. We're always strapped to chairs in corners and bashing our heads against walls, that the normalcy of disability doesn't exist.

Deborah:

And that narrative is a narrative that, this is the first time I've said it because I don't feel able to say it really. It's definitely something that needs work, but I don't know if I'm the person to do it. I really don't.

Alexandrina:

When thinking about the original proposal to think through historical exclusion, we had spoken previously a little bit about archiving, and I guess the importance of acknowledging the scene. Also what we were talking around critical discourse or just networks and the fact that people are present, it somehow just feels nice to name a few people. So yeah, these are definitely people who've added value to my life and are really present in their articulations around their lived experience, making their stories really visible and have somehow, I believe are really marking their histories.

Alexandrina:

So I had Toni Lewis, Dehmi Nandhra, Priya Mistry, Selina Thompson, Jade Montserrat, Shereen Hamilton, Matilda Ibini, Marion Budge, Tony D. Pool, Ria Hartley, Brownton Abbey and Chanje Kunda.

Deborah:

I know nearly none of those people, so that's interesting. That's a bit of history for me to go and do. I mean, I've known one person, which is Maria Oshodi, and I named her and I will always name her because she kept on fighting and she sits head and shoulders above anyone else in terms of her creativity, but also her ability to fold her impairment and into her art. And to really make that sexual. In 2000, when the Transatlantic Slave Trade and again all the money was there, et cetera, Ruth Gould was at DaDaFest and she commissioned me to write a show about Harriet Tubman, who is of course...

Deborah:

I'd been told the year before there were no disabled slaves, and of course Harriet was a disabled slave. And Harriet is the classic example of she was placed in children's education. So there was a lot of song about Harriet Tubman, how she freed the slaves, but there was no story about how she was a business woman, the work she did at the end of own railroad, what that meant and all the deeper contextualization of the work she did. So it will always be Harriet.

Deborah:

Leroy Moore, who works in the States and Keith Jones, they work together. They sort of work on the Krip-Hop Nation work. Manford Sanchez is based in Germany and Bosco. And I'll talk about Bosco. Bosco's in Rwanda. He was one of the children I worked with when I went out to Rwanda two, three years ago and did a piece of work around the genocide with a group of Black, young, disabled Rwandans, who all of them born post-genocide, but they wanted to do some work around the impact it's had on them and being in Kigali.

Deborah:

And Bosco is now, he's a young blind musician. He's now 20 I think, he was 18 when I worked with him, so he's just coming up to 20 and last weekend, he performed his first gig, professional gig at Kigali Jazz Festival. And he's got an EP out, and I just think it gives me hope that there are young people globally... Because the other thing is the global diaspora includes disabled people and should include disabled people. So those are the people that I name as artists who make work and who are doing now what I hope is what's best for them, not what other people think they should be doing and not through anyone else's guise but their own.

Alexandrina:

Wonderful. Thank you.

Deborah:

Thank you.

Alexandrina:

Thanks for this conversation.

Deborah:

And you, very nice to meet you.

Alexandrina:

Yeah, you too and thank you too.

Deborah:

And to talk.

Alexandrina:

Yes.

Deborah:

It was very nice to talk.

Alexandrina:

Thank you to Disability Arts Online and thank you to Graeae.

Speaker 1:

Disability Arts Online in conjunction with Richard Butchins are launching a new podcast, '213 Things About Me'. The podcast will be available from the 28th of May, through all good podcast providers.

Speaker 4:

'213 Things About Me'.

Speaker 4:

I'm going to recount a story. It's a true story. I mean, as true as any story can be. Aren't all stories true in some way or another, from Anna Karenina to the Handmaid's Tale? They're all about truth in one form or another. This one is about a friend of mine, about her life and her death. About how she died and why, but more importantly, it's about how she lived.

Speaker 4:

Two, I jump up and down and clap When I'm happy. 12, I can easily forget to eat, sometimes for days in a row. When thinking about what it might mean to walk in someone else's shoes, imagine myself in someone else's shoes, which means that I'm still me with all my history, all my thought processes, but now I'm wearing a pair of very uncomfortable shoes.

Speaker 5:

I mean, they closed all the bookshops, but left open all the booze shops because they're essential and books are just trouble, at least until you need to find one, to figure out how to make more beer.

Speaker 4:

61, I don't know who I am. Until recently, I thought this was a phenomenon of the human experience.

Speaker 6:

There's a myth that autists can't empathize, but of course they can. The problem is figuring out what someone else is feeling from nonverbal cues, body language, facial expressions, and so on. Problems working out what someone else is feeling. Isn't the same as not feeling empathy for them, not at all.

Speaker 4:

62, I cannot under any circumstances do two things at once.

Speaker 4:

'213 Things About Me', a podcast about thinking, living and dying from an autistic point of view.

Speaker 7:

Visit graeae.org and disabilityarts.online for details of productions, events, interviews, opinions, reviews, and learning opportunities.