

## Curating Cabaret, Curating Queerness

*The following is an edited transcript of an online conversation staged in summer 2022 as part of the Live Art in Scotland project at the University of Glasgow, supported by the AHRC. To watch the full original exchange, visit: <https://liveartscotland.org/index.php/curating-cabaret-curating-queerness/>*

### MAKING 'EAT THE RICH'

#### **Stephen Greer**

To find our way in, I know that the *Eat the Rich* event at Lemon Tree was the thing that you've worked on together. How did that come about? Did you know each other beforehand or.. who's the person to start us off? Hanna, were you already working for Aberdeen Performing Arts at that point, or did that come around some other time?

#### **Hanna Louise**

Yeah, so I was working at Aberdeen Performing Arts. My role was a yearlong position through Western Jerwood. They fund people from working class backgrounds to have a yearlong position in an arts organisation, which was an incredible opportunity. And I was getting towards the end of my year, and I was told that I could do a project and have anything that I wanted and put something on at the Lemon Tree in Aberdeen. So my first thought was, I want to have a queer cabaret. And my boss was really keen, and they were like, Yeah, go ahead, you can do that. And so I thought about, you know, maybe that I didn't have the experience that I could just pull this off on my own. And before, maybe a few months before, Annabel and I had met because we had been.. do you remember what that festival was? It was a kind of like a digital delegation of people, kind of queer arts people who were watching cabarets based in Canada, and maybe.. maybe remind me what that was.

#### **Annabel Cooper**

Yeh, that's right. We'd actually met before though, Hanna. We'd met [at] an LGBT health and well-being event and I only mentioned it because maybe it's interesting to the discussion, in the context, because it was like a grassroots event for bringing together LGBT people who weren't running LGBT organisations. And you turned up and I turned up during the pandemic, I think it was about connecting people during the pandemic digitally. So we'd met there and then Karl got in touch with me - Karl, the wonderful Karl Taylor from Buzzcut - got in touch with me about attending this.. being part of this delegation to the Canadian cabaret festival. And I had said, Do you know Hanna? Get in touch with her and invite her along as well. So yeah, that's the very detailed backstory.

### **Hanna Louise**

I remember, I know the one you're talking about and I say we met at - it was called Transform, the Transform delegation - because that was the first time we kind of spoke to each other. But um, thank you for that. Thanks for sending Karl along because that was awesome. But yeah, so I reached out to Annabel and they very kindly agreed to kind of take on a sort of a mixture of kind of a mentoring role and a co-producing role. And we kind of came up with the concept and everything together. And yeah, and then that's how we got Myfanwy involved. And it just kind of went from there.

### **Stephen Greer**

Myfanwy, did you see.. was it a conversation? Did you see an open call? Did you know Annabel or Hanna?

### **Myfanwy Morgan**

Yes, through the Sanctuary Queer Arts young company. That's where I'd first met Annabel through and I'd done Threads with them, filmed a piece with them called Threads. And then Annabel had heard about the fact that I'd started trying to do more drag [as] Richard Hascock and she reached out to me. So that's essentially how I got in and then met Hanna for the first time there as well.

### **Stephen Greer**

Nice. So what was the.. tell me something about the event? What was it and what was the impetus for doing it? Knowing that and that you have a background in in making space for work that doesn't get a platform in Aberdeen and doing a little bit of work with Hysteria, but the opportunities of doing that work at the Lemon Tree - was there a sense of looking across the Lemon Tree's programme, and going 'there's a bit of a gap here'? Or was it a bit broader than that, of looking across Aberdeen, and going 'there's a gap here'?

### **Hanna Louise**

It was absolutely [about] looking across Aberdeen and thinking there's a gap here. I think there's not a huge queer scene in Aberdeen: there's little things that pop up from time to time and there's a lovely grassroots art scene and there's lots of queer artists doing awesome things, but there's not.. We lack a kind of coherent queer art scene in the way that Edinburgh and Glasgow have. So I thought it would be a really nice opportunity to kind of bring something that we don't really have to Aberdeen and I think Annabel and possibly Myfanwy, also you can attest to this, the audience reaction was.. even people coming up afterwards saying that they really needed to see a show like this, and it meant a lot to them, and they wanted it to come back.

## **Stephen Greer**

I saw you nodding there, Myfanwy. Did that match your experience of it?

## **Myfanwy Morgan**

Absolutely, it was my own stage premiere, as well, for Richard Hascock. I'd done all of this stuff during the pandemic, that's where he was born, so it was all online. So it was amazing to have that experience where you could evidently tell that it was also a crowd people that.. not just because they were coming up and saying, 'oh, it's amazing', they're also saying 'we're reasonably starved of this kind of thing'. And so 'thank you so much for making it' and I'm like, 'I just, I just came along, talk to them. I was just tired and came along, talk to them'. But there was a lot of 'just please make more of this happen'. And I was like, 'believe me, I'll be on your side, on the picket [line] for getting that done as well'. Because, yeah, it's.. A lot of the time, I'm a rural artist as well - at the moment, don't want to be for long, but I am. And it's a case of finding that everything is central belt. So, you know, it was big for Aberdeen because otherwise you've got southside of Glasgow, and then that one area with like three gay bars in Edinburgh. And so yeah, that was my experience too: lots of fanfare, lots of happiness, lots of queer joy.

## **GOING ONLINE**

## **Hanna Louise**

I think there's so much to be learned from the online shift that happened during the pandemic, I think, especially around access, because prior to the pandemic, I was working with Hysteria, and we basically were volunteers. So there was two of us, we run Hysteria, and the nights were great. But I never really thought of it as, you know, it wasn't my job. It was just something that I did because I loved it. And then when we went through into the pandemic, people were saying how much they missed it. And we actually did get funding to do an online event from the Equality Network. And that was really nice - I think that was maybe the first time we'd had funding.

So we had a digital event, we made some zines, and we realised we were getting orders for the zines from people all across Scotland, I think even someone in England. And yes, it was nice to kind of expand the reach, but it really did get me thinking about, you know, access and who could come to our events, because we didn't.. because we had no budget, we weren't even being paid, we weren't really able to think of access beyond, you know, 'the bar we're doing this is on a level surface, and we're going to make it a safe space'. And obviously, these things are important, but there's so much more than that. And so I think now that I'm kind of emerging from the pandemic with a paid arts job, I can take that and.. I think what I've really taken in is a desire to learn about access and opening myself up to learning from people who've got a lot of lived experience, and that kind of expertise professionally as well. But I think that's the main thing I'll take from the pandemic.

### **Stephen Greer**

I've had many interesting conversations about access over the last.. maybe over the last couple of months, doing and working towards events like this, digital conversations, and then things in person and trying to think about when hybrid practices are useful, when stuff could or should be purely digital and when an in-person encounter is necessary. I don't know how you feel about this, Myfanwy. I know that.. I think when we [originally] chatted, you talked about the significance of digital. The suddenly expanding landscape of culture that you could access or take part in seemed to be really significant.

### **Myfanwy Morgan**

I'm a huge advocate for multiple reasons of more online resources, but I'm also doing my best... I'm at the moment applying for Birds of Paradise youth consultancy, because I would love to be able to give the, like the perspective of.. I think there's still a lot of people that feel it's kind of either it's online and digital or is in person. And then it's a bit like.. I know it's fiddly. It's so fiddly to be able to do it but there are plenty of professionals that have been trained to do it, to have hybrid kinds of events, where you have live performance but filmed or streamed live, that kind of thing. Again, I know you need a good internet connection, not everything falls into place. But there is that kind of possibility. There are also still events that realistically might actually work better not just in an online format.

But it's still kind of ingrained in people, from the history of live performance. There's a debate constantly going on where it's like, 'well, it's no longer live if it's being streamed, if you're watching it through a camera stream, it's not live, it's not like theatre'. And you're like, where I'm like, sorry, it very much feels like I'm still there, and I have the ability to be there. But even more so for people that genuinely do not have the access to even get into the building, not just people that are chronically ill, and don't have a lot of energy a lot of the time. So it's a discussion that's very, very important to me.

### **Stephen Greer**

It's interesting because I hear some people [who are] anxious.. maybe that's too strong a word, but trying to work through their attachments and their feelings [in relation to live theatre], like the actual feeling of being in a live space and at a live event. And I wonder whether there's heightened stakes with a space like cabaret, with all of these sorts of interactions or responsiveness. There are forms of [interaction] which are possible online, and indeed forms online that you couldn't do in person. But I think there's like maybe [an issue where] with some art forms, people are a little bit more anxious than others, just because the idea of bumping into someone, of it being a loud, noisy room, is a part of their mental image of what the art form actually is.

### **Myfanwy Morgan**

I totally get that as well. But it's, it's a case of.. usually it can be done. you know, you have streaming these days where people are able to communicate just through typing. And I know that my first several drag shows being online, there was things like tipping abilities through that. There were comments like, you know, 'yass, queen, slay', just all the way through it. But that's essentially the same as having a whole crowd of people being [there], screaming that in a room.

### **Stephen Greer**

But it's so interesting to hear that because.. when people are anxious, I do think about that attachment and maybe that fetishisation of the live event because.. as you said, it's not like there aren't like analogues or even brilliant alternatives which can be done online. But also knowing that those [club] spaces aren't necessarily accessible spaces, like if you're neurodivergent, or if you're in recovery. Bar spaces can be really difficult to hang out in.

### **Hanna Louise**

I think also if you don't have a lot of money, I think it's a massive privilege to be able to get to events, and I think especially if you don't live in the central belt or in cities where these events are happening. If we can make a digital offering as well, the reach is potentially much bigger. And I guess that's the point of live art, isn't it? To reach people and connect with people, especially queer art. So yeah, I totally agree with what you're saying, Myfanwy, I think it's really important that we can try and do this kind of stuff.

### **Annabel Cooper**

For me when the pandemic hit, and there was this big rush, obviously, to keep creating, keep earning, keep making stuff, keep things seen, keep connecting, I think it was definitely the DIY kind of artists spaces, platforms that did it most successfully, that were able to kind of pivot in a light way, in a light touch way, and take advantage of all of the things that we've discussed. You know, platforms like Queer Theory, for example, who created these amazing cabarets using Twitch TV. Completely self-taught, self-learnt, just made it happen, you know, within a couple of weeks: just learning it and creating these platforms for artists who.. when the nightlife economy had disappeared and needed to keep earning, then these [events] were real lifelines for people. And certainly, I would say, from what I saw, it was these more grassroots platforms that did it much more successfully than the more established institutions with more money and resources behind them.

## DRAG & SPOKEN WORD

### **Myfanwy Morgan**

I don't think it's like from an organisational level that people go, 'we need to have drag and spoken word together', it just does tend to happen. Because spoken word is a fantastic way of putting out a platform and how you feel about it, or how you feel about something in your own life. And then drag also. I mean, yes, there is a tendency for it to lean towards trans people using it as a platform and a way of discussing their own identity. And that doesn't mean that there aren't cis people that use it too. And so then you've just got two different ranges of platform that people are [using to talk] about different emotional aspects, or even being able to channel those two together [to] talk more eloquently or more in depth about their gender identity, gender discovery, through not only seeing drag and a gender performance but also being able to speak about it.

But even if it's nothing to do with gender, it just seems to be able to.. I don't know, is it just that drag brings people in by usually how huge it is, how big it looks, and especially from drag queens, but drag kings as well held or drag things? All of us are flamboyant, whether we like it or not. And so we dr.. what's the word I'm looking for? We pull people in for attention. And then of course, we'll talk about something, whether it be completely silly and off the charts or very serious, political, governmental lah-dee-dah. Maybe more organisations are looking for that, now. But I think they are inherently coming from people just going 'these two things make sense to me', and tend to bring in more attention. And I mean, is that not what anyone wants as a performer?

### **Stephen Greer**

I saw you Hanna, you nodding a bit there, does that reflect some of your [experience]?

### **Hanna Louise**

Yeah, well, I think when you were talking about the two art forms being about self-expression, I think that's kind of what it comes down to. They're very open art forms. I don't have much experience of working with drag artists, prior to the cabaret. But I have quite a strong background in spoken word. And what I've noticed is that when you kind of host a spoken word event and curate one, it's about holding space for people to share parts of themselves that they they want to share publicly, but maybe they haven't had the chance [or] this space to do so like before that. So people use spoken word to talk about all kinds of things that are really personal to them, as you said. But also things that relate to kind of wider society and what's going on. I mean, spoken word started - I think it was the kind of the 1960s, it was the American civil rights struggle - and since then it's kind of become this thing popping up in cities all over the world. And Aberdeen has a lovely spoken word scene that I think has been going for a good few years now and I've been really fortunate to be part of that.

But yeah, it's a kind of art form [where] you don't need any money to start, you just need to turn up with yourself and your story. And if you find a good spoken word night, then the audience will be receptive and you will feel welcomed and you'll feel like you.. there's a real sense of belonging, I think, as well at these kind of events. And I can imagine that it's like that with drag as well. It's a platform that makes you feel almost like home. So I think that's what's really nice about these art forms and it's definitely because they came from the grassroots. That's why they're so powerful and that's why they have the ability to connect with so many people

### **Stephen Greer**

Annabel, did you have any thoughts about that? It's interesting thinking about both of those forms as grassroots forms and also about their capacity to address both the personal and the political, depending on what the artist or an audience is interested in.

### **Annabel Cooper**

Yeah, absolutely. They do. They are kind of natural fellows and and I agree with what Myfanwy and Hanna was saying about them being direct forms of self-expression and connection and cheap, easy to mount, easy to put up. You know, you don't need much to create a drag performance or a spoken word performance. And, yeah, there's loads of amazing opportunities at the moment, within the drag scenes within the central belt, I'm not so familiar with what's going on out with the central belt. But it's really incredible how many platforms there are now, the venues that are out there, the nights that are out there. And drag itself is un.. what's the word, you can't define it, it's undefinable. Drag itself – within that bracket – also encompasses so many different art forms as well. And drag artists themselves are multifaceted and bringing in all sorts of skills and all sorts of practices, spoken word being one. They're musicians, they're visual artists, they're costume makers, they're singers, they are, you know, everything you can imagine. And I always believe that - no matter what anyone tells you - there are no rules for drag, and really anything, anything goes and anything is possible. And it is it's really incredible to see the health of the scene at the moment, it's really brilliant. And, you know, it's an art form that's not formally funded. Yes, it's achieved mainstream recognition and success because of the [TV] shows that we know from the States. And that's helped. But this ecology exists and is run by artists, grassroots artists. And some - a few - make it into the mainstream. But it really is an amazing kind of culture that exists and [is] run by the individuals that are involved in it.

### **Stephen Greer**

I have this on and off conversation with a friend about what would happen if the field of live art was funded in the same way as dramatic theatre or opera. And now I'm sitting here thinking, what if drag in Scotland had the same budget as Scottish Ballet? What would happen to it? What else might artists do? But also, how would it transform [the] grassroots nature of it?

### **Annabel Cooper**

I think we're definitely starting to see - from my own experience, and my own networks, I'm sure it's happening out with that scope of understanding that I have - but I'm definitely seeing artists and producers and programmers within the drag and cabaret scene, queer cabaret scene who are making that step towards being formally funded. And that's really encouraging because it shows that the arts funders are valuing these art forms. And, you know, their value is.., it's just obvious how valuable they are both to the culture itself, or the individuals that enjoy that culture and enjoy that art form, but also in the way that it inspires other art forms and inspires more established art forms. You can see that in the big theatre shows that are happening on the big stages. That's undeniable. So individuals like Queer Theory, I'll mention them again, who got Creative Scotland funding during the pandemic to put on a queer cabaret, a digital queer cabaret. Amazing to see that. And more recently with Shut up and King which is a platform for developing drag king performers who are really thinking about how to put support frameworks in place for drag kings to develop their performances and also to encourage programmers to programme drag kings. And that's funded by Creative Scotland as well by the Create Inclusion fund. It was amazing to actually see that kind of more formal institutional resources making its way down to more queer art forms and drag in particular.

## **CURATING QUEERNESS**

### **Stephen Greer**

It's interesting, Annabel, hearing you talking earlier about creating a platform or maybe a context, as much as about directly programming or commissioning artists. [Programming artists is] obviously an important part of it because it lets people eat and pay their rent! But there's this other sort of development work going on and I think there's a little bit of resonance maybe, Hanna, with what you were saying earlier on about creating space for this kind of work [at spoken word nights]. And I think I'm becoming more interested in the wider sense of 'space creating' or artist development which has a far more kind of conversational or collaborative exchange built into it.

So I'm interested in your sense of what queer performance curation looks like, or what a queer relationship between producers and artists look like? Maybe in your dream world? Maybe not what that looks like right now, but whatever would be the ideal circumstances for curating queer work?

### **Myfanwy Morgan**

I was ironically thinking it was something along the lines of that the other day, though it is a big question. But I was thinking around the Fringe because a lot of my friends have been having.. a lot of me and my friends have been having conversations about the Fringe and queer

performances within it. Because my Facebook timeline, all my different social media timelines, let's face it, are as queer as possible. They are all the queer artist development opportunities, all of the queer performances that are coming up. And I was like, It's weird because I'm looking through the online stuff for the Edinburgh Fringe [and] there's not anything highlighted, you know, that these are queer shows you can go to see. And maybe that should be the case? I guess it might feel weird to some queer people to highlight [the work] as such, when a lot of queer people just want their performance to be what it is, as a performance standalone. Not feeling that it needs to be signposted.

But I was right in the middle of the conversations with my friends saying, 'No, you shouldn't signpost it because [queer artists] really just want to feel normal', or 'yes, signpost it because it gives us more attention, [makes it] more likely to sell tickets, and it helps queer performance collectives'. And I thought, 'well, I guess you could do a wee bit of both'. This is not me trying to say, you know, 'hire me Edinburgh Fringe society', which I've worked for as a young consultant a few years back now. It's not me going 'I can solve your problems'. But it is an interesting conversation with people - surely we could try a bit of both. Like there'd be a section, not signposting every single queer show, just things that [are] maybe more to do with relevant social questions at the moment. I know there's quite a few shows in the Fringe at the moment, probably due to *It's A Sin's* revival of the discussion on AIDS. There are several shows like that. And it can be not a signpost specifically for AIDS, but for queer historic issues - and joy at the same time. I wouldn't personally want it to be just a page of 'here's all the sad queer stories'. But yeah, that's a discussion. I know that's not really an answer to you. But that is something that's been going on in my mind at the moment in relation to one of Scotland's biggest performance platforms, the Fringe.

### **Stephen Greer**

It's that question of.. what's the curatorial gesture in making a community of practice intelligible? What frame do you put around it? And as you were saying, what's the balance between that kind of form of visibility, that conditional form of visibility, and the desire for people to go 'my work is just my work. The vocabulary that I use around [the work] is important but not the totality of that work'. I don't know if you have sort of those discussions.. Thinking as producers, Annabel and Hanna, if this runs around in your head sometimes, [the question of] how you choose to frame particular projects? Whether it's for the public or it's in approaching funders, [the question] of what frame you put forward in articulating the value or the place or the audience for a given kind of work.

### **Annabel Cooper**

Just in response to what Myfanwy was saying, I know that Josie Giles - a couple of years ago, maybe at the last pre pandemic fringe - created a hashtag that she was encouraging trans artists to use or if people saw a show that was by a trans artist, that they would use this

hashtag. I'm not sure if she's doing it again. But there's obviously, you know, there's this desire and need, I think for the community to categorise or support, [or] put a supportive framework [that] connects people, to create a community of practice, as you say, Steve, around these artists and these shows within such a huge, scary, terrifying programme. And of course, there's the Fringe of Colour initiative as well, which does a similar thing.

But in response to your question, Steve, I think speaking as a co-director of Sanctuary, what we're all about is creating a very queer-centric space. So what we do is we say what we do on the tin, it's about amplifying LGBTQI plus voices, and our development opportunities, our events, our workshops, they're all about doing that, and bringing LGBT people coming together. And we've had a brilliant, brilliant response to that since we launched and we also have a lot of people coming to us saying, Can you help me to develop this thing, this idea, this film, this play, this event that was put on, because I wouldn't do it? Elsewhere, I wouldn't feel that I could do it, I wouldn't feel that it was the kind of space that I could take a risk on this? Or that it could be my true authentic self. So I think LGBTQI plus specific, queercentric, queer specific space - be that as festivals, or as performance making spaces or development spaces - are really, really important. And people are asking for them and needing them.

### **Stephen Greer**

Hanna, did you have thoughts about that, I saw you nodding again at different points to what folk were saying.

### **Hanna Louise**

I was just nodding to affirm what both of you said, I think it was when Myfanwy was talking about 'do we be explicit? Or do we not?' I think that's a really interesting question. Because you don't want to kind of, you know, make a queer work just a queer work, because it's so many more things about that individual person. I think though, in relation to what Annabel was saying, when Hysteria started, we were originally like, 'we're a women's performance night' because it was in response to the over saturation of white men at open mics, doing covers of Wonderwall. And we're just kind of like, where's our space?

And then, really quickly, within the first month, we were like, oh, but then we need to also include non-binary people and trans people, because, you know, they're not being represented at your standard open mic. And the question was kind of like, well, how do we word it? Because if we call it a women's open mic, that's not going to let people know it's a safe space. And then we were like, 'women and non-binary'. And then we were like, women, non-binary and if we say trans then are trans men excluded? So eventually we landed on women, non-binary and gender marginalised. And the wording was really clunky, but we really wanted it to be clear that it was an inherently queer space, because it was [centred on] marginalised

genders. And so we ended up with this really fun space that was a mixture, you know, you would have cis women, you would have trans people, everyone was welcome. And obviously, cis men were welcome too and they just didn't have a place on the stage for that particular evening.

But I think what I realised pretty early on was that you do have to be explicit if you want something to be a safe space, and for people to know that they are welcome and that is for them. You have to say, I think, because there's a real risk that people might think, well, I don't know if it is for me, and the risk is maybe too high to go along and find out if you're from a marginalised group. So I think there's something nice about being explicit and saying this is a queer space. And from someone browsing the fringe website, I'd like there to be a kind of like queer arts page because I would like to just be able to sign up for all the queer shows without having to do the research..

## THE SWEET SPOT?

### **Stephen Greer**

The last question was the awkward question that I put at the bottom of my email. I've been thinking about the place of live art and queer work in relationship to grassroots activity and also to institutionalized practice, whether that's building based work or whether it's organisations with regular funding, and thinking about where experimental work or work that takes risks sits in relationship to the two of those, particularly given that a lot of resources are often attached to organisations but a lot of the liberty to take risks seems to be [found] in grassroots activity.

The awkward question is, what's the 'sweet spot' between the complete freedom to do what you want, because you're doing it off your own back, and then the security or resources of working with a large organisation where there may be a bit of a trade off in the kind of risks that you can take, because there are strings attached to that money? I was laughing with a friend and saying, 'is the sweet spot for queer performance being in the lobby of the theatre or in the street just outside? Like, you can run an extension cable to steal their power, to get your amp running'. It's a difficult question but do you have a sense of.. where's the happy place in between those possibilities?

### **Annabel Cooper**

It's a difficult question, isn't it? I think everyone in this call is kind of treading that line a little bit. And everyone is or has experience as a grassroots maker, but also being able to access resources and support from institutions. And you can see that across the sector, many many artists are doing that. And the cabaret drag spaces, clubs spaces as well, let's not forget them - the performances happening in Scotland's clubs at the moment are really spectacular and amazing. Nights like Shoot your Shot. Artists like Shrek and Frankie. Those spaces are so

vital. And I think the artists themselves need those spaces as we keep saying to take risks and try out new things and develop their artistry and evolve their artistry. But being able to access the resources and support of those more established well-resourced structures are really important, as well.

I think the artists that are doing both are able to take advantage of developing new ideas, developing new art forms, trying things out, and being inspired in those more grassroots spaces – and then also being able to elevate their work and take their work to bigger audiences, larger audiences, through those more resourced and established spaces. I'm thinking about artists like Craig Manson with *Gay Boys* going to be at the Fringe this year funded by Made in Scotland - a fantastic, really uber queer piece of work, which I had the pleasure of seeing at Tramway but also snippets of that in their work previously as a drag [performer], as a cabaret performer. Artists like James Ley, who's got play also at the Made in Scotland showcase this year at the fringe which is called *Ode to Joy (How Gordon got to go to the nasty pig party)* which is about a young queer man getting to a sex party in Berlin and also features a DJ called Simonotron who has run a night called Hot Mess for 10 years in Glasgow and Edinburgh. So we're seeing these grassroots queer art forms popping up at the Fringe funded by the Scottish Government through Made in Scotland, and I think through those amazing individuals that have been able to traverse those two spaces.

### **Stephen Greer**

And then maybe there is no sweet spot. Maybe it's always deeply, deeply contextual. And I suspect it is. But I don't know your feeling about that, Hanna, whether that's been working in a grassroots capacity or working for an organisation, if you are reaching out from either side, to try and create a space in the middle?

### **Hanna Louise**

I think what Annabel said earlier about traversing two worlds, almost, as kind of a start. I mean, I don't know if I'm the best person to answer this, what with Aberdeen not having such a big queer scene. So my evolution from Hysteria to working for an organisation has been that.. the great thing about my job is that my role is essentially to bring in the grassroots scene in Aberdeen and communities in Aberdeen and to connect with them and bring them into the venues and that's that's lovely. But there's not so much of an established queer scene which is why with Eat the Rich it so happened that Annabel in Sanctuary, with all those amazing connections, was able to connect me to artists like such Myfanwy that I hadn't met before. So I'm not sure I'm the best person to really offer that perspective.

But what I can say is that the two organisations that I have had dealings with in my short career, which is Aberdeen Performing Arts and Jerwood Arts, have given me as an individual a lot of support, and I have really appreciated that and I can see that there's a real meaningful

effort going towards [working with grassroots activity] within the confines of what organisations can do. And there are limitations. Sometimes that is not amazing for artists who want to have total creative freedom but it feels from my perspective, in those two experiences, there has been a move towards better engagements with the grassroots and really wanting to incorporate [grassroots] viewpoints and experiences in a meaningful way. But that is such a small, you know, sample size as a researcher, you'll know that doesn't make.. that does not make an argument. But um, that's my two cents.

### **Stephen Greer**

Yeah, that's interesting. But I wonder about this field, just because of the number of solo artists or freelance creatives, about trying to extrapolate out from what works at the level of the individual to designing something which might sustain a whole extended community of practice, when people might be doing radically different things from each other. How do you strategize, go from that individual experience - which is so important, which each of you shared - and then expand it so it's accessible to a really wide range of people across Scotland? Working in rural spaces or towns. How do you upscale what you've learned about that individual relationship?

### **Annabel Cooper**

I think that Hanna is actually really good person to answer that question, because I think she's kind of doing it, you know. You did it through Eat the Rich, and I think you used an opportunity that you were given through an established venue [and] arts organisation to offer an opportunity to artists who might not normally have it. It was a well-paid gig. It was a well-paid gig coming out of the pandemic, and it was well supported in terms of being accessible as well. There was somewhere to stay overnight, there was money for food, you know, so all these things made it an attractive and well supported opportunity for artists. And Hanna reached out to me and Sanctuary to make those connections to queer grassroots artists working that we knew. So I think that's a great example of traversing those two worlds and making connections between those two worlds. And then you could arguably say that, you know, the legacy of that is really fab in that Aberdeen Performing Arts want to continue to put on cabarets, they've seen the value of the work, and they want to keep doing it, and they want to support Hanna to keep doing it. And we're going to work together on another one.

But beyond that, Hanna probably won't need anyone else to work with them. And then and they'll just roll from there, you know, so hopefully that's going to be the legacy of something that you tried out that is a great model that can be continued. One of the other lovely legacies I think it's worth mentioning is that we had a great review, someone wrote about how great it was to see a queer space, a vibrant queer space, a queer performance platform space in Aberdeen. And kind of sort of bemoaning the loss of another one called Fruit salad, I think

**Hanna Louise**

It came back for one night only after that, as a result of the review.

**Annabel Cooper**

Fantastic. So some sort of further legacy of that might be that there'll other platforms, other grassroots kind of programmes, platforms, nights that might be inspired to start up again or to begin anew.