

Live Art in Scotland: Karen Christopher

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Karen Christopher (KC): I was a theatre major as an undergraduate at university. I was in theatre from the time I was nine years old where I lived on the island of Maui in Hawaii, where the only theatre on the whole island was a community theatre. The people in the community theatre took it super seriously because everyone came because they wouldn't see theatre otherwise. I always thought of myself as a professional actor [laughs], but I wasn't really. In school we made our own plays, we never had scripts to work with. When I was at university, I started working with things that one might do if you were tired of regular theatre and thought there's something more here. It was more fun when I was a kid and we were making it up. I did a lot more experimental things and those were also offered where I was. At the college where I was in southern California, we were the home for Padua Hills Playwrights' Festival, which was a festival of new plays but it was also a workshop. There was a four-week workshop and young playwrights came to do that. For three hours every morning there were playwriting workshops and then in the afternoon and evenings there were rehearsals for those people who were teaching the workshops to put on performances of their own plays. These were all done outdoors in the foothills. There was an old Mexican dinner theatre that had been disused for a long time and so there was a big kitchen and there was space. There were coyotes at night and weird rugged high desert hills. The first year I was about eighteen and I was working as a technician in the summer for the theatre because roadshows would come in when no students were there. Those of us didn't have anywhere to go worked at the theatre. My college owned that old Mexican

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theatre and so they were the host of this festival which happened every year. Sam Shepherd was there, I don't know if you know Murray Mednick and María Irene Fornés. There were lots of playwrights, a lot of whom had connected as part of Theatre Genesis in New York in the early seventies. Anyway, Steve Bottoms has written a lot about all these people. Murray Mednick was the guy who organised the festival and he was also a playwright. He was best friends with Sam Shepherd. We were supposed to have Sam Shepherd that year but right before all the students arrived, I was told if anyone asks when Sam Shepherd is going to be here just say he's at a rodeo in Modesto and we're not sure when he's going to be here. Sam Shepherd of course said I'm not into this anymore, I'm not going to do it. Anyway, I was hired and I was re-routed from being a technician to being the assistant to [the artistic] director. So, I had to take over this list of names, one of which was Matthew Goulish [later of Goat Island]. That was both Matthew's and my first year in the festival and the festival had a bank of actors who would hang out. We all lived together in the dorms at the college and we made food together. A [rotating] crew of five people were always responsible for the dinner that night and we'd make food for everybody which was probably about fifty people. We worked on these plays that were then put on. Matthew was the first student to arrive because he'd taken a Greyhound bus from Michigan all the way to Los Angeles and he arrived at something like five in the morning and the guy at the bakery had come in and seen him sitting on a bench and thought he was a bum and gave him a bit of bread from the bakery and then he wandered over when it was time to meet me. I was greeting all of the incoming people. I'm sure he was not impressed because I was eighteen, very scraggly, possibly not wearing shoes, and the first thing he said to me was when is Sam Shepherd going to be here [laughs]. I just felt like oh shit, I'm being thrown under the bus at the starting pistol. I just looked at him and said he's at a rodeo in Modesto and we don't know when he'll be here. [Modesto is a small town in California where there would be a lot of cowboys]. He said oh okay, but Murray Mednick is going to be here right, and I said yes. I felt fine after that. Anyway, long story short, two years later Lin was a student at that festival. We all went every year and so I got involved with [Lin and Matthew] there as friends and co-workers and eventually Lin and Matthew got together, and I got together with somebody in that same year and we all moved to Chicago. Matthew already lived in Chicago, but Lin moved to Chicago and I moved in with this other guy who lived in Chicago. I was supposed to join Goat Island then and if I had done, I would have been in at the

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beginning, but there was a weird thing that happened which is super personal, but everybody knows anyway, it doesn't matter. It used to be a big secret, but then one day Lin just blurted it out in front of somebody in an interview and looked at me and was like, oops we've never talked about this [laughs]. I kind of knew anyway. They couldn't take me because of the guy I was living with. The other members of the group Tim and Greg, said we can't have anyone who lives with that guy, it's no good. It was a little weird for me for a while, but then [three years later] I broke up with that person. I called to say I broke up with that person and Lin called me back to say how would you like to be in Goat Island.

Stephen Greer (SG): [Laughs].

KC: I just thought yes, I don't really care what happened. I pretty much had figured it out and thought we better just let that go. We were friends and we'd see each other occasionally, but not much. Once I joined Goat Island that was a different thing. Anyway, that was a really long way of saying I met them in California and followed this weird trajectory. It was nice because if I had joined Goat Island when I first moved to Chicago, I never would have been in the Neo-Futurists. I would've just done Goat Island and only Goat Island. I got involved with a lot of other different Chicago companies, whether they were theatres or other strange experimental ideas. Then I was part of the early days of the Neo-Futurists and I did that properly for a year and a half and then was peripheral to them for a long time. For a while I thought I could do both and was doing Neo-Futurists where you do thirty plays in sixty minutes and you take one day in a week to make them and then also Goat Island where we take a year or more to make one piece.

SG: Yes, that's the thing that jumped out at me, the radically different beads of making work. The Neo-Futurists was my first point of contact with the Chicago scene and then through them I later came to learn about Goat Island's work.

KC: Yes, so after a while I realised I had to do one or the other and I decided to stay with Goat Island.

SG: I'm just thinking about the timeline of when Goat Island first came across to Scotland or to the UK and I know that they presented work at the Third Eye in 1990. Were you with them at that point?

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KC: I was in the company, but I wasn't in the piece that they were doing. That was a piece that they had made earlier.

SG: Okay, prior to that year.

KC: Yes. Joan Dickinson was in the company, so I think it was *We Got a Date*. I think I joined at the end of 1989, so they went off without me on that trip which was a little bit sad, but I didn't have a part in that piece, so it didn't make sense for me to go. It was always on a shoestring with Goat Island, so we never had money for extra people. If extra people came with us, they were usually paying their own way which is always tough.

SG: So it would be later into the nineties. The thing I'd mentioned in my email to you was this specific season that I think Mark Waddell had been involved in helping to bring over, the Chicago Oh Chicago season of which Goat Island was one part. Is that the first point of contact with what would have been the CCA by that time?

KC: No, I don't think so because we had been to the CCA to do other pieces. I would have to look it up to be sure.

SG: Okay, so that would have been to come across for things programmed as part of Mayfest, I'm guessing?

KC: Yes, maybe that's what it was. I know that Nikki programmed us a lot and I think she programmed us in Mayfest, but was she programming Mayfest, maybe it was somebody else.

SG: From what I can make out, and the Mayfest records are a little bit of a patchwork, there was a central programme which was done centrally by the Mayfest team, but then Third Eye and CCA and a few other venues in the city were running their own federated programmes which were then included as part of the official programme. Third Eye and CCA were kind of doing their own in-house thing, which was then part of Mayfest.

KC: I would have to look at it to remember exactly, but my recollection is, at the beginning, we often went to three places: the CCA, the Arnolfini, and ICA. Lois Keidan hated Goat Island so the first time we only went to the ICA because Mark Waddell had been a protégée of Lois Keidan, so he convinced her to take us. I remember she just absolutely hated it, so we may

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not have done the next piece there. There was a guy named Christopher with waistcoats, it's an H but I can't think of his name at the moment. Argh it's a recording!

SG: [Laughs] That's okay, the perfect thing about the recording is that we can lift that bit out [laughs] or preserve it. No one I've spoken to has had perfect recall and everyone is concerned that they should have perfect recall.

KC: Yes. I was about to say Christopher Hitchens so I think his name was something like Hewett, but anyway Christopher was maybe there after Lois. I don't know the exact way those people at the ICA came in, but he brought us in. Of course there were other places that we went, so those aren't the only three places, but those were three really steady places. We often went to Nottingham.

SG: And you went to Dartington a few times as well?

KC: Oh, we went to Dartington a lot, yes. I'm kind of underselling the number of different places we went, but the thing is those three were often set up by Diana Warden who used to be at the Arnolfini and by Mark Waddell. They were kind of in league with each other for a little while and they would set up a triangle of places that we could go to. There were also other places that would be added to the tour because coming all the way over for not very much money meant we really needed to pack the tour with as many venues as we could. [I think we came to the CCA with those three pieces before Chicago Oh Chicago because *We Got A Date* and *Can't Take Johnny to the Funeral* had already been done at the CCA, but I didn't do it the first time. Not *It's Shifting, Hank*, I think that was the first time we did *It's Shifting, Hank*. I did *We Got A Date* for Chicago Oh Chicago and then *Johnny* and *Hank* I was in.]

SG: What do you remember about the CCA around that time because I know that this was the run up before the summer school. I guess the first one of that was in 1996. Part of what I've been reading about, and this is going into Mark Waddell's records of his time there, was talking about the relationship between commissioning and residencies and wanting to be able to create spaces for companies to spend time at the CCA as part of presenting or finishing work, or just exploring elements of their practice.

KC: Yes. Mark was really key for a while for us in terms of being someone (who didn't work for us) who would sit us down and say we need to come up with a plan for what's next,

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what are you going to do next? If you could do anything . . . and that's how the summer school was born. It was really born out of Mark Waddell's head fully formed in some ways because that was part of a jam session to come and think about what you would do. He liked to use the word launch, and now we know that everyone talks about launches in Britain, but we just thought it was bizarre that he always said we need to launch this or launch that [laughs]. We were just like are we going in a rocket [laughs]? He would have all these terms and say we need to have a session to talk about this and now I can't remember what they all were. He would get us together and say we have to have this strategic planning for you. He was using wacky words though. Anyway, he had this plan for us to expand and next time you come, what could we add to it, so we talked about doing some kind of long workshop that would be three or four weeks and would let people come and stay. It was a really big plan originally and Mark made sure a lot of money was raised for it and we also did but it had to scale down. We did it for four weeks and it was truly amazing. Francis McKee was there as a guest and did an amazing talk about research which I can still remember. He talked about being a culture historian and the ice cream parlours in Glasgow and Italians intervening on people's ability to meet knee-to-knee in the evening because it was respectable at an ice cream parlour. The mothers of the women would never have let them go into a pub. At any rate the ice cream wars of Glasgow were one of the things he talked about, but there were a number of things and he helped break open the kind of things that were part of a package of what we were trying to deliver to the people who were there in terms of what is research, what is a strategy for making a performance, and how do you think about it, how do you train yourself, what kinds of things do you allow to be part of the work. We wanted it to be a workshop in the true sense of a workshop and not a big teaching thing. Most of what happened was the participants actively making and they were all people who had started on their careers of making work, they were just very early in their careers. There was Donna Rutherford, Russell MacEwan, Minty Donald, Dave Richmond and Jules who are at York St. John, and Clare Thornton who died recently, and, of course, Steve Bottoms who was at a number of workshops. I think he was at that first one. He did three of them. Do you know Steve Bottoms?

SG: Yes, I do. Not very well, but I do know him.

KC: Maybe he was teaching at the University of Glasgow, I can't remember now.

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SG: I don't know the exact dates, but he was teaching there.

KC: Yes, so I think he was nearby and that made it easy, but still, I think he got into this idea that he wanted to do it again and see how it was different every time. There was also a person who I've kept in touch with, Alyson Hallett and Lucy Skaer and Ross.

SG: Ross Birrell?

KC: Yes, Ross Birrell. He was amazing. He levitated the . . .

SG: Was it the Gallery of Modern Art that he was involved in?

KC: Yes, that wasn't part of the Goat Island thing, but he had us all come along. Anyway, the idea was to have this kind of working environment where everyone would make and incorporate theory into the process of making, so to confuse the creative with the critical and kind of say that these things go hand in hand and they're all about making the work. There were talks that people came to give, or that we gave, in the afternoons and there was a lot of working time, and we gave little instigations. We had so much fun because four of us ran it and we had a little walking tour we had to take and it would include some kind of site that we were going to as research such as the fishmonger; the cheese shop, I. J. Mellis on Great Western Road; St Vincent, that big, strange church that's on a corner; the Zen garden at St Mungo's; and there were some baths that were really amazing. These kinds of places. We would take a group there and would be some research filter so that you think about what you saw with certain ideas in mind that varied every time. It might just be "shifting figures around a steady centre," or look for that kind of thing, or an architectural feature. The filter would be the same for every site but each group had a different site so would think of it differently. People would make a performance based on what they had gathered from the site. There were ways in which the city itself was finding its way into the room up in the old CCA. That crushed room, the way it used to be, had a ceiling that was so low. It was a fantastic room and everything that had ever been performed in that room came up through the cracks in the boards when you pounded on it, all the dust of all the shows before and lots of glitter. It was quite an amazing room to be in. I find it really interesting that sometimes it's these old, difficult, problematic rooms in places that weren't necessarily built for what they ended up being, that house the most generative times of a group or a person's work. You find yourself having to live into the space in order to make the most of it

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and it affects you as much as you affect it. Whereas if you go into a pristine space, there is almost no interaction with you and the space because the space is complete already. I remember, this is not anything to do with your question but it's hugely important and hugely important about Glasgow in the scheme of things and the way that we were able to organise ourselves there with a kind of openness, because the CCA was this set of galleries, a shop, and a café, there was a whole life around it. That was hugely important because we would always meet and know the people who were having the show in the gallery downstairs or have coffee in the café and meet other artists who hung out there. There were a lot of people who we were also influenced by, including Maurice O'Connell who did three weeks of painting Os and the Os were posted all over the gallery. He was artist in residence at the city council or something and sat in on council meetings. Anyway, so that stuff would happen but also, we agreed to have open rehearsals in the afternoon. In the mornings we were shut, but in the afternoons, people could come up and because people were comfortable with the CCA, they would go in and if they saw there was an open rehearsal and the front of house staff would say and people would come up. You had to go up the side stairs to find us there. I think we had two weeks and then a work-in-progress showing on this one occasion, but it might have been four. Sometimes we had quite a lot of time there. I can't remember, but we were there for some time and this guy who was an unemployed bricklayer had come up a few times and we started talking to him. You didn't talk to everyone who came up because you're working, but this guy we had struck up a conversation with. He told us he was unemployed and he was on the dole but he decided to use this time to improve himself, so he was going to art things in the town. We were impressed and very interested and he came back again and eventually he came and he saw the work-in-progress. The piece he was coming to watch was *How Dear To Me the Hour When Daylight Dies* and there's this tiny LED light that has a little battery that it's hooked up to and it's wrapped in black electrical tape and then there's a little wire hook on it. It's just a tiny LED that's smaller than the tip of my finger. It gets hung up on the wall that is on Sauchiehall Street, so a brick wall. He'd seen us put it up there before at the rehearsals during the day, but at the work-in-progress, there were all these other artists there and the lights were on, and the lights were out outside and on inside and I think he was really transported in a way he hadn't been before. He said to me afterwards that his favourite part was when I went up and opened a little window to the outside and the light came in and I

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said but I didn't do that, I hung a light on the wall. He said no, no, I mean when you opened the window and then we could see the outside. Sometimes after a show when your head is a little rearranged you can't edit yourself and I just wanted to be so honest with this guy for some reason, I don't know why, but I could've just said, oh great, I'm glad you liked it because it was his favourite part of the show after all. I just thought it was so odd that he thought I'd opened a window so I said come over here, I'm going to show you and I took him to the wall where it was still hanging there and I turned it on to show him and he was really mystified because he had really seen something different. He's a bricklayer, he's going to know that you're not going to open a tiny little window, plus it was dark outside! It wasn't that kind of thing. I think he had this experience of this window opening. It's the end of the piece and it is meant to be like there is a distant light out there. This is a kind of experience that you can't have if you aren't in a place where you can have a connection with a guy like this guy who is not an artist and who is having the top of his head blown off in some ways by the contact with this other world that he didn't really have a contact with and us by him.

SG: I'm conscious that in later years Goat Island would have also appeared at Tramway.

KC: Yes, that's right.

SG: I know that Nikki Millican would've been programming New Territories across the city, but at Tramway in later years which is again one of Glasgow's distinctive spaces, but very different in terms of its relationship to the community around it.

KC: Yes, absolutely. By that time, we had a following in Glasgow. There were people that would come because they'd come before to see other Goat Island pieces. We were doing pieces at the CCA and in that time did two or three summer schools. I can't remember if we did three in Glasgow or just two. After that, we did two of them in Bristol and then I think only in the US after that. I think there were between twenty-five and thirty people in each of those summer schools and then there were also people who had come to see us at the CCA, so that little pot of people then also had friends. We had a group of people who would come to see us no matter what it was we were going to be doing. They were coming to see us, not what is the show about. It was let's find out in the process of watching it. I think we were also amazed by the, the word ebullience is coming to mind and I thought no, it's not a rowdy enough word, but the enthusiasm of the Glasgow audience was also amazing.

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Coming to Britain, usually in other places we experienced people's interest and respect for the work, but in Glasgow people really roared with laughter in places that we thought it was funny and appropriate to laugh. In a lot of other places, I think either the audiences were more reserved, or they weren't sure if it was okay to laugh. We would do the first performance in Glasgow, and we would remind each other in the dressing room afterwards because we knew we were going down to London or to Dartington, Bristol, or Nottingham, and say don't forget, England next with the sniff laughs. In Glasgow it would be [roars]. Also Manchester, we would go to the Greenroom, even though everyone was having a pint before the show they weren't so ready to laugh, or not as they were in Glasgow.

SG: It's so interesting that register of serious performance or performance art. Whatever the set of assumptions are that you're bringing with you to the theatre, how that shapes audience conduct and what it might be about Glasgow or Scotland that resists that. I was watching a little bit of *The Lastmaker* this morning and there is a whole sequence in that, it's a version that is recorded and it must have been one of the last versions of it that was performed in Chicago.

KC: Yes, the MCA on the stage. [both performance and audience were on the stage]

SG: There's a long sequence of that which is so funny. I mean maybe it's just not picking up the audience response on the recording, but I was like, this is not getting the response I was imagining. I was watching *The Lastmaker* this morning because there's a gestural sequence which I guess is the second or third movement which is a kind of triadic movement or a dance sequence, but there's a sequence where your hands tap and slap the floor. I don't know what it is about that sequence of tapping, but I keep going back to that moment of the recording, which is my little bit of segue into talking about the register of the choreographic both in Goat Island's work and in your own work since. I'm asking partly because I know that the people who came into the Goat Island summer schools were from a really broad range of backgrounds as visual artists, as performance makers, some of them dancers. I'm trying to think about the choreographic as some kind of register that is the meeting place of all of those disciplines and more. I'm kind of burbling, but maybe the invitation is about the status of the choreographic.

KC: Yes, well I think the important thing is that the emphasis is not on technique so anyone can do it. People used to see us and bump into us at some point later and say oh, after your

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show we were saying to each other, I could do that and then we went home, and we did the entire show in our living room. I was like oh that's amazing, there was an after show. I think that if there is virtuosity, which I'd say there isn't, but if there is, it's in the ability to pay attention for a long time in terms of the work we did in the making process. If we were virtuosic in any way, it was in spending time and being willing to spend time. Once you have practiced a thing enough times, it looks like you're good at it, but if you are not doing something that required twelve years of training in order to be able to do that thing, then you are doing something that one could do if they'd only just go and do it. You're not doing something rarefied and special. It's not like country dancing or social dancing, it's not that either, but anyone can also do those things. You don't have to be a dancer to dance in a night club or at a wedding. We often used to say the kind of dance we do is more like social dance than proper dance just to help people over this hump of thinking well, you're not dancers [laughs]. It was like yes, we know that. It's not that I think there's a problem with trained dancing, it's just a different thing. I think this movement where your hand sort of goes like this on the floor [tapping]. You're doing your homework in a very good way because that's my movement [laughs]. I'm kidding about you doing your homework in a good way. That is someone trying to put a fire out on their hands. The sleeve is on fire, but we've taken the pathos or the emotion out of it and now it's just this move that is repeated. I'm trying to explain it in a very particular way and I'm taking too long to get there so I'm losing the thread. The first thing I thought of when you started asking that question was a young boy named Jay who was in a workshop with us at the Arnolfini before all those buildings on the other side were remodelled into businesses, when they were still disused sheds or warehouses. We did a workshop in there that was requested by a group called, oh I might forget their name [Travelling Light]. They made performance for theatre for children. I remember some of the people. There are some things you think you're never going to forget and then one day you do. Anyway, one of the participants, Winnie Love, brought her son Jay who was maybe eight. There were a bunch of adults and an eight-year-old taking this workshop. Everyone was asked to think about their most injured body part and an incident where this injury took place or something like that and just have a gesture from that moment. This kid hurt his pinky finger at some point and his gesture was just that he kept doing this, there was his finger, and he was falling on it. He would move forward like he was falling on it. There was something so amazing about the importance of this. He would

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raise his finger and just sort of do a forward movement like I am going to fall on my finger. It was because he was a kid, but it was also because it was exactly the way we always envision people will do these things but normally they find a way to be fancy with it or do something slightly more abstracted. I think that inroad for a kid is an inroad for anybody to just say whatever I do and if I say this is it, it is. There's something about being able to take a series of gestures that look like there's no emotion. There's no miming, we're not pretending that the thing we're indicating is actually visible here, we're just taking the residue of some kind of human action. Nothing that a human can do is abstract. I don't think it's possible because we are so much in a context all the time. Even if it's onstage, if that's what the context is. I think we were also never pretending we aren't humans in front of other humans who are kind enough to sit and watch what we as humans have prepared to show. That contract, you know. If people are able to watch and not worry about what does this mean, then I think you end up in a really interesting place because your brain can doodle because we never stop trying to make sense of things. If there isn't an easy sense, then some work starts taking place that wouldn't take place otherwise. There is also sense from things that are obvious and that you take meaning from immediately or that are definitely indicating something, but there's a whole different kind of doodling that goes on if it isn't obvious and it has to go into a more unconscious place in order for you to take something from that. I think it then starts to become polluted by your own experience, your own associations and as I like to say, what you had for breakfast that morning.

SG: It occurs to me that maybe that way of working in a room with an audience, that invitation, is very much tied into the longer process of creating work adopted by Goat Island to sort of extend that invitation and for it to be offered without the anxiety of will they get it [laughs]. That only becomes possible when you have taken the time to let it go.

KC: Yes, yes that's right. In Lethbridge, a place in Canada where the deer are walking around and it was very snowy – it was in February and there's a university and nothing to see but snow, deer, and students trudging through it and I don't know who brought us there, it was amazing – but there was a guy in a pink sweater and a preppy button-down shirt and in the post-show discussion afterwards he said I've never been to anything like this before. I was very uncomfortable, but I didn't feel good about leaving because everyone would see me leave and I came with friends. I should've left, I wasn't enjoying it, but at a certain point, I

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realised I can just stay. He said the minute I relaxed, and he paused and said, I don't want to say it was a religious experience, but I was suddenly filled with peace and then I started to understand everything about the piece. I was like he's never been to a performance before, and he's just had a religious experience [laughs]. It was incredible. He was reading himself which I think is his doing. He could've had that experience and not had the consciousness about it, but the fact that he allowed himself and then was able to read it was such a gift to us because this is the mechanism that we want to know is possible. Unless someone tells you, you have no way of knowing.

SG: There was a series of conversations that Dee Heddon who I work with curated or put together and she began lots of them by asking people how they got into theatre or why they got into theatre. It was like the hallmark question. I hosted one of the conversations, so Dee asked me that question. I said that I wasn't sure why I got into theatre, but I was still interested in theatre and performance because I was always looking for some kind of conversion experience, that I would feel differently about the world after the performance to how I did at the start. What you've just described made me think of that in a new way.

KC: Yes, absolutely. We also had someone who had taken a workshop from us in Hull and she wasn't going to be able to see our show so she came to see a rehearsal the next afternoon and she'd had a great time in the workshop and we really liked her, but after seeing the run through we did in the afternoon, she left without talking to us. We were a little bit upset, but we know it's not for everyone, so we just thought whatever. Then she showed up the next day and she said I just wanted to tell you I was so upset I couldn't talk to you. I didn't know what was going on and I couldn't make any sense of it, but at ten o'clock I sat bolt upright on the settee and suddenly it all made quite a lot of sense [laughs]. Those two little stories get triggered when we talk about something like this.

SG: [Laughs]. That's lovely. If you've got a bit more time, I have one or two more things.

KC: Sure.

SG: One of them was about your more recent practice working with different spaces and festivals in Scotland. I know that you presented a work-in-progress version of *miles & miles* at BUZZCUT back in 2015, I think. Then, very recently, you have been involved with Take Me Somewhere and their version of the Thick Time Radio project. It's interesting to me that

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both of those festivals have come out of the disappearance of other structures or festivals which have previously supported live art. BUZZCUT very much came out of the ending of the National Review of Live Art and the closure of New Moves International and Take Me Somewhere out of the closure of The Arches. That history aside, what has it been like to work in those spaces or those festivals?

KC: Is that Partick where BUZZCUT —

SG: Yes, so it's been in a few different places. On the opposite side of the river, it's in Govan.

KC: Oh yes. I think that's where it was when I went. I can't always remember what places are called. I've only been to BUZZCUT once when Sophie and I did that, but hearing about it, it sounds like it's very often. Oh, that's not true, I'd been to BUZZCUT once before. Anyway, at any rate, the feeling of BUZZCUT is amazing because the festival feeling that we used to have so much more often in the nineties was alive there in a really important way. It's the idea that we're all here for the duration, we're going to see as much as we can see and everything if possible, we're eating meals together, and we're hanging out. We're spending the whole day and so the performers and the audience mingle with relaxation, we're not having to talk after a piece and maybe not having to talk at all, but we're really mixing and blending and feeling like this is normal. This is what people do and not something that is rarefied in some way. I think for me BUZZCUT is really important thing happening because of that feeling that I had there. I think when Sophie and I did our piece there it was really raw, it was so not ready, and it was really helpful for us because the audience were so generous. We could do this half-baked thing and get a lot out of having done it regardless of whether we heard from people or not and then we did hear from people. I think we both felt oh gosh, it was so uncooked compared to some of the other things that were being shown. I think it was clear there were also plenty of works-in-progress. We didn't feel embarrassed by that or that anything wrong had happened. People engaged seriously and relaxed at the same time which was amazing and beautiful. That was really important to us. It was important for that piece, but it was also important for the interaction that Sophie and I were able to continue to have with each other having done something for the public. With Take Me Somewhere it was during the pandemic so I never gathered in an actual location with everyone, but the way the negotiations were held, the way the arrangements were made for meeting on Zoom, the extended mentoring sessions which weren't really

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mentoring but sessions for peer mentoring and for people to engage with each other, the way that those were held and cared for and prepared for was really generous and intentional on the part of the staff there. It was amazing. I knew Karl a little bit in London and he's a lovely guy but it's clear that there are practices in place there that are really caring and specific and careful about how things are arranged. You don't just plan to do something and make sure that it happens. There is a lot of care taken and enough attention put on it by the staff that it would feel like if it went well, great, if it didn't go well, everyone was still very careful about that. Sometimes things don't come off. In my case, things went well. I just know that feeling of when you've been cared for and it doesn't go well, you're fine, because that just happens sometimes. It's the absence, inattentive programming that leaves you in the lurch if anything goes wrong. Things can go so wrong when everything is about the bringing together of people. My experience with Take Me Somewhere was just about the care for people and the opening of communication rather than just snap, snap, snap, we got it, so you're getting paid, now go, do it! It was really fantastic, and all the participants felt like they were well cared for, so they weren't tough to deal with. Some of them didn't understand why I was having them do certain things, but they just did it anyway and made the most of it, which is all you ever need to let something possibly go well.

SG: I've spent so much time recently thinking and reading about what makes spaces of risk or creative risk-taking possible, so I need to go away and think about that some more.

KC: You know Phil Collins, I'm talking about the artist, not the musician. Is he still around in Glasgow?

SG: I don't know.

KC: He was in the first Goat Island summer school in Glasgow, and I don't know why he came to mind, something to do with risk-taking. He was in that summer school. I never remember everything somebody does. I don't know why I brought him up. He was always so giddy and doing such hilarious, strange things in that first Goat Island summer school which kind of took over. It was infectious. A lot of people just felt like they could also do whatever they wanted to do. He changed his name in the middle of the four weeks, I think that's what I was going to say. That was the longest summer school we've ever done. We never did another four-week one because the comments afterwards were that it really took them out of their regular life for a bit too long. He changed his name to something Cobbins. I can't

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remember but he changed it because, he said, he couldn't live with the Phil Collins name anymore and so we all had to call him this other name. It was a really awkward, silly thing to do. Much later when I heard things going on with Phil Collins, I thought no he changed his name when I realised that was only for the summer school [laughs].

SG: [Laughs].

KC: I don't know what that had to do with risk. I think the thing that's important about risk-taking, particularly with an artistic making, process-oriented situation, where you're putting everything that you have not just into collaborating with other people but having your voice heard. I think actually being seen, really paid attention to, relaxes people, in a good way. Not so much that you fall asleep. I think that not being acknowledged, seen, or responded to, causes a person to feel invisible and then you feel under threat because no one is really seeing what you're doing or they're not paying attention to you. They might be paying attention, but if they're not acknowledging that, then that's huge. One of the things that I'm trying to base this Thick Time Radio Station thing on has roots in Goat Island in the sense of this idea of the creative response. It wouldn't only be the people running the workshop who responded to people's work. There's always an assignment for someone in the group to respond to someone else either one-on-one or these four people are doing a piece and there are other groups of four and they respond to different groups so there is a chain link of people really watching and making sure that they have something to say about what that group did. Anyone can say something, but there's also an assigned responder so that there's definitely not a case where you don't get somebody super focused because it was as important to make an amazing response to something as it was to make something that received an amazing response. This really helped because there is no way that the people running the workshop can be up to the task of truly seeing everyone, but if everyone is taking care of that together because you're not all about hierarchy, I think that makes a big difference. I really love the groupings that happened in those sessions at Take Me Somewhere. The first ones were made by the Zoom programme and then after that I was trying to pair people up with people they hadn't worked with before, or I paired people in Scotland with international people. Some of them were done on purpose, but whether they were done by the machine or on purpose, they all flowered in this really interesting way. There was one guy who had a problem and some of them were less interesting to me

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personally, but by and large, they were amazing because people allowed themselves to flower in the context of the other which you wouldn't think would happen in a break-out room on Zoom with someone you've never met before [laughs].

SG: Yes. I felt for everyone in the festival and particularly for Karl and LJ and the others when I knew the festival was going all online this year and just thinking about how they were going to carry on extending the care which I think they've worked on very consciously over the past few years, how they were going to be able to sustain that with a remote or a distributed festival.

KC: Yes. We were already in negotiations before it became apparent that there was going to be a lockdown. First it was postponed and then postponed further, it was just that series of things we all went through as it became more and more clear that it wasn't just two months, not just three months. The first time they asked me if I'd be interested in doing it online, I just said frankly no, not at all, I have no confidence this can be done online, but if you think that's the only way it can happen then I'd be willing to think about a proposal for how I would do that. It took them four months to get back to me and in that time, I just assumed maybe I shouldn't have said I have no confidence in this. I wanted to be really honest. But no, it was just they were taking their time, they were working things out and wanted to make sure it could be something that they could be happy to say that they presented. Then I went through a lot of steps with them before that ended up happening and they were super patient all the time. It was amazing.