**32. Disability and…Confidence with Lachi**

**Intro**

Welcome to the Graeae and Disability Arts Online podcast 'Disability And...' - bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month, Disability Arts Online's Assistant Editor Joe Turnbull chats with writer, singer and disability campaigner Lachi, about her current project RAMPD and her other achievements. This podcast contains strong language.

**Joe Turnbull**

Welcome everyone to the Disability And podcast. This month, I'm joined by award-winning recording artist, songwriter and disability advocate, Lachi. Welcome Lachi.

**Lachi**

Hey, hey, hey!

**Joe Turnbull**

How you doing today?

**Lachi**

I'm doing quite well. It is a cold day, but my heat is up. Very pumped. So I am just watching the wind as it wafts by my window.

**Joe Turnbull**

And you're joining us from across the ocean today?

**Lachi**

Yes. Yes, I am in the great city of New York - the city that never sleeps.

**Joe Turnbull**

It's great to have such a guest from overseas and international...

**Lachi**

Oh, wow.

**Joe Turnbull**

...to grace our little podcast.

**Lachi**

Am I really international? First of all, New York is the only city that exists, so you are welcomed into my home. I'm just kidding! I'm just kidding!

**Joe Turnbull**

No, that's great. Yeah, I thought we could kick things off by just telling our listeners a bit about yourself and your background.

**Lachi**

Cool. Yeah, for sure. Well, I go by Lachi - she/her, black girl, cornrows. My hobbies are music, making people laugh, and talking way too much apparently (as you can tell). I also love turning my hobbies into careers, so my love for music turned me into a recording artist and songwriter. My love for laughing, turned me into acting. My love for talking turned me into a speaker. And my love for myself really turned me into an advocate. So I'm black, blind, daughter of immigrants here to the US from West Africa. I've had the pleasure of touring the world for my art, speaking nationally to representatives of the White House for my advocacy. But really, I'm all about just showcasing to the world that, listen, we're living in a world not made for us as people with disabilities. I had to run three times as hard to get where I am than my non-disabled counterparts. And that's why I do this, so that the next little "me" out there, or the next person coming up, doesn't have to run as hard to achieve the same goals.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah, that's so important to have disabled role models, I think. That is something we hear so many times like, how can you imagine yourself doing something if you've never seen someone else who kind of looks like you or has similar life experiences to you doing that thing.

**Lachi**

Well exactly. You know, we all talk about people having vision boards, and putting that "Rolls Royce" up on your vision board or that "big house" up on your vision board. But if you don't have anything to envision to become - if you don't have that picture of yourself successful that you can look at and point to and go 'I want to be that' - then how can you really plan for that ending? And so that's one of the things I knew I was missing as a young child wanting to do entertainment, and wanting to really be a big thing out in the world. I just didn't see folks that looked like me or had my situation do what I was doing. And so having to carve it is difficult. So it would just be nice to have, you know, awesome musicians or awesome actresses, awesome politicians with disabilities, just commonplace.

**Joe Turnbull**

That's definitely something we'd like to see a lot more of. How early have a love is music for you? Has it been in your life for a long time from the get-go as a baby? When did you first kind of get into music?

**Lachi**

Well, you know, I was into music very very early on. I wasn't the most social child. I just didn't really understand how to interact with other children. Being in that weird position where I wasn't fully blind, so I didn't have the dog or the cane so I wasn't put into that box; but then I also wasn't fully sighted, so children didn't understand how to interact with me. So, I turned kind of inward, and I turned to my music to get to know myself really. But also as an outlet to express myself to others in ways that just my words weren't able to really do. Because I just couldn't find confidence anywhere else. I didn't really find confidence at home. I mean, my parents weren't really equipped to handle a child with limited access to the world, being immigrants. I didn't find that confidence at school either, because the education system just didn't know how to encourage folks, at least while I was there. But I did gain the courage, sort of, through performing music - whether it was at school talent shows, whether it was playing the piano in my college dorm, and just hearing people go, 'Wow, you're really good'. As more people recognised me for my music, my outward confidence level grew. So I just continue to pay homage (if it were) to the spark of music that was inside me. In fact, it was because of music that I moved to New York City and really pursued running forward in that light. And, really, music has now just propelled me to this amazing movement of advocacy, from co-chair of Grammy advocacy at the Recording Academy, to sharing my music, sharing my... just everything that I do, my whole journey has all really been bolstered through music. Being open about my blindness was bolstered through music. So it's just always been a part... like has always held my hand and been there for me. And combining the confidence of my music with the acceptance of my blindness - I didn't really know that that was the burning fire in me at an early age until now, that this was the mission. And I think something in me always knew it, and that's why music was just always a heavy part of my life.

**Joe Turnbull**

Do you feel like you found your people or a community within within music as well? I know that, for example, a lot of UK disabled artists and activists who came through the disability arts movement, I know that for a lot of them a gateway was Punk music, where they found a level of acceptance there that they wouldn't have found in mainstream society, if you like. And, obviously, I know that it's from a different lineage maybe the music that you make, but I wondered whether that's also a common experience for you as well in that sense?

**Lachi**

My musical genre doesn't necessarily go hand-in-hand with my disability. So the genre isn't really what defines my music, actually. I'm truly a vocal artist at heart. I like moving vocal stacks and painted harmonies - that's really my forté. I started out with acapella in college - so I want to give a big shout-out to Mezzo, which is an acapella group I made here in New York City for performing my arrangement of 'Genius' mixed with Beethoven, which we actually won an award for! Go ahead, girl you're awesome! But I started with pop, sort of almost alternative pop, because my parents lived in a white bread town really, to just not mince words. And so that was the music I knew. And then we also moved to a more urban town. And I was also moved into looking into more urban style music. And I felt most comfortable when I started doing house music, EDM music, pop dance trance, because I could just be myself. I felt I could be myself. I mean, it was a personal journey, and anyone who goes through my musical journey will see the differences. But I ended here because I currently focus on EDM vocals with pop-centric melodies, because I felt that I could say whatever I want, go through and unpack my issues, but also be cheeky, clever and fun with it. I don't have to hide behind the many layers of other genres.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah.

**Lachi**

So that's why I like sticking with EDM.

**Joe Turnbull**

It's funny because in terms of the crossover between the advocacy and the music, I can think of examples of people who kind of advocate for certain issues or are quite outspoken who are musicians, and like EDM is usually not the kind... it's not those kind of people often who are advocates and also make electronic dance music, right? It's like it's often, kind of, hip hop artists or R&B or... you know what I mean?

**Lachi**

Social conscience?

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah.

**Lachi**

Well, you make a good point, because part of my advocacy - a very integral part of my advocacy - is actually my life journey. And it's why I tell people about it every time I speak on it. Because of the society I was raised in, I didn't know and I didn't understand that I could be confident. I didn't know that I could be bold, I didn't know that I could be funny, I didn't know that I could be smart and yell and have fun doing it. And it wasn't until I grew into it that I realised I could say and do whatever I want however I wanted to do it. So when I say that I started out with sort of a pop-alternative bent, those who listen to my earlier things would see that more lyric-heavy "Let's talk about our issues" type of Lachi. But as we progress, you watch as my confidence blooms - as it turns into, "hear me, see me" into "fuck you". [Laughs] That's part of the advocacy. Because I'm at a point now where I want to be mainstream vocalised. So I want my music to be accessible to a wider audience, to a radio listening audience; as opposed to those who are looking to be inspired, are looking for social change. I want to hit the airwaves and the ears of those who don't... who aren't familiar with the fact that they need to hear this message. And so that's why I tap into a musical genre that I know hits a lot of folks. And while you're dancing, while you're getting your heart pumping, if you can be graced with this message and have it infused into you while you're having a great time, I think it sticks.

**Joe Turnbull**

I read that you majored in Economics at college, and that your parents wanted you to pursue Mathematics in some way. How did your parents react to the career move into music?

**Lachi**

Right. My parents they came to America, struggling with culture, struggling with racism redlining. Here in America, redlining is when folks try not to sell you homes in generally white neighbourhoods. And so dealing with all of that as an immigrant, the goal is to just hurry up, build a legacy from scratch, to bring back home, and do what you can to catch up to the game. So with such a lofty goal what else could they do with a child who society deems isn't even worthy of accommodation? They had seven kids, I was just one in the mix. They were Catholic! [Laughs] And so look, they assumed I'd be tied to my mom's hip for the rest of my life. Hence the name Olachi. So my name is Lachi, which is short for Olachi, which means ring of God. So they assumed I'd be a ring on my mother's finger. And when they saw I could be something else... Honestly, I really can't blame them for wanting me to go the stable path - get a job, make sure I you know... And I do longingly watch now as parents today... they'll dump their savings and pack up and move and do whatever they have to do to get their little child (that they see as a star) to be famous, or to pursue their Paralympic dreams. And I look at that, and I go, 'Wow, that's amazing', but that was just not... my parents didn't have that luxury. They didn't have the knowledge, especially as immigrants. So anyway, all that being said, there was something in my spirit that drove me for greater things than the desk, for sure. And... I don't know... they did push me in one direction. It was smart because after college, I did get a desk job.

**Joe Turnbull**

A different kind of desk that you work with now? A mixing desk!

**Lachi**

Now I'm in the studio at my desk! But yeah, and honestly that skill of management, that skill of interpersonal this-and-that, the ability to be responsible really was necessary. And it's good that it was nurtured into me at an early age. But even while I worked my government job (I worked for the US Army Corps of Engineers), people were like, 'She's singing at the desk, and she's not just humming, she's actually like really good - what is she doing here?' And eventually I had to make a decision: do I keep doing what my parents want, do I keep hiding behind what I really want to do, do I keep trying to keep secret this burning passion that is like larger than I am? And I really had to follow it. And I really had to kind of plug my ears to any naysaying, and just wait till folks got on board, which they did.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah. And I think the alternative that you look longingly at as well, you know, has its drawbacks - that pressure of having parents believe in you, that's great. But, I think if they focus all their energy into that and then it doesn't work out, that's also really hard to deal with.

**Lachi**

That's true. It's like, 'Go live my dreams now!'

**Joe Turnbull**

For sure. The grass is always greener, as we would say.

**Lachi**

That's true.

**Joe Turnbull**

But they must be full of pride now though, right?

**Lachi**

Yes, they're definitely... I mean, at the end of the day... I just called my Mom the other day, and I was like, 'Hey, Mom, I spoke with the White House about my advocacy', and she was like, 'Oh, well, that's it - you're done! You did it! You win! You won the world!', and I was like, 'Thank you, I will decide to take that as a compliment'. No, they're definitely super proud. I mean, all of their children are successful doctors, lawyers. And I was like, you know what, I am going to be the best at the the field that I choose. And I think they see that.

**Joe Turnbull**

So you've worked with some big names. Not that you're not a big name yourself.

**Lachi**

Thank-you! More people need to say that!

**Joe Turnbull**

But I just wondered if you had a favourite collaboration? Or a particular story that sticks out? Or someone who was particularly fun to work with? Or the outcome came out and you just loved it? I mean, I know it's always hard to pick when there's a glittering list.

**Lachi**

I can never say a favourite, because then another person will say, 'Really? I thought we had fun.' [Laughs] So, I mean, I've had the opportunity to work with tons of really great artists, from around the globe, really. From Uganda, to Germany, to Russia, to Australia. You know, a really fun collaboration that I did was actually with apl.de.ap of the Black Eyed Peas. So he and I hooked up for a Foundation Fighting Blindness collaboration, and he himself actually is legally blind, which I did not know when we met.

**Joe Turnbull**

Oh, I didn not know that.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah, he's legally blind. And he and I got together, and we were both like 'You! You! Oh!' And we put together this amazing song called 'Dis Education', speaking on how society needs to kind of like chill out with this charitable model of disability. I don't need your charity, I need you to invest in the proper tools so I can play the game on an equitable playing field. That's kind of what that song was. And it was fun to put it together with someone else in the game that identifies that way. And it's not like apl.de.ap is a staunch advocate for blindness, but he doesn't necessarily hide it either. And so it was really nice to be able to work with him on that. I also recently worked in a writing camp with Alicia Keys and her friends and family and folks and her whole team. And we did a thing with Mercedes Benz, which should be rolling out soonish. And, you know, Alicia Keys is a black female that plays the piano- obviously, she was an idol, so to be able to... and you know a real one! You know, when people were like, 'Who do you look up to?' I was like 'Alicia Keys!', you can literally look at past interviews and... I hope she doesn't find them because I'm embarrassed. But yeah, working with her has been awesome. And I remember when I was a kid, I said something along the lines of like, 'I know I made it when I work with Alicia Keys', and so I guess I made it? I guess I made it, yay! So that's another really great one. But I will say, listen, I have worked with a ton of really amazing people, and not just artists. Just some really great organisations, that just knowing them have made me a better person, and a stronger person, and more accepting of myself and how I communicate with others. And to be able to teach folks and watch folks learn, and to be able to learn from folks has been a lot. So working with the Foundation Fighting Blindness has actually been really fun. There is two different ways that you can look at blindness. Some folks go, 'We don't want to look for a cure', other folks go, 'We want a cure'. I say, 'Look, you can love your body and get implants, it's fine'. So I learned that through working with the Foundation Fighting Blindness. I've worked with, RespectAbility, I've worked with folks at the Ford Foundation, I've worked with folks at C Talent, which is one of my talent management agencies. And I'm just learning tons and tons and tons, and so I don't even want to focus just on the other musical collaborations. I mean, just so many collaborations I've had have been so growthing. Growthing! [Laughs] If that's a word!

**Joe Turnbull**

Nourishing.

**Lachi**

Nourishing! Thank you. See your English, right? So you guys know proper English. [Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

As a journalist, I like to think about words sometimes for sure. [Laughs] I just do that, I just sit here all day and think about words, that's all we do.

**Lachi**

[Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

Whilst you're off touring the world and changing the world, I'm sat at the desk...

**Lachi**

To each our own.

**Joe Turnbull**

So, it flows quite nicely from that, certainly talking about some of the organisations you worked with, and that collaboration, which... yeah, I have no idea. But, how do you think that the music industry, specifically, is still kind of excluding and really failing disabled artists?

**Lachi**

Yeah. So firstly, the numbers don't lie. Around 70% of music professionals don't disclose. - they'll risk their lives for fear of not getting a gig. Or the even more angering statistic that 1 in 5 musicians have to cancel a gig when they get there due to inaccessibility. I mean, they have to spend money and then cancel! A lot of times you prepay your backing musicians, or maybe your flight, or you just spend a ton of money on promotion, and then you have to cancel your gig when you get there! But even more upsetting to me... I mean, these are actually UK figures. Which brings me to my second point - there are no large-scale or peer-reviewed studies focused on this topic in the US. There was an Annenberg Institute study done by Dr. Stacy L. Smith, which was great. It was on inclusion in the music industry with respondents from over 100 of the largest music firms, organisations labels. And they were talking about race, and they were talking about gender, and they were talking about everything but disability. And it's like disability is not included as a diversity in the mainstream. And until we see disabled folks in the green room, in the boardroom, in the staff room, on the main stage and behind the scenes and are taken into account in research as a diversity, we will not see massive change. I you know, here at RAMPD (and I'm not I know we're gonna get into RAMPD in a little bit), we're here to really change that narrative, and to make the music industry sort of better at seeing diversity in disability.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah. I mean, it doesn't shock me at all, but, you know, for the last few years there's been a diversity conversation around the Oscars or whatever, and disability is always left off the thing. It's like, so disability just doesn't count! Even though it's one of the biggest minorities in a way in most countries. And it's the least well represented in most fields, it seems anyway, and yeah it's still left off the agenda. It's constant frustration.

**Lachi**

Yeah. Hollywood is a lot further than music is. Like entertainment, television, even... Well, obviously, the corporate world takes very serious measure to make sure for accommodation. Now, I will say that a lot of this is very ADA. So we have a law called the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), and a lot of things here in America are very ADA-focused. So as long as 'we tick all the boxes, we should be good, right?', but we want to be included, we don't just want you to tick off boxes. We want to feel like you want us there. But I will say corporate America is doing what it can to make sure that this is known. Hollywood, TV, entertainment - they're starting to try to get this off the ground. But, you know, music isn't there. The music industry isn't there. The performing arts industry just isn't there. Firstly, there are numbers in corporate America, there are numbers in Hollywood. These aren't the best numbers, but at least we have some numbers. So like, let's say for instance, in in America in Hollywood, 2% to 3% of lead roles are portrayed as someone with a disability. 26% of Americans have some form of disability, yet only 2% to 3% of roles in broadcast television are people with disabilities! Oh, and here's the kicker - only 10% of those 2% to 3% of roles are played authentic, so most of the roles are just played by regular non-disabled people.

**Joe Turnbull**

Can you imagine that for some other diversity characteristics? Not even last century, right, It's like the previous century!

**Lachi**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't even want to go there. Listen, in Hollywood, there are organisations - like I mentioned RespectAbility - they're helping place disabled consultants and plan authentic representation in Hollywood. We also have an organisation called The 1in4 looking to place disabled folks in the background, as PD'S and Production Assistants, we have folks like C talent and Gamut Management looking to get disabled actors work. There is nothing like that on a professional and competitive level for disabled artists and music professionals. So, we'll have some programmes that operate to help folks in a sort of more charitable model way - you know, let's help parents get their children to have instruments or let's do things in a very charitable, 'Oh, the poor disabled musician, let's help them try and be inspirational and reach for their dreams'. But I'm not here to be inspirational. I'm here to make money, right? And that's what we don't have. We don't have organisations, we don't have numbers. And so Hollywood is much further along. When you see a musician struggling to make it on the stage, it's not inspirational. It's not, 'Oh, wow, that musician struggled to get on stage and made it, I'm so inspired'. No, you're witnessing social discrimination. That's what you're saying 'Aww' too - 'Aww, social discrimination is so cute'. Because the venue is not adhering to the law to the ADA, and we have to do what we can despite that oversight. So instead of your response of 'Aww, that's so cute', you really should be saying, 'Who is my local politician that I should be writing to? Who at the venue should I be speaking to? Should I continue to attend this venue? That's not accommodating 26% of the population?' That's the response you should have. So when I walk down the street with my cane and folks are like, 'Oh, wow, she made it across the street with her cane'. No, your reaction should be 'Shit, should we have the traffic lights fitted with sonic warnings so that someone like Lachi will know which directions the cars are currently going?' That's the reaction you should have, not 'Wow, you're so inspiring'. I'm getting on my soapbox here. [Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

That's totally fine. There's all well-known slogan in the UK Disability Rights and Arts Movement, which is 'Piss on Pity'. I've always liked that one! [Laughs]

**Lachi**

Piss on pity! Well, I don't know, because you guys in the UK use piss in all sorts of different ways. Are you saying get drunk on pity? That's not what we want to do. But yeah. No, I hear it. I hear it.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah okay, why don't you tell us a bit about RAMPD, and what it is and what you're trying to do with it.

**Lachi**

RAMPD in its truest form is basically a coalition of professional and accredited recording artists, engineers, producers, composers, songwriters, sound techs, you know, live sound engineers, and music professionals like agents, journalists, publicists, managers, with disabilities or deafness or neurodiversity or chronic illness or rare disease - all of those differences. And we're here as a resource for the community to get on the right side of the disability movement. So here in America, and really globally, we had an international incident with George Floyd, where a cop was just being very aggressive towards a minority and it was caught on camera, and then everyone turned around and said, 'Oh, my goodness, let's all care about black people'. And I don't think or believe that the disability community should have a George Floyd for disability incidents before folks start paying attention to disabled artists. And that's really what RAMPD is - we're here to help the music community get on the right side of this conversation before it's just out of control. So we're in talks with some of the biggest music organisations in the country, like the Recording Academy, for one, Women in Music for two. We're running around and we're being very loud and being very vocal, and telling folks, 'Hey, disability is a diversity and should be part of these DEI ( Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) conversations. We are a professional community and we have members. We're a place where people can turn to and say, 'I don't know where any music professionals are, I don't know where any composers are with a disability, I don't know where any engineers with a disability are, for maybe a gig, maybe a project or just to consult'. We're here to be that resource. And it's funny because we put out a call. And we got over 200 responses right in the beginning for professional, disabled musicians. And that's really empowering and encouraging, because one of the biggest things that we do for ourselves here within the disability music community, is be a community. We get to find each other, we get to no longer be alone, isolated, and feeling like we're the only one struggling to get this word out to get this message forward. And so that's really explosive. It's the first ever, and so we're all super gung-ho for this movement. Something awesome that we were recently able to do at RAMPD is we hooked up with this record label called Blonde records, and they put on an awards show called the Wavy Awards. And the Wavy Awards are an award show that highlights historically excluded artists like LGBTQ, non-binary, race - all of those historically excluded artists. And we wanted to make sure that they included disability. So they consulted us, we told them yea or nay to some of the things they were doing, and then at the end we said 'How about we work-in self description?' - and what self description is just a really quick, 'what do you look like?' So I usually say "black girl,cornrows" (because I'm a black girl with cornrows). And it doesn't take up too much time. There was a bit of a kerfuffle - people didn't know what to do, they were scared or embarrassed. But when the award show finally happened, the entire night had self description baked in. So when people were going up and announcing or presenting, they also self described and it was so empowering! Throughout the night people were using it not just as self description, but they were using it to empower themselves, express themselves, and show off themselves. So instead of, 'Hello, I am an Asian woman with a white shirt', they're sitting there going, 'Hey, I am wearing a badass sexy dress that I just got at Kohl's, and I have really high heels that make me two feet taller than I originally was, and I'm wearing a Ninja Turtle bra'! And so, everyone was just so empowered - it was an amazing night! And it's things like that that RAMPD is doing, really making the world a lot of fun. Because at the end of the day inclusion is fucking fun - you get to be a part of something new and unscary. And you get to expand yourself, and expand your worldview. And that's what RAMPD is here to do for the music industry.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah, I think that's a really great point about the fact that it's fun. I think so many movements that want to make a change - whether it's disability, race, any any issue - like making it fun and making it something that people want to be involved in, and not like something that's not fun and it feels kind of alienating to other people, it's definitely a good tactic to bring people onboard, right?

**Lachi**

You made a good point - "alienating" is just not how you get people to do what you want to do, and so it's just not my brand of advocacy. I just love to show people how fun it is, how awesome disability culture is. I mean, anyone that follows me sees my glittery canes and me walking around in my heels in my case. We're here to have fun, and we're here to let other people want to be a part of that fun.

**Joe Turnbull**

Who are the disabled musicians or other artists that you admire, or maybe you've worked with or maybe you haven't worked with and you'd like to work with?

**Lachi**

Yeah. I'll probably just take this opportunity to shout out just RAMPD members: Like songwriter and violinist Gaelynn Lea - she's amazing! Stephen Letnes - he's a composer on Emmy-nominated films. James Ian - he's a songwriter and actor. We have an Namel of 4 Wheel City - he is a rapper, he is a paraplegic due to gun violence, and he has spoken to the White House to the UN, he's been on HOT97, he's everywhere. Ryan “Gooch” Nelson - he is also a quadriplegic, he moves his hands and he uses it to play slide guitar, he is a touring artist. We have Mandy Harvey, she is a Deaf artist. Eric Howk of Portugal, the man - he is a drummer in a wheelchair. Cola Boyy... And anyone who's listening, look all these names up and add them to your playlist. They're just amazing.

**Joe Turnbull**

They'll thank you later.

**Lachi**

Yeah exactly, thank me later. Hell yeah!

**Joe Turnbull**

That's great. Yeah, maybe we could get a Spotify playlist together of all those to accompany this. You never know.

**Lachi**

Yeah, don't make... I am holding your feet to the fire! [Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

So, I think listeners will already have got a sense of just how varied and successful a career you've had in lots of different ways. Are there any standout achievements that really make you feel proud? Or maybe there's small moments that actually aren't the big glitzy things? I don't know.

**Lachi**

Being here - that's fun - I like being here with you. [Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

Oh c'mon! Flattery will get you everywhere, right? [Laughs]

**Lachi**

Um, no, it's just been it's been a fun last couple of years. I would have never imagined the awesome things that we're doing, like talking to the White House Office of Public Engagement - that was fun - being recognised by the Grammys, seeing my name in the New York Times or Forbes or Variety, or for my work making the first ever accessible music award show! So, I think though mostly just proud of myself for accepting my disability. As a black immigrant in music, as a woman, as a person with a disability. None of these things would have happened if I didn't really accept who I was; accept some of the hardest parts. You know, it's kind of like when you steal cookies from the cookie jar and you hide it from everyone, and you just can't go back to sleep until you tell everyone to get it off your chest and just be okay again. So, really coming out about my disability and no longer hiding behind the fact that I could pass as non-disabled. Owning it has really been the best. And it's gotten me the ability to do some really cool things like this Youtube series that we're doing - Off Beat - and we just won an award for that! Yay! But really, to be able to go off and do the Off Beat series is me going and running and just doing ridiculous things as somebody who's going blind - scuba diving, skydiving, hanging out with random politicians and celebrities and just catching it on YouTube. I wouldn't be able to do anything like that. I wouldn't be able to tell my story if I wasn't true to myself about what my story is. And I think that is what I'm most proud of. I think that has been my biggest success.

**Joe Turnbull**

Is there still any "Everests" out there to conquer for you? Is there still stuff you'd really like to achieve that's still on that mood board? That Lamborghini?

**Lachi**

[Laughs] Um, well like I said, we're doing something with Mercedes so I'm waiting for them to mail me my Benz! But I don't know who's gonna drive it! But so I am... Look, I want equity for musicians with disabilities on a mainstream level. You know, I don't want it to be something on the sidelines. This is why we're talking to folks like The Recording Academy, The Kennedy Centre - the big dogs - because I want equity for musicians and music professionals with disabilities at a mainstream level. It's a small but fast growing movement and folks are responding eagerly to it. But we want to amplify disability culture, promote disability inclusion, advocate for accessibility, win some well-deserved visibility on a major scale. In a more imminent level, I think I really want to complete these studies that I keep complaining about that we don't have here in the US, concerning accessibility - whether it's physical, social, technological or whatever - and disclosure. My manager, Ben... oh, let me get into my whole team in a second here, but let me finish what I'm saying. So, of course, I'd love to see more blind badass's on broadcast and streaming series'. There's not enough authentic casting there, so I want to see more of that - especially as it pertains to blind folks. We're starting to see more deaf actors and actresses, we're starting to see more actors and actresses in wheelchairs with neurodiversities, but blindness has always been rough. And I understand for a lot of folks it's difficult to find actors that are blind, it's usually what the concern is. And a lot of folks are afraid of, 'How do we work with the script? How do we help them out on set?' But we are here to guide you. We want to be successful and we want to be seen, so come find us at places like C Talent, at places like KMR Talent, at places like Gamut Management, at places like Zebedee Management. We're here and you can find us, okay, don't act like you can't. I want to see all events. I want to see them include accessibility as it should be, and it should totally be commonplace. So that's what I want to see. But speaking of my team, I mention my manager Ben Price because he just actually did a study that you guys covered on disclosure in the music industry, and I was really really excited that he was doing that. So, my manager Ben Price as you guys know he's blind, legally blind. And then my talent rep who is Keely Cat-Well, she has a non-visible disability. My literary agent, who is Stephanie Hanson, she is deaf, unilaterally deaf. My accounts manager, his name is Arthur, he has a neurodiversity. My assistant JD, he is legally blind. And my two interns, Sal and Jade - Sal is blind, Jade is deafblind. And then the person who does our voiceover for our YouTube series, she is legally blind. So my entire team has some form of disability, deafness, or neurodiversity, because I came out and I said, 'We need to hire more people in this industry', but I was like, 'I need to start with my own team'. I was like, 'I'm good at so many things', and the reason I am good at doing a lot of this stuff, and better than the team that I had, was because I was just a great problem-solver. And sort of that light bulb moment came and was just like, 'Oh, I need to get more problem-solvers'. Folks with disabilities are just outside-the-box thinkers, problem solvers. And I'm like, 'I'm gonna surround myself with these fucking guys because they know what the fuck they're doing'.

**Joe Turnbull**

It's something we say all the time. That's why it's great working with disabled artists. We think disabled artists are some of the most creative, innovative people out there. As an artist you have to be creative and a freethinker anyway, but disabled people are so used to solving problems because, unfortunately, their day-to-day is full of fucking problems because the world is not built for them. But we're slowly changing that I hope.

**Lachi**

We are.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah.

**Lachi**

We are. And disabled art is beautiful. It incorporates that lived experience. I got to team-up with a ton of artists on our disability NFT project - folks like Rachel Gadsten, folks like Clara Woods. And just to be able to see art from different perspectives that aren't the "same-old shmay-old", because we're well outside-of-the-box because we bring our lived experience to those things. It's such a beautiful thing. And I'm so hopeful. I'm really hopeful for the rest of society to really be inspired. I mean, truly inspired. Not that bullshit "pity" inspiration. [Laughs]

**Joe Turnbull**

Yeah. That's good to hear because it's been a rough couple of years for everyone, but I think (as ever) the disabled community seem to bear the brunt of when anything goes wrong. So I think a message like that - of positive change - is really nice to hear.

**Lachi**

Yep. Yeah. I mean, like I said, I'm super-hopeful. There has been an amazing response to our efforts at RAMPD, and folks are considering DEI in the music industry more just in general. So to be able to shout and make sure disability is part of that conversation is really the missing puzzle piece, and it's starting to happen. And so I am actually very hopeful for change, or else why do it. I'm not running towards an unending goal. I see that there is room for this movement, that it's growing, and there's a problem that people want to solve. And we're here to solve it.

**Joe Turnbull**

I think that's a great place for us to wrap up, so thank you so much for your time today Lachi. It was a really great conversation. So thank you for joining us on the 'Disability And...' podcast.

**Lachi**

Thank you for having me guys. Check me out - Lachi Music. [Spells] L A C H I M U S I C.

**Joe Turnbull**

Yes.

**Lachi**

I will be there.

**Joe Turnbull**

Thank us later, when you check it out.

**Lachi**

[Laughs]

**Outro**

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