

Horizon Radio: Co-creation

Transcript

Hello and welcome to Horizon Radio. horizon is a new international performing arts showcase at the Edinburgh festivals. Horizon Radio is a chance to delve deeper into the practice of the showcase artists and get to know them better. What you are about to hear is a conversation about the making of 'Peaceophobia' by Common Wealth, Speakers Corner and the Bradford Modified Club. Presented by Fuel. The speakers are Mariyah Kyat, producer of Speakers Corner, and Casper Ahmed writer and performer. The host is co-creation specialist Andrew Westle. We hope you enjoy listening

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Andrew: hello everyone I am Andrew Westle and I'm joined by two amazing people for what will be a very relaxed conversation about 'Peaceophobia' an amazing piece of site specific work that was created in the city that will soon be the City of Culture and that city is Bradford. We're going to have a conversation about the work, we're gonna talk about Bradford, we're going to talk about how the work was created and how work with its roots so strongly in Bradford translates into other environments and sparks different types of conversations.

First we're going to talk a little bit about the process or the context of co-creation and so for those that might not know co-creation is used in a UK cultural context as a term that means collaboration in different ways and often refers to working in non-hierarchical ways where we might work the communities in different forms of collaborations, particularly ways that shift power, resource, ownership and encourage all individuals in the process to activate their own creativity to bring forth their ideas and their passions. And it's often I guess seen as a space where changes made through the development of authentic and sustained relationships.

In this conversation I am joined by Mariyah who is one of six co-directors of 'Peaceophobia' alongside Casper who is one of the writers and performers. And to start this conversation I started by asking Mariyah to share a little bit about what the show is about.

Mariyah: 'Peaceophobia' follows and explores the stories of three young muslim men from Bradford and it talks about car culture, Islam and Islamophobia and it's really just about always being able to share the reality and what it's like as a young Muslim man in this age and what it's like to pop passenger the stereotypes that are placed on you from media. And just really what it means to be a young person living in today's day and age.

Andrew: Thank you that was wondering Casper if you could maybe tell us a little bit about Bradford as a city because I realised that a lot of people listening to this might not understand where Bradford's located and if you could maybe just introduce a little bit about the context that this piece emerged from.

Casper: OK where is it located, it is actually located in the north of the country. we are a city that is next to Leeds not far from Manchester and Lancashire area. So we kind of in the heart of West

Yorkshire and Bradford as a city I feel it was growing up, it was and it probably still is, not looked at in the brightest of lights. Although I would say and I think a lot of people who have grown up in central Bradford and around will say that Bradford has come a very long way from where it used to be and what it used to be. What was the last question that you asked, sorry?

Andrew: What was growing up like in the place? Can give us a sense of Bradford and growing up in Bradford? I've heard that % of the population is under, which makes it one of the youngest cities in Europe, which is kind of I think really, really incredible. And also by - % of the population will come from non-white backgrounds as well which is really quite incredible in terms that diversity of the city as well.

Casper: Bradford is a very, I'd like to say now It's become a very fruitful city in sense of exactly what you said it's a city that's multicultural. It's got a lot of multicultural within it. It's very diverse as a community and the younger generation now more than ever before are really becoming the beaming lights of the city the kind of ideas that they are coming out with it wasn't and the kind of resources are now available in Bradford weren't the same resources that possibly my generation or the generation that was before me had access to.

And I think obviously when we're relating it back to the show and how we has a link with what we've come along with 'Peaceophobia' a lot of is to help people understand the different narratives that we've faced over the years so that could be from the kind of backlash the youth face around their own passions around their own hobbies to then look at for example islamophobia and the stereotypes that we've faced as people of as people of Bradford.

Especially after you know the 9/11 took place and then we have the Bradford riots and the many different things that took place in around Bradford and the negative media attention that we had and how we kind of affected us. But then how we've not allowed it to break us. We've kind of allowed it to make us and we've come very far. I believe we've come a very long way from there. So that's kind of what 'Peaceophobia' is kind of demonstrating alongside, obviously our three characters and the personal stories that we bring to the table.

Andrew: Yeah, I was wondering can we talk a little bit about some of the themes in the work because I think for me personally, I think art and culture is that space for having dangerous conversations and interesting conversations. And as you say kind of shining a light on different people's experiences and this piece kind of fits in so many themes that does so much and I'm just wondering if you can kind of give you know an audience an expectation of what they might discover?

Casper: um, I'm gonna I think I'd start off by saying that you'd that the audience are gonna discover a very... The level of authenticity within the stories themselves is going to be pretty high in the sense that, I can't really speak on behalf of the other two actors, but me for one the stories that I share within 'Peaceophobia' are all true, non-fictional stories that actually happened to me. Um, yes, we don't obviously share the full story of the whole ins and outs of exactly what happened etc. But we

kind of, I wouldn't say I sugarcoat but I would say we've kind of summarised the entire story into a short kind of snippet and we can demonstrate that in the show.

With regards to the stories, where do I start from? What the audience is really going to expect I think they're gonna read it. I think they can expect. I don't know what to expect because you see I don't well, sorry. I don't know what they're going to expect because you see up until now the kind of feedback that we've had from people who have come to see the show, they've I don't think a lot I don't think any of them expected this show to be the way it is. And to hear the stories that they hear. And to kind of obviously being one of them things that you kind of take a person who's watching the show through many different kinds of emotions and feels.

And I genuinely believe 'Peaceophobia' does that, it kind of really goes, it has a fine balance of different emotions throughout the entire Um sure and I for one as a character who's playing one of the three characters that are there I'd like to think that I really do go into my own feels as well sometimes. And yeah, it's just it's a very authentic piece of work and that's why I believe in.

Andrew: Thank you so much. And Mariyah I was wondering if I can bring you in here as one of the directors, you know, one of six kind of people co-directing this show and thinking about you know, all these different elements and just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the process because this was a work made with a number of different partners and a lot of different people that you know from all different walks of life. And yeah, if you can just give us a bit of an insight as to how the work was made.

Mariyah: Yes, the idea of 'Peaceophobia' was first a campaign and it was created by a female youth collective called Speakers Corner and we're based in Bradford and we do campaigns around issues that are important to us as young women, that happen in Bradford that are international and one of the conversations we were having is around just really the car culture in Bradford and then how it's portrayed in media and like the certain stereotypes that with the car culture and with young Asian of men in Bradford and how maybe that they've got all these cars who like all different illegal activities and we just kind of want to show that's not always the case.

So we did a big car meet in the city centre of Bradford and was really just about really just showcasing what is the car culture and how it is really and just letting people be part of it and it was really beautiful event. There was spoken word poetry. We had a powder paint fight and I think from there we realised there's so much more in this idea and as an event it had so much impact and we affected, we were like talking to someone different people.

And just being able to open up the car world to everyone, to Bradford really was just so impactful and then Common Wealth were like why isn't this a show and then it became a show and because Speakers Corner is where the idea came from it just made sense for us to still be part of the whole process it going into a show.

So from Speakers Corner, there were six co-directors and it was just us first sitting and having the conversations around what do we want 'Peaceophobia' to be because we had the car culture and we knew we wanted it to be focused around young Muslim men of Bradford and then we just kind of got talking to how like there's a lot of like institutional racism that the young men face. And the idea also sorry came from punish a Muslim day, which was when they were leaflets made and they were posting people's houses and you got certain points for certain Islamophobic attacks, and there was a

lot of fear like for us but a lot of fear for the men in our families because then the ones who have a lot of public facing jobs, they're going out they already, you know, have they already like are victims of like racism and abuse. So this was just adding to that and there wasn't a lot of coverage of this in the media either and all of that I think just kind of put it together and were like this is what the show needs to be and that's really how 'Peaceophobia' came about.

Andrew: Yes, such important topics. I mean institutional racism something that in a UK context is very rarely spoken about actually and kind of the over policing of working-class communities, Black and Asian communities is you know, really well understood by those people that live those experiences but doesn't have that broader and important conversation that kind of needs to happen.

I'm wondering because this piece is so site specific and so much of like Common Wealth's work and that kind of stuff is really very site-specific and this one takes place around cars in you know, a car park kind of setting. I was wondering could you talk a little bit both of you just about the reception of the work in Bradford and then maybe we'll talk about, you know, when it's toured and gone to other places and what that experience has been like but let's talk first about you know, it's experience and it's kind of premiere in Bradford. Do you want to start Mariyah and then Casper you can join in.

Mariyah: In Bradford, I think it was just received, it's such a bad for show. You know, the actors are from Bradford. Common Wealth is based in Bradford. And I just think it was really well received because people saw it and they just kind of felt represented and they were like, yes, this is the money, this is our brothers, our cousins like, our dad have been through this. And it was just I mean every audience I think every night everyone just loved it and I think there's certain things about when you're a young Muslim person and there's so much media and there's so much happening but like all representation isn't good representation and you don't always see yourself or you don't always like connect with what you're seeing and I think for 'Peaceophobia', it did allow people to connect because it is your hearing real stories. It's real people. These aren't professional actors. They're sharing their stories things that have happened to them things that you just think. Yeah. This makes sense this happens. And it's not done like it's not really over dramatic or overdone is just quite raw and quite real. So I think it's very easy to connect to and for people of Bradford where we have massive South Asian populations it just felt like yes, this is our story. It might not be great and there's not great parts of it, but this is our story.

Andrew: And what's that experience been like for your Casper you know performing in your own city like you know the receptions from people in your circles, friends, family. You know, how was that for you?

Casper: You want to know the honest truth? I don't like it.

Andrew: Yeah?

Casper: And I think my reason that's yeah laugh at me know okay, my background of all of this. I was very, not in a negative way. I don't want it to be, you know art to be, you know, I think now I'm a strong believer of 'Peaceophobia' being a really tremendous piece of work. But for a person who's never ever seen a theatre show in his life. To get, and I'm camera shy. I hate public facing. I hate the, I just I don't like the limelight in general. For me, I was very obnoxious. I said no from the get go. I said, it's nice. So when I got first got approach with regards to this piece and the whole idea of it. I just shut it down it's not me. I'm not doing it. Somebody else we'll get somebody else and then it was a matter of one of the other actors called Ali who kind of really pushed me and he said look, okay forget about this show. We're gonna take you to a show we'll show you what theatre is. We'll show you, we'll introduce you to the whole concept see whether you like it. And so then he took me.

And we went to watch a show again which was created by Common Wealth. Well, I think the production company was Common Wealth. Well and I was, I liked it it was something new. But again, I think I didn't like the whole concept because it was something out of my comfort zone. I've never done acting before I've never done public audiences etc. So it wasn't my cup of tea. But fast forward from there, it did take a lot of convincing from the co-directors from Easy and all the other, all the other people who are working alongside us to kind of bring me onto the table and say look Casper Are you really not gonna?

And but then I think with time as we progressed and it's about site specific, I'll never forget the first show that I ever did. Um, I was I think for the last for the two hours up until the show started. I was itching. I was I was like really trying to hold it together because my nerves were kicking and I wanted to just run like I wanted out I didn't know I especially in the last two hours. It's not happening. It's unreal, and I was you know, it was just a whole I don't know what was going through but I guess it was expected. I mean after the first show when I wouldn't. I was nowhere near as confident as I am now about the show now. Now I'll happily do it. I can't wait for it to be in Edinburgh and Bradford again and going to London and all the rest of it all the other places these guys. I can't wait for it and I Now I'm big I'm in my feels about it. But let's just say at the beginning for me personally. Because it was on my comfort zone because I've never done acting never. Well, I've never been to a theatre so never mind acting. It was yeah. It really took me off guard.

Andrew: Thanks for sharing. I think that's really profound. I think sometimes you know, it's about that exposure and this assumption of what theatre is and trying to connect with something that you know, and then to be in it I think is so amazing the fact that you're touring in this work and it's been popping up all over the place now as you said, so that's really, really incredible. What's it like doing in a city that is not Bradford where you don't know the people in the same way or you're contributing something new to that area. Does that feel different to you?

Casper: No, I kind of enjoy, I enjoy it, I wouldn't say kind of I really do enjoy it. Because it allows people to learn what the mainstream media doesn't show and me being a person who if I feel that I've even educated one person from the show about how life really is on the other side of the fence. That's my job done. I've been a character throughout the show who I've looked for criticism. I've looked for constructive criticism at the end of every show I've asked people they genuine opinions and apart from one particular person who was a book writer himself everybody else was in awe of how this came together they didn't expect it to be the way it was they were they felt that they went home educated and I think for me that's where it is.

This shows that for me personally once I got into the feels of things and once I got to understand what the mess even when the first finished show was beginning to come into light and I was really trying to get my head around how are we gonna get, you know, like such bizarre topics like islamophobia, you know, racism. You've got a car culture, young Muslim men, but how is somebody gonna put this whole thing together, but now that is come together. Well, I'm genuinely shocked. I'm really shocked and this is coming from me.

I think every, every single time this shows moved places from different from going from Bradford to the Manchester to the Norwich Festival to then Brighton I just felt like it was getting better and better each time. I felt that this show was it was I never came into this show about me in the first place anyway, but now I feel more about the fact that it's really about everybody else and it's got it's nothing about me. I've been through these and I yes, I am a living example of these stories and yes have I had traumatic experiences and am I still going through them till today? Yeah. But the fact that I'm in a position now where I can educate people about how it is like to you know how it is to live life on the other side of the fence. I think that's really important because it will possibly save the future generations to come.

Andrew: It does and it's really profound. Thank you for sharing. Mariyah, just a final observation when we were talking yesterday you mentioned a different like different conversations this work has started outside of Bradford, and I was just wondering if you wanted to share one of them with us before we wrap up this conversation.

Mariyah: Yeah, I mean like it's a very Bradford show and we've been touring now for a while and I think one of the things you realise with touring is that these issues aren't Bradford only like they happen and it's relevant everywhere and when we've travelled and when we've gone places and you talk to the audience afterwards, you realise, one there's car culture everywhere. I mean, I know nothing about cars. It just goes over my head but you realise there's this massive car culture everywhere and it's such community and it brings people together.

Also these talks of like religion, Islamophobia and how much it affects people in so many different ways but it just happens all over. Like when we went to Norwich we ended up connecting with the car club there and just like connecting with them and seeing what their issues were and I think that's why we do it to start conversations like Casper said like it is also educating people the shows are fun and it's like, you know, all the actors are so charming, the scripts great, the show's great and it's also we're talking about really intense subjects like Islamophobia, like racism and but it's also just really fun and educational but not in a way that's like in your face and scary and I think when we tour that just connects with everyone and even if people can't relate to the topics they still learn and they still like watching and they're still almost like responding in some way.

And I think that's what it's been massive thing for us touring because you never know how people are gonna react. I mean, we I think we kind of knew Bradford it'll be great. But when we go elsewhere what will the reaction be. I think we've also been surprised a few times that everyone's loved it, but people do react in different ways, but is educational and it always connects with people somehow

Andrew: Thank you so much. Both of you for such a rich conversation. I think we could talk about all the different themes in this work for a really long time. And I think it's a really great example of co-creation and I think there's a lot of companies out there that use language of co-creation and kind of approach communities as if they're lacking something, a real deficit mindset. Where this work really emboldens people and encourages people to put themselves forward and put themselves in the work and I think this work has got so much to say in all the different contexts. So thank you both and all the best with the future tours and endeavours with this piece as it goes out and further and further in the world.

Casper: Thank you very much for having us.

Mariyah: Thank you very much

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This recording was edited by Jason Crouch. Horizon is commissioned by Arts Council England and delivered by Battersea Arts Centre, FABRIC, Fierce, GIFT, MAYK and Transform.