

Thalidomide: Mat Fraser (2012)

Ruth Blue interviews Mat Fraser for the *Thalidomide: An Oral History* project.

The library at Wellcome Collection

183 Euston Road, London NW1  Euston, Euston Square **T** +44 (0)20 7611 8722

**wellcome
library**

wellcomelibrary.org

The free library for the incurably curious

Wellcome Collection is part of the Wellcome Trust. The Wellcome Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales, no. 210183. Its sole trustee is The Wellcome Trust Limited, a company registered in England and Wales, no. 2711000 (whose registered office is at 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, UK)

*This is Ruth Blue interviewing Mat Fraser on the 12th of November at his home in London for *Thalidomide: An Oral History*. Mat, can you confirm that you've signed the copyright and consent form?*

Yes I have.

Thank you. And can you start off just by giving me your full name, age, date and place of birth?

Okay, well my full passport / birth certificated name is Matthew Julian Glynn Fraser-Harris. I was born in Kensington Hospital, as it was called then, in Fulham, at 1am on the 28 January 1962.

Thank you. First of all I'd like to just ask you questions mostly about your childhood – your birth, family and early school life. So what about your family background? Who were your parents? Did you have brothers and sisters? And what sort of work your parents did.

Okay, my mother grew up in a very ... the daughter of a vet in leafy English-ire. She found it very constraining, studied in dance and took her first job possible when she was seventeen which was a showgirl in Las Vegas from which she never really came back conceptually. So she came back to Britain, carried on dancing, that moved into acting, she became one of the good players of touring theatre at the time of a juvenile, as it was called then, so a woman under thirty.

And at that time my father, Richard Fraser, was amongst the top five leading men for touring theatre in Britain as well. But my father was a gay man and he was in a very old-fashioned ... the Fraser-Harris's, you know, very stiff upper lip British family, posh, they didn't consider themselves posh but nowadays we would definitely ... upper-middle class as the bracket then existed ... and had been kicked out of the RAF when he was fourteen for a sojourn in a cupboard with another male person but the family pressure for him to be normal was such that he had married previously. That had not worked out and he was trying again with my mum. What happened was they were both cast to play opposite each other, Jeremy and Amanda in *Salad Days*, this incredibly painfully English musical that they toured together. And my mother immediately fell in love with my father because he was ... he had that sort of Clooney-esque maleness about him ... funnily enough exactly the Clooney-esque one which is why we all think he is gay! And my father, I can only assume, felt similarly, he also ... and they made me.

So my initial upbringing was, we all lived in apparently very poor places, there was no money, this place, that place, apparently we lived on the North End Road in Fulham, this is when it was a shit hole. But my first memories of where we lived were in a place called East Sheen, which is an incredibly posh place now. We lived in a leaky flat above a carpet shop, kind of opposite the Hare and Hounds pub, until I was nine. From when I can remember until me and mum left for New Zealand after the big split up and everything. I went to Sheen Mount Primary School now considered the poshest primary school in England.

You didn't have brothers and sisters?

I had no brothers or sisters. One kid, me, that's it. Yep.

Do you know ... just adding thalidomide into that story; do you know who prescribed it for your mum?

Yes. My mum was on tour with, I think, *Salad Days*, and was in Leicester and she got morning sickness and it was a locum doctor. She took it three times in that week.

I was going to say how long did she take it for. And apart from that, did she have a good pregnancy that you know?

As far as I know of.

Is it something she talks about with you, or does talk about with you if she's still living?

The pregnancy no, the birth, yes, but not the pregnancy.

Okay. What about her decision to use thalidomide, is that something she talks openly about?

Well yes, there's always been ... it was not contested, at the time you believed doctors. It was a brand new thing to cure morning sickness. That's why she went to the doctor, for morning sickness, it was pretty cut and dried. "Try this new thing it's really great." "Oh okay." Nothing more than that.

It's funny how it's changed now isn't it?

It's because of thalidomide that every drug bottle has, if you're pregnant, "Seek the advice of a physician before taking this drug" because of thalidomide.

Yes you can't even take nose spray if you've got hay fever. So your birth, you were born in hospital ...

I was and the only details I have, and I must admit there must be more, were from my mother's perspective, so I never got my dad's version of the birth. I don't know if he was around, whether he was pacing up and down the corridor, whether he was holding mum's hand, whether he was on tour, I've no idea. You know what? I should know, but I don't. She gave birth and immediately I was taken away, so I think she came to, maybe she'd had some drugs, maybe it had been ... it was ten hours labour, quite an intense birthing. But they took me away and mum started to wonder sort of where I was and then after an hour or two she was like, "All right, something's wrong, they wouldn't have kept the baby for this long." And after four hours she was like "Right, my baby's dead, I have a dead baby." And then they came in with me wrapped tightly in the way that they used to do and put me into her arms, as they said, "I'm afraid we've got some terribly bad news" to which she wasn't listening because she was just experiencing relief at having a baby, alive, and was doing the mother / child eyesight connection thing. That was all going on as they said, "I'm afraid your son has got small arms ... tiny arms." And at that point she was just sort of looking at me and falling in mum love and visa versa and she was like, "Oh is that all?" She was just really relieved. No doubt the reality of the disability impacted a lot more seriously in days to come but at that moment, that's what happened.

Because if she'd been thinking you were dead, then ...

It's an upgrade from dead isn't it? Short arms.

It definitely is [laughs]!

If it's one thing, it's that [laughs]!

And so that would have been ... did she ever talk about the moment when she first realised that you had ... when the doctors told her you'd been born with short arms?

That's it, that moment. I don't know how she felt when she first saw them, when she unwrapped me, etc. And in questions to come we're no doubt going to talk about did she show me to people. I don't know. I just remember from when I could run around and was uncontrollably toddly. When I was a baby in a pram, did she wrap me up so people couldn't tell? I don't know, I can't remember.

And for the sake of the ... because this is an audio only interview, can you describe your level of impairment?

Yes sure. I've got short arms. My arms are ten and eleven inches respectively and then they turn inward like a ... basically my hands come off my arms, like a foot comes off a leg; there's a right angle with a heel kind of thing. The lump on the outside of your wrist, of an average person, is what looks like the heel of my inwardly turning limb, hand, which doesn't have a thumb. But the hand itself, the pad of the hand and the length of the fingers are in keeping with the size of the rest of my body. My shoulders end at my collarbone so I don't have the bulk muscle at the top of the upper arm. I have one inch of upper arm and then a somewhat remaining situation of an elbow joint and from there, rather than a ... what the hell are they called those two bones? Tib and fib? No that's the leg. Is it? Radius and ulna. Rather than a radius and ulna bone, I've got one plate-like bone that looks a bit like the plate bone of a seal's flipper, hence the condition known as phocomelia which is seal-like limbs. Not very well explained.

No very well explained. Actually perfectly explained. You even know the respective lengths of your arms, which is a first for me.

I do well I'm in showbiz aren't I? So I've been measured for so many suits and stuff.

Yes it's good! Do you know how long your mum stayed in hospital after you were born?

No.

But she took you straight home?

As far as I know, yes.

You didn't have to stay in and have any surgical or medical interventions that you know of?

No. I don't even know if they were offered. Like Mikey, for instance, has similar arms to me but different because there was surgery on them. I didn't have any surgery. I was certainly never asked about surgery. I don't know if my parents were asked about surgery but if they were, they obviously said no.

Okay, so that's that. You went straight home. And do you know how ... did you have much contact with the sort of extended family at that point and do you know if anybody in your extended family had any particular reactions to you?

It's incredible that I don't know these things. It's incredible given my politicised disabled life. I've no idea. The posh lot, on my dad's side ... God ... and the less posh lot who were more medically based on my mother's side because my grandfather was a vet. I have no idea. I'm going to ask my mum.

Okay. Well when I do the follow up interview I can ask you then can't I?

Absolutely do, yes.

So I'll say "Save this for the follow up." Do you also ... maybe this is something else as well that you're not aware of but do you know if your mum was offered any support following leaving hospital? Any Social Services support or ..."

I would find that very unlikely but I don't know, again, I'll ask her. But you know, pretty soon after I was born, she was back on tour and I lived in drawers in dressing rooms for the first two years of my life I think, something like that. The only childcare they could afford was bringing me on tour and having me in the dressing room, which must have annoyed the other people, but there we are.

Quite nice to have a baby in a drawer.

Personally, I wouldn't want a baby in my workplace, period.

It's one of those things that before you have a baby, you think, "Oh yes, I'll just carry on life as normal with the baby in the corner" and in actual fact the baby takes over the room.

Absolutely, and it would with me. The minute the baby cried I'd be more concerned with that than work. And work is work.

Yes, it's true. And so how long did that go on for, you being the baby in the drawer?

Two years. And then I guess I was sort of toddlery. My first actual memories really are of about four years old, and then very quickly morphing into kindergarten. So I remember kindergarten. I had a lot of au pair girls because they had to keep going on tour. Touring is what they did and sometimes they both had different tours or financially could afford to have me stay at home because it was more practical, so I had au pair girls.

So there was a home base somewhere?

Yes there was this flat in East Sheen from like four until nine. So five years in one place; kindergarten and into primary school.

Do you think ... this might sound like a slightly naff question, but did you have a happy childhood, from what you remember?

Very. Very happy. I've always been the life and soul; I've always had loads of friends. Right from, you know, your first nine-year-old girlfriend. That's not been an issue for me. Social interaction and good communication have allowed me to be socially popular and one of the gang. And often the weird one and what have you, there were all sorts of things with not talking about disability, and pre-teen stuff, but that's later on in life. That first phase, I was extraordinarily happy.

When do you think that you knew that your impairment had been caused by thalidomide? Or perhaps even before that, was there a moment when you realised you were differently shaped to everybody else you were playing with?

Well, you always know because you've got a mirror and you don't look like anyone else but it didn't really become anything worth thinking about until I got called ... some kid at school used to call me 'screwed up arms.' It's hard to analyse it without being a sort of amateur sociologist but I think at that point I realised, "Oh, other people have a problem with how I am, I have to watch out for that." That hadn't occurred to me up until that point. Everybody had been so bloody nice, it really wasn't an issue, no more than some people being girls, and some being boys, it was that much of a non-issue. And then at school, social interaction and perceived behaviour and everything, obviously that began to impact on me and so around then.

There was one time ... that was the social one, being teased, and the other time was at the time I wasn't really very good at dressing and undressing myself properly, I hadn't really got that down. But I loved swimming, and swimming was the next class, but I was always the last one to get changed and also had to wait until everyone else was changed before I got changed, or something like that, because I wanted to be in the pool with the other ... something like that. And I remember pre-loading, thinking asking the girl next to me to help me off with my jumper at the end of the lesson, preceding the swimming lesson, to have the jumper on the change, and then her not managing to do it, then getting caught up in a world of confusing

wool around my face, hearing lots of laughter, being unaware of what was going on and then the jumper coming off and the teacher being cross with me, and everyone looking at me and then thinking, "Oh all right, that probably was somewhat of a spectacle." I hadn't really thought about that. So those two would have been the first times I thought about that.

Do you know at which point your parents became aware that your impairment had been caused by your mum taking thalidomide? Do you know how old you would have been?

No, but I do remember when it hit ... yeah ... probably a year before it hit the Sunday Times, that was '68 wasn't it? Or '67?

Yes.

So probably about a year before then. They would have got letters saying this is going to happen. The Lady Hoare Trust, or whatever it was then, would have probably forewarned some of the parents. I certainly remember ... and then the thing was we left in 1970 and didn't come back until just before 1972 and that was when a lot of the action happened. We were in New Zealand, me and my mum. So, again, I've no idea when they found out. But I remember finding out or hearing other people talking about it and asking dad and him telling me around about when I was about seven I guess, so 1969 maybe.

Do you remember anything of that conversation, what he said?

His awkwardness. I could just sense him feeling awkward.

Yes. And do you have any sense of how your mum felt?

No. I think they just felt, "We've got this great kid who's been dealt a bad blow. We want to give him everything we can. We're not lawyers, but yes we'll join this thing that people are talking about because it might get us some more money." And I was on the X list, the first list.

Do you know ... yes I was going to say whether your parents got involved with the campaigns for compensation and ...

They signed, and they added their names to but they weren't vocal or proactive. They were happy to be a member of that group but they were no David Mason, they were two actors for God's sake, you know? Useless really!

No, it sounds like they brought you up with great confidence so that wasn't particularly useless!

They had a very telling moment, the fancy dress competition. I've always been very pugnacious and loved combat, and wanted to go to the fancy dress party as a boxer. I cannot imagine what I must have looked like with boxing gloves on, stuck onto my shoulders, which is what I must have looked like. But that's ... they were quite happy that if that's what I wanted to do, then that's how I would go to the thing. It wasn't even mentioned that, "Oh well it's a bit weird but sure." They just went "Fine, okay."

He's going to be a boxer!

So that was very much their attitude and I grew up with that attitude.

Were they approached by the media, do you know, ever, to talk about you?

Not as far as I know, no. And I know for a fact that my dad would have absolutely not gone with that whatsoever. He would have thought of it as cheap and exploitative. He had very high standards, moral standards, Dad.

And you mentioned being put on the first X list.

Well, my parents signed up for the first group. There was apparently a first group and a second group wasn't there?

Yes.

My parents were in the first group.

Do you have any recollection of that process, meeting the doctors and being assessed?

Absolutely, absolutely. A very vivid remembrance that I took the day off school, my mum and me went into London, because Sheen is not really in London, into a waiting room where there were other kids that looked like me and that's the first time I'd ever seen that. I remember noting that a couple of the girls had opted for the shawl, the flipper-hiding shawl, thinking, "That's weird, you can't tell. That must be difficult." And then it was my turn and I held mum's hand as I got up but she was like, "No you have to go in on your own." I'll just turn off the washing machine.

Let me pause you for a second.

Oh, sorry.

No, don't worry.

[Break in recording 0:20:22]

So I went into the office, it was a small office, about the size of this room fifteen by fifteen or whatever and there were three men in suits behind a desk in a kind of audition, interview panel kind of setting. They asked me some questions, none of which I can remember, the only thing I can remember is they said, "Do you see that cabinet behind you?" And it was a three-tiered, drawer, metal cabinet, traditional style. "There are some sweets in the top drawer. If you want, you can take them." And so I computed immediately that I wouldn't reach, so took the chair over with me, stood on the chair, pulled opened the drawer and got the sweets. And they started writing stuff down. And I remember years later realising that that was an ability assessment going on and I was very angry with my mother because even at seven, if I'd have known that that was about how much money I was going to get, I would have crawled across that fucking carpet on my chin and gone, "I can't reach the sweets" and pathetically tried and failed and really made a meal of it. I was the son of two actors after all. And I remember thinking how cynical it was of them. Fifteen grand I got. Which, compared to what other people got for their impairments, when you look at the severity of the impairments, it's in keeping with what everybody else got, but I just think it's very, very below the moral compass to do it like that. They should have asked me to do up my top button which is something to this day I can't do.

Well what they were asking you to do was to ... you were actually using your brain to work something out really weren't you? Rather than something that no matter how much you used your brain you actually just couldn't do it.

Yeah. But yeah, I just remembered thinking that was a bit cynical of them to do it like ... means testing is cynical, ask anyone who's had to reapply for their Motability recently.

Oh yes, that's got very tough hasn't it? And did they photograph you and things like that?

I have photographs of me as a sort of twelve-year-old, in my pants, front, back, both sides. Very sort of medical looking, that I can only assume would have been part of the cataloguing of me. I'm number one hundred and thirty in the Thalidomide Trust referencing things. They were something to do with that, I don't know. So I was photographed. I don't remember that being traumatic or invasive.

And just going back a little bit, you were saying that for the first time you saw some other children who looked like you, what did that feel like?

Really weird. And I was not scared of them but sort of, I don't know if I literally did, but felt like clutching my mum and looking at them with wide eyes, in the way that any kid would but perhaps with other stuff going on. I remember being quite surprised and shocked and ... I suppose it's the first time you see yourself really, as others see you. Not altogether a positive experience, but not necessarily a bad one, just shocking. Shocked is how I felt.

And what about the Thalidomide Society? Did you or your parents get involved with their activities, or their holidays or anything like that?

No. They got me involved in them, but actors are terribly elitist, they don't want to hang out with others who aren't actors, or 'civilians' as they call them, so they would have always signed the form and gone, "Yes we agree with that" and maybe even gone to the meeting occasionally, but they would have never have gone, "I'll volunteer." It was not their style. They were too busy as well, very hard-working people.

I remember Dad took me to a big conference once in, gosh, '72 / '73, which was boring as hell, and just lots of people talking ... I completely zoned out and suddenly my dad got up angrily, having got the roaming mike and said, "Of course you realise that Mr so and so is a gift for the press?" I didn't know who the bloke was, I didn't know what they were talking about because I'd zoned out, but I was thinking, "I've not seen Dad like that before. Angry about something." And I guess that was in the middle of their litigation strategy with Distillers and the Sunday Times in one of those meeting you know?

So you didn't go on any of the Trust funded holidays?

Oh yes. Yes. That was later though, I didn't go until I was fifteen.

Oh okay, right. And those were the holidays to Miami and all of those kind of places.

Yes, yes. I don't remember it very vividly, but it was four to five years worth of option holidays. Like one of three places; stupidly I never chose America. I always went for the European holiday, so did Corfu, that infamous time in Gran Canaria.

What was infamous about it?

Well you know ... I can't remember who it was ... was it Kevin Donnellon we were talking about it ... it was the first time that you got to do what other teenagers did, like make out with each other and if you were lucky enough, have sex and get pissed and trash someone's room and do all those things that other kids did but we'd never got to do because we weren't considered cool enough to be in a gang like that. We could make our own gangs on these holidays and be those people. Mikey and I talk about it often as one of the huge benefits of those things were that we went from being the shit heap, the bottom of the shit heap in terms of sexual ... you know dating partner at main-stream school to the top of the elite at a thalidomide holiday. Given that we were tall and slim and able to communicate and not with faces like the back end of a donkey. So we were like, "Wow! Yes we like these holidays." It's so weird to be Sandy and thingy from Grease when you're used to being the ugly people, you know?

So what was infamous about the Gran Canaria one though?

Well lots of booze and lots of sex, you know, we were all fifteen. Some of the girls ... some of the more slapper ... you know, you can say that about them but goodness knows what their upbringing was like. But

a lot of the Greek waiters had a good time with a lot of the girls and some of us who were lucky enough also did ... of the thalidomide boys. Yeah, it was fun, it was the first time we had sex.

On one of them I was nineteen, so punk had happened and I was a skinhead at the time and we were still doing it, but by this point we were kind of bored of each other and were sort of branching out into other tourists and stuff, so that was fun as well. But it was very much hugely an agenda of get drunk and get laid like any other teenager on holiday, right?

Well in actual fact, probably a lot of other teenagers at that period of time you know in those ... wouldn't have necessarily been going on a holiday like that abroad would they? So in a way you were doing something that ...

No, no. I wonder what they were constructed as? I wonder why the committee decided we should have holidays? One of the other things I do remember was that we had helpers who were, I suppose, social workers in training or social workers. So five per thirty people. And there'd be the head woman who'd be a bit like a school ma'am, so we'd avoid her because she would let us smoke and stuff ... the others were like "Oh for fuck's sake, they're on holiday" and be much more liberal about it and they were like our ... you know when you're ... like the leader, like Akela's cool or something and you want to hang out with him and have a pint and they do and they have a pint with you and you feel really mature. They were very much like that and they became our buddies, mentor buddies and I clicked immediately that one of them was gay which was when I was nineteen. We were in Gran Canaria, it's a gay Mecca, I don't know whether you know it there? I didn't know at the time and at one point there were just the two of us, "You're gay aren't you?" And he went, "Yeah, but don't tell anyone" and I went, "I won't, I just wanted to know that you were gay." And he was like, "Yeah, I'm gay." "My dad's gay." "Is he?" And I had a 'My dad's gay' conversation with a gay man for the first time and I said, "Your secret's safe with me." "Good because a lot of you are under eighteen and as a gay man I'm just going to lose my job the minute they find out."

This was amazing wasn't it? But it was the late seventies and that's how it ... and I was like "So are you getting any time off then?" And he was like, "Yeah, there's a club, do you want to come?" And one night I went to the gay club with the cool woman and this guy and I really enjoyed that and I suppose part of that was just wanting to be part of gay culture as a straight man, but also part of it was about having passed ... that I wasn't just part of a bunch of disabled people, I was with able bodied people on their terms and no one else was, just me, I was the coolest one, because a lot of that happens.

Yes, I can imagine, there's competition in most walks of life isn't there? So those would have been the main times probably when you met other people affected by Thalidomide. Sort of leading up to that did you ...

None. None. There were no others in my town. I didn't live in that weird place in Yorkshire where the highest proliferation of us is. No. And there were no efforts made to have a special buddy that visited some weekends or anything like that. I just lived with people who were local to me.

So you were mostly just hanging around with able-bodied people?

Yep. I didn't even have any disabled friends. Like you'd have thought there might be someone with a limp or something but as it happens, no.

Well at mainstream school, often disabled children weren't included were they?

No, well I was one of the few thalidomiders I know who went to a mainstream school. That I know anyway.

Could you talk a little bit about that now? School, where you went to, your primary school.

Sheen Mount Primary School.

Where's that Sheen ...?

Sheen Mount. So there's a hill. Sheen is next to Richmond. It's so posh; it's just not worth talking about now. And I suppose it was then, but in my memory it wasn't, it's just where I went to school. Mums at the gates, there were two gates, for mums at the gate. I used to walk to school. It was fun. Only a couple of kids teased me and I think one of my friends told the teacher that they were teasing me and then that stopped. I had a very, very pleasant time. I had a girlfriend, Lisa Bedford. Best friend Richard Walters, we used to fight stag beetles at lunchtime, like get them and have a beetle fight, you know? There were two camps and they were based on whether you watched Doctor Who or Land of the Giants which was on ITV at the same time as Doctor Who at 6pm on a Saturday.

Which did you go for?

Oh, Doctor Who. Yeah, that's pretty much my school life, there and then. We had one teacher ... we had a trendy woman teacher with a short skirt who taught us all to do the twist, and then one day her boyfriend came in and they had an argument in the classroom and he was like, "I need the keys, you took the keys!" So it was one of those normal life things but we were like, as nine year olds ... that's very vivid! The sweater incident before swimming. The other one of me trying to win ... swimming figured quite heavily for some reason in primary school there and I wanted to get my length badge on my swimming trunks but could only swim confidently on my back and then one day, "This is it teacher. This is the one, I'm going to get it," and swimming for some time, thinking it was going well and feeling my head hit the end, thinking, "I've done it!" and then hearing laughter and looking up and I'd just done a sort of L shape in the water and had hit the side ... I got it like a week later.

Did they have to make any changes at all for you?

No. None.

So things like writing, and using the bathrooms and meal times, you could just fit into the regular school life?

I don't remember ever having a poo at school or remember dealing with wanting one, and what to do, or anything like that. No, that's interesting. Weeing I guess I could do otherwise I would remember lots of kerfuffle about being helped in the toilet and I have no memories of that whatsoever. Being helped changing for swimming, that was about my only concession, the teacher would help. But the writing ... I guess I must have been taught to write at kindergarten because I could write and I could keep up at school, I kept up at school, that I remember.

Did you have anything in particular that you really loved doing at sort of primary school time? Any subjects?

English. Stories. English and stories.

Did you like reading as well then?

Yes, I read a lot, always had a book.

What did you like? Can you remember?

Novels.

C.S. Lewis type novels?

Well I read all of *Narnia*. I read some *Famous Five*, but found it boring, I seem to remember, and then comedically racist later on in life. The very seminal books were later on in life, like *The Land of Green Ginger*, *The Phantom Tollbooth* ...

Oh yes, I remember that one. I'd forgotten about that.

Ring of Bright Water. The one about the fucking otter just destroyed me.

I was only just talking about that the other day. I was in Greenwich Market and I saw a clock made out of the front cover of, it was Tarka the Otter wasn't it? It was a front cover made out of the exact Tarka the Otter that we read at school and I was trying to explain to somebody how it made me well up inside just seeing the cover.

I was distraught for like two days after that. I actually read a fair bit of Alfred Hitchcock who wrote for children.

I didn't know that.

Yes. Wrote old school, basically detective novels for children, like who-done-its for kids.

I must look into that.

My dad's friend, Jimmy Beck, played Private Walker, the spiv in Dad's Army and they both used the same pub and I would mow his lawn every Saturday, probably pretty badly, and he'd give me fifty pence which was a huge amount of money. You could buy a Funny Faces ice cream for five pence then. So that's another one of my big memories of the East Sheen days from up until nine years old. And then one seminal day I remember my mother taking me for a walk, most unusual, she was crying, she had the dark glasses on. We got to the gate, Sheen Gate at Richmond Park and she was like, "You know that boy Jerry who came to live with us a while back?" "Yes." This nice new guy Jerry who lived with us who would be my au pair but was also very camp and fun and had lots of games. "Well dad and him love each other so we're going to go and move. We're moving. We're actually going to go to New Zealand." I'm like, "What?" Blah blah blah blah ...

So how old are you then, at that moment?

Nine. Nine. And Jerry had come to live with us about six months earlier. Of course to me it was presented as, "This guy's going to stay in the spare bedroom." But the reality was that dad had come home from a secondary tour of *Salad Days* where he was now directing other people in it and he had fallen in love with Jerry, because he was gay. Dad used to have weekends where he didn't come back and mum would turn a blind eye. But then one day he came back and went, "I'm in love with a man and I can't do this anymore, I'm really, really sorry" and my mum just had to give up the ghost at that point. You can't deny a person's sexuality when it finally comes out. But they agreed to not disrupt our family unit for my sake. And so dad would sleep with Jerry; I slept in a small bed in the same bedroom as mum and dad, we didn't have a separate bedroom, it was a small flat, and every morning I'd wake up and they'd both be in bed, mum and dad but he had got up ten minutes earlier than I would wake up and get into bed with mum so that when I woke up it looked normal. So that's what was being weirdly, adultly constructed. My mum put a brave face on it but still I don't think she's ever got over it frankly.

So she was still in love with your dad would you say?

Still is in love with my dad I reckon. So that's that. And my mum tells me that the hardest moment in her life I think ... or at that point in her life was when I said, "But why are we doing it?" "Well it's because it's what we want to do." And I said, "Well what about what I want to do?" I just wanted to stay there and have my life and not be taken away from all my friends and all that but that's what we did. We upped sticks and went to New Zealand.

Why New Zealand?

My mum wanted to get away from everything to do with the situation. She had a few friends. One of her friends had taken a radical new job by becoming director of the Auckland theatre, the one big theatre in

Auckland, the Mermaid Theatre, and said "You can be the lead actress in every play for a whole season. Come over. We need fucking British actresses here anyway none of these people know how to act etcetera etcetera." Elitist. And so she took it. That's what we did. It didn't work out that way, she ended up working in a black pudding factory but ...

So that would have been towards the end of your time in primary school if you were nine then.

Yes. I think we were just before the last year in my cycle. So I missed out doing one year and a term or something.

So did you go to school in New Zealand for a while?

Yes. The schooling system is different in New Zealand. They have something called intermediate school which bridges between primary and secondary and you're ten and eleven when you do Intermediate School. So I was put into intermediate school with a completely radically different approach to children's education and childcare and stuff.

Better or worse would you say?

Well I came back from New Zealand not knowing how to long-divide or multiply properly, but I could make a dovetail joint in woodwork. So their approach was very different. They also thought you're disabled, right, you're a prefect and you're in the softball team. "I can't play softball" "Yes you can. You'll play it as well as you can. We won't give you a hard time, but you will try your hardest. And you're going to be a prefect, and you're responsible for these kids and we need you to have a word with that kid because he's being naughty." So that's super-liberal isn't it?

Did you respond well to that responsibility?

Yes of course I did because it's a really excellent way of doing shit. But so different from the really repressed, embarrassed, tuck it away attitude of England you know? So I had a fucking brilliant time in New Zealand.

So when you got there ... so you didn't want to go but when you got there ...

Yes, I didn't want to go, but kids, you know, they only really care about what they're looking at don't they? Not what's behind them. I remember I got one really nice group letter when every kid in my class from my old school had sent me a card. So that was really nice of the teacher, I thought, to organise that. But I was away with my New Zealand friends by then having a very exciting life and being ten and eleven, which is very different from being eight and nine.

Yes, it's a big change isn't it actually? When you cross the ten boundary.

You kind of feel, "I'm an adult now" even though you're not, but do you know what I mean?

Yes, it's the double figure thing isn't it I think?

You care how you look.

And what contact did you have with your dad then? Did he keep in touch?

Very little. Cassette tapes, and the occasional awkward phone call ... one of those awful old long-distance phone calls with the delay and everything that none of us could afford anyway, so it was cassette tapes. But dad read me all of *The Sword in the Stone*, the dramatic version of Arthur as a boy which was nice. And they would sing us ... Jerry and him, now the out gay couple ... would send me lots of show ... Jerry would just sing along showbiz tunes and things and send it to me, just very sort of camp, gay stuff which was fun.

And how did you feel about that. Your dad ... I mean at that age it must have been quite an eye-opening thing to find your dad had a boyfriend.

No, I'd always known gay people and I'd always been around straight and gay actors. Sticking your cock in someone's arse as opposed to baby-making vagina aspect of it didn't ... I didn't think like that, I wasn't sexual, you know, so it was like Laurel and Hardy. Two guys who like each other more than they like a woman. So they lived together. It was very simple for me. I can see it. It was like that's their chosen companionship, you know? And that's fine by me.

What about your mum though?

Well she would put a brave face on it. The first thing she did when she met Jerry was rush up to him and give him a great big hug. What she should have done was slug him I reckon. I think that would have really ... my mother can't express anger, she represses it and then it becomes an illness. That's her pattern. So she repressed it. She had a few affairs with people in New Zealand, was made to feel like a woman ... an attractive woman again, because she is an incredibly attractive woman. Lots of guys were after her, I'm sure that helped but the man she loved had rejected her for someone else. Yes, she understood it was about gay but on paper it was still rejected for somebody else and she felt suitably rejected I think. It took her a long time to get over it, if she has. But she kept it all from me.

She had an affair ... Ian Mune the director started staying a lot for a while. That was ... people wouldn't talk and he would leave rather early in the morning and so clearly he was married, I think they were having an affair of some sort but that was basically it. My mum did really well. She started off bad but did become the leading actress in many plays of quite good renown for the time in Auckland, enough that we earned enough money to, after a year and a half, go back for six weeks to see all our old friends in London and it was lethal. My mum's favourite season is autumn, they don't have that in New Zealand, and we came back to a proper old British autumn. Sludgy leaves on the floor and all of that and the conkers for an eleven year

old and we just never went back. We came back and we thought, "No this is our culture, this is where we belong." That was that. Because I'd been swimming in the sea on Christmas day in New Zealand. You know, totally alien to a Brit. Great for an adult who wants a change after forty years of life, but not what a nine year old wanted or a ten year old.

So we came back and it was really exciting to come back. It was like we'd got over that life with dad in New Zealand and when we came back it was like, "Right, what are we going to do? Where are we going to go? Let's start." So that was very exciting, right in time for secondary school.

So you were happy to come back and leave New Zealand would you say?

Yes. We left a few things behind that were nice and who knows how life would have been if we'd have stayed there. Impossible to gauge.

It's very difficult to imagine isn't really, if you'd taken one of the alternative routes in life? So secondary school, did you come back to London in particular?

No, we didn't know where to go and again we did that thing of one of mum's more friendly and more influential friends said "Come and live where I live, I can get you work." So we ended up in ... we stayed with dad and Jerry in Colchester for a while. But you know, us staying in the spare room of a gay couple where the woman ... that was never going to work was it? And we went and got a place in Canterbury where mum worked at the Marlowe Theatre. There were four schools in Canterbury; three really posh ones and the comprehensive and I did the Eleven Plus on all of them, the entrance test for all of them. Passed all of them, except the maths which I was behind on because the New Zealand curriculum was very different about maths. And while we were deciding where to rent, or where to live, we stayed in a room in lodgings for a while, in one room together for a while, so we were obviously quite poor.

But also very close. I like the way when you're talking you say things like, "We arrived back" and, "We were thinking what shall we do now?" It's like you were a real duo there.

Absolutely, a real duo and a unit. It felt like that. So that was fun and then we opted for ... there was King's College with the wing collars and the ridiculous fees ... the education system was structured differently in 1972, 3, or 4, or whenever it was that I started and they had something called the Direct Grants System in some public private schools which was that the fee was a percentage of the previous years income of the person and my mum had earned nothing on paper the year before, so we got the peppercorn version so we went for that one. She thought ... my mum, in her wisdom, decided to send me to the posher of the two schools on offer and not the comprehensive because she was worried about the maths and worried about the stuff I'd fallen behind in and thought I'd get a better education at the posh school. I don't know if that's true, but that's where I went into a really repressive kind of situation. I was a dayboy.

It was an all boy's school then obviously?

All boy's school. I was a dayboy in an otherwise mostly boarding school full of really unhappy kids of military families and the like, and posh kids, and thick kids, and all of that stuff. But, you know, there were

no women, there was me and I was bullied a bit, bullied a fair bit at first, just because I was different. And it was a real hierarchical teaching ... the repressive system and curriculum and all of that really to the n-th degree so of course I was going to be noticed and noticed as different. I managed okay, and I got a gang of friends. I kind of made friends with one of the bullies so it was sort of okay. Not too bad. I occasionally ... you know when people got really bored the attention would often end up on me, you know. I remember being made to fight at lunchtime with the nerdy weak kid and sort of resignedly going to do it, you know, otherwise we both got a beating, that kind of thing. We had fags at the school, that's how old-fashioned it was; people were fagging other boys which is really old-fashioned. It's like slavery, it's like practise slavery isn't it?

And then I remember ... my nickname was Flid; that was my nickname, for a long-time. Then one day an Indian boy turned up at the school, a very dark Indian boy and I jumped up from the other side of the quadrangle, because that's what it was called, not the playground. And I remember getting up and shouting, "Paki!" at the top of my voice and running towards him and pointing at him. I don't even remember owning that, I just remember doing it and the boy came up to me and just punched me in the face and knocked me down, which is fair enough. And I went home and didn't think about the nature of racism, I wasn't racist, I was just desperate to off-load the attention onto something else and someone else. So that was interesting. We didn't like each other for the whole of school because of that incident but we should have stuck together. And there was the gay kid as well, you know, the kid who'd been caught rubbing his penis with another boy's penis in the bed; Barber. He was just vilified for the whole school career. So, you know, it was that kind of environment.

And then ... yeah, it was that kind of environment. And I had my little gang; I was in the weedy gang because they were the only ones who would take me. Everyone else was very much into postulating at rugby and being tough but of course the weedy gang liked the cool music and we caught punk as it came along, the others were still listening to Rush and glam and stuff and we were like "No, no, no. The Sex Pistols, that's what it's all about," you know? We had a little band, we formed a band, that didn't really last but it was fun. I had a great time, I really enjoyed it. It was hideously posh, but I had a really good time.

And again did the school make any kind of changes or did they need to make any changes to accommodate you?

No, I had to play cricket and rugby and hockey. And how useless was I at hockey? Bent double and I was always number eleven batsman, but usually you only get to number ten. I was number eleven batsman and the outfielder so sports was very boring for me because you were just standing in the field for three hours doing nothing. Rugby I could play but some kids wanted to do soccer instead and I got into the soccer bit because it was easier than rugby and the rugby teacher didn't know what to do with me. But for hockey, I was used as the take out the best player in the other team. So my use on the team was just to go up and crack the kid on the shins. Take him out of the game; get sent off, but at least I was of some use to my team.

Yes, like an assassin!

Yes! I don't know what to say. There was the one where there was the group date, because there were girl's schools. And there was the one where, it was a group date and there were seven of them and seven of us, and they came over and we managed to secure one of the common rooms or something ... I don't know how we were getting away with it but then I remember seeing the look on the face when she realised that I was the only boy left and that she should have fucking got on with it a bit quicker. And that was an

interesting look, which I sort of would perceive as realisation, horror, self-checking policing, still the horror, suppression and then forced smiling, something along that line. We processed that later when we were seventeen, eighteen. It turns out that's pretty much what she was feeling. But she obviously analysed why later in life, and felt ashamed and did all those liberal things but that was when I realised that my pecking order was different, you know?

And also a great thing that I use a lot in my history of performance lectures and stuff that I do which was that my favourite ... one term Mr Slade, our awesome English teacher, decided that we were all going to write plays. Every ... it was just going to be a play and it didn't matter what they were like but we had to take famous stories and make plays from them and I fucked with form ... I was already quite a mature playwright compared with the other kids because I'd watched twenty-five plays by then, you know? And so did stuff like, one of the characters would suddenly talk to the audience, just for one bit, and break form and things which my teacher was extremely impressed with, thought I was a great talent. And then the next term it was the school play and I bounced up to him and announced my intention to audition, and again there was a frozen smile that had a lot of fear behind it. He was like, "Great." And I was like, "That was a bit fucking weird. That was the first time he'd smiled at me like that." So I went off and learnt my earnest monologue and did it. And Carol-Ann Proctor, who was the red head that I really fancied, who I used to share five minutes with at the bus stop every day, who enjoyed the attention, was giggling about something at the back of the hall. Probably about something completely different but I perceived it as being embarrassed and giggling about me being on stage and so that pretty much instantaneously destroyed my intention of being an actor because I just thought, "They're embarrassed. You can't be on stage and embarrass people, it ain't gonna work. Right, what will I do?" I came back to it obviously after another seminal moment in my life but that was ... you know. So that was that school.

So still writing and things like that were your real top subjects, and did you have in your mind, did you ...

And music was becoming another one.

Yes I was going to say when did the drumming start?

My mum ... Bernie the drummer was staying a lot. One can only assume it was another affair. Mum operated like that a bit, you know? Good on her, self-survival. Don't know much about sisterhood, whatever anyway. There was a drum kit, he left it at mine. I was like, "Can I set it up in my bedroom?" He was like "Yeah, do you want a lesson?" "Sure." And I whiled away on my own for a term, drumming along to records that I had.

How old? That was at secondary school?

Thirteen. And I had become rather a wild child by that point. In order ... you know, you either become dangerous or a comedian to stop being bullied, and I did a mixture of both. And my mum did Saturday matinee, and we had Saturday school in the morning and Saturday afternoon / evening off, but my mum was always and I had a house in the centre of town so it quickly became a two hour party at Mat's house. Some of the older boys would muscle in and somehow there'd be some older girls there and they would snog a lot. So they used my youthful availability for their snogage. A couple of glasses got broken one time; it was going to end in tears or rape. Because the vodka had got introduced at that point as well and somebody was smoking dope. And I had a naughty au pair boy who was a total hippy and so at thirteen I

got introduced to marijuana, drinking and being naughty through those things, rather than going down the terraces and being tough which wasn't an option for me. Or interesting.

So there was a fair bit of that going on. We were all getting quite drunk. You know when you see the drunk thirteen year olds in the shopping mall? I guess we were them.

Well now there mostly stoned rather than drunk, aren't they these days? I would say, by me. I don't see many teenagers out on our street drinking, but I smell a lot of cannabis in our hallway when I come home.

Right. I can imagine. It's very fucking strong that stuff. God it stinks. Yeah, but, you know, this was not, you know, hydroponic skunk weed with a ridiculously twenty-three per cent THC content and no cannabinoids. This was old-school weed where you had one toke and giggled for four hours, you know, very different stuff. But that was the life that we had and it was great, I had a good time.

It sounds fantastic actually. And at that point, were you having any teenage aspirations about what you wanted to do?

Well yes ... luckily punk happened around the time very quickly after that and I had a drum kit and punk was all about you don't need to be a virtuoso like Rick Wakeman from Yes, you can just know three chords and be in a band, which was music to my ears and so we formed a punk band, pretty quickly. The band that we were in decided we were punk.

What was it called?

Krimineller Eighty-eight. H is the eighth letter in the alphabet and eighty-eight stands for Heil Hitler, right, so we weren't Nazis remotely, but for some reason we decided to call ourselves Krimineller, which is German for criminal, Heil Hitler. I have no idea why, not relevant to anything we sang, or did, just metally and tough.

There were a lot of references to Hitler in punk bands around then actually.

There was, yeah.

It was quite a sort of strange cross-over.

It was. Sid Vicious walking down the Jewish area in Paris in the film with his Nazi t-shirt on, just for shock effect was considered punk, not fucking arse-hole-ness, which it would be considered now, you know, it's weird!

Yes because the skinhead take on picking up Hitler ... it had a totally different vibe didn't it?

Yes, it was not like we admired this man's political policies. It was just like "Yeah! Hitler!" It was just to shock people. Good old juvenile punk. But it was a wonderful vehicle for me and, you know, for many, many disenfranchised kids. From being the school spastic, or the school flid, to the school punk was pretty good. It came with a lot of baggage, but it was worth it.

And did you have crazy haircuts too?

No I wasn't allowed, it was a very repressive school, I was the first boy in our school to have an earring, but I had hair that covered it in my ear so you couldn't tell for, like, the first two terms.

I'd love to see some photos of you from around then.

All fat-faced and longhaired.

I can't imagine you being fat-faced at all!

Where it goes in, it used to go out. You know what we looked like when we were young, we looked fatter faced.

A little bit I suppose, yes. What about after school, did you go on to further education? Did you carry on with education or did you ...

Well what happened was ... so around about fourteen my mum met Peter the stage manager from the Marlowe Theatre and they had a relationship and then Peter moved in and came to live with us, so I had ... I was a wild child, he needed to reign me in. He wasn't very good at fathering, he over did the reigning in because he thought that's what he should do, but it just made me resent him because too many of my hard-fought freedoms were taken away in the attempt to re-stabilise and discipline me. I needed disciplining, but I didn't need to go to bed at eight thirty in the evening when I was thirteen, that made me hate him for a while. However, he is a nice guy and was nice. Then he got a job as stage manager in Aberystwyth Arts Centre and it was up sticks and go again.

Aberystwyth's a bit different isn't it?

Aberystwyth was tough. I had discovered punk and then I was removed to a village in the middle of Wales where everybody hated English people and the school was a rural farmer's kids school comprehensive, that you had to take a shitty bus to get to down country lanes. So again I went through the whole being introduced to a new group of kids who weren't used to me, disability ... I was the posh cunt, that was my name for a lot of the time. They were like "Yeah you're weird because of your arms, but really it's the fact that you're English that makes us hate you. And you're a punk? We like Status Quo and Abba." So I couldn't have done more to alienate myself from those people, not that it was my intention, it's just what happened. So I became very aggressive and very punk, and I had my best friend Dan, who's still my best friend, we were punks in a sea of shit, as far as we saw it. The only people who listened to us were people

in hippy communes. There were quite a lot of hippy communes in those days. I had a wonderful loss of virginity experience in Wales which was really superb.

Go on, tell me about that.

Well, there was the one band in Wales that were punks called Krypton Tunes and the hippies and the punks ... but the punks were just me and Dan and Krypton Tunes ... all hung out together because we were all for the same thing, some by peace, some by violence, but you know and we could be punks with the hippies because they saw us as kids trying to fuck the system so they would encourage it and Suzie Foley was the daughter, a daughter in a lesbian commune in Llangeitho, they were called witches by everybody at school, unsurprisingly they were all lesbians and hippies. And she asked me out in the corridor and she was very sexual and had big boobs and hips and smelt of sebum and teenage-ness and I was a couple of years behind that so had an inexplicable funny feeling when she walked past that was a crush of sorts. And then, out of the fucking blue, out of all people, she asked me – whether she identified with another outsider because she was vilified, who knows what the reason was but she was the one that all the boys would talk about shagging when they called her a slut and a slag. So we had a couple of dates and I lost my virginity to her in a toilet at the back of the disco in Tregaron, which was the town where we went to have drinks on a Saturday so that was really awesome. I had a really, really good time in Wales.

But I became very aggressive and punk because the Welsh didn't like ... they wanted a reason not to like me and I gave them plenty. And so, sorry this is a long thing, but it's a preamble to the further education. And so my mum said, "Look, you've got out of hand" ... I told her to fuck off once walking up the stairs, and that was it. That. Was. It. I was smoking a lot of pot and wanking all the time and drumming in my bedroom and telling people to fuck off, deciding not to bother with school any more, doing all those really annoying things. So my mum said, "You're going back to your father and you're going to go to A Level college" ... oh no, no. I'm so sorry, gosh I've forgotten, I got sent back to Kent College. I failed all my exams and so was sent back to Kent College, as a border this time, on my own to re-take all my O-levels, to get one year of fifth form, so that I could do A-levels but because I'd missed a year, because when I'd been at Kent College it was very hierarchical, you beat up everyone in the class a year below you. I was now in the class but they were all sixteen now and so I had a really hard time, that time. But that soon stopped and my other best friend Nick and me started a band and we caught the mood of the ... by this time the school had heard of punk as well and we became the school band and people would ... our gigs were great and we did one gig in the school chapel where the teachers let us go and everybody had a great time and it was wonderful. I was celebrated at that point and that was nice.

And your mum still stayed in Aberystwyth?

Stuck in Wales now with my sister growing inside her tum. Product of the second marriage, thinking "I don't like it in Wales. There's no one to talk to. I'm an actress, I need glamour and social events."

Was she still working at that time?

She'd stopped completely. She was being a stay at home mum, it didn't suit her. Anyway, so I went and did the thing at Kent College. Didn't enjoy it, but it was just the one year. Really cemented my drug taking leisure life-style. So we were trying Valium and booze, great mix, everything goes in slow motion, you get really wasted. Glue ...

No!

Only tried it once. Didn't like it. God, you get really out of it leaves this horrible chemical taste in your mouth. Lots of pot, lots of trying to be with girls, but at this point the change that had happened was that a hundred girls had been put in the school. Forty girls out of four hundred. So each girl had ten boys that thought she was a goddess. So they all had over done images of their attractiveness, which was fine for them, lovely. I made a couple of women friends that have been friends with me ever since and Nick and that was it.

And then I really fancied this girl, Louise Gabriel, and I had some blues, I don't know if you remember blues? Speed pills and diet pills, you know? And she was two years below me but I just fancied the hell out of her, she was fourteen, I was sixteen, and she just persuaded me to give her one, which of course was the wrong thing because she ran around the school for five hours, speeding, going, "This is really great! I feel like I can fly and Mat gave me this!" And by the next morning I was hauled in, and the ex-social worker, liberal headmaster went, "Look, I'm really in a bad situation here, I really want to support you, you have a hard life, I want to support you, but you've broken every rule there is. Here are your two options: I expel you, you have shame, you have a black mark. You decide not to come back for sixth form; no one needs to know anything about it. What are you going to be doing next year?" "I'm going to be going to A-level college sir, thank you very much." And he went, "Good. Good luck." And that was that.

So where's an A-level college, and I didn't want to go to one in Aberystwyth because I hated Wales by that point and there was nowhere in Canterbury to be on my own so I had to go and live with my dad, and that was in Colchester where he had settled.

Was he still with Jerry?

He was still with Jerry, and they'd done all right and they had the second house now which was slightly bigger with the spare bedroom at the top, Victorian. Dad would occasionally work at the Mercury Theatre in Colchester and Jerry was always in the West End in shows like *Gypsy*, and *Irene* and all those big West End musicals, and I just slotted in and enrolled at the local A-level college, the tech, Colchester Tech. As a punk but dad was like, "I don't care how you look and what fashion you do. There are do's and don'ts." Drugs was not something that I shared with him. But he was very happy for me, as long as it was a respectful relationship, he was very happy for me to bring girls home with me and for them to spend the night, for us to have sex and "Did I have condoms?" He was very progressive like that, very proud, for two years we lived as a family unit as a gay couple with a son who was young, under eighteen, in a successful family unit, he was extraordinarily proud of that.

That's a very interesting change of events altogether from moving away from your mum. How did your mum feel about you going to live with your dad?

"Oh thank god, got him off my back, he's really unruly." I was a really unpleasant, petulant, horrible, sullen, Kevin-style teenager, I think, for her, and so she'd just had enough by then. She had enough to deal with with the husband who she was becoming increasingly annoyed with and then Bimla my sister came along
...

What was her name?

Bimla.

How do you spell that?

B-I-M-L-A.

Okay that's an unusual name!

Do you remember on Sunday morning telly there was *House for the Future*, hippy house with the first ever solar panels, documentary about hippies building a house? And then after that was the only Asian programme on television, called [*? Nyad Zing Zing Zeben 13:32*]

Never heard of it, no.

And the presenter was a really pretty Indian woman called Bimla something.

Okay, so she named her after ...

No he ...

He, yes.

... named her after a woman he fancied. I think that pretty much should have been a pointer for mum there but ...

So your sister would have been newly born then ...

I was seventeen when she was newly born.

Okay, and is it just the one sister that you have, or did they have any more children?

No, no. I mean our fragmented, second marriage family life split up, previous children, it all got very complicated. Peter had previous children from another marriage, one of whom had died so I got a call from another boy called Matthew going, "I've just lost my older brother, we've now been joined by marriage. Could you be my older brother? I really miss having an older brother." So I got this traumatised letter from a

young gay boy that I didn't know, who never to this day talks to his father because of what happened at the funeral of his brother, just ... you couldn't write it, well you could.

And did your mum and Peter stay together?

No, no, they split up. In an uncanny reminder of previous activity, suddenly a woman called Kim went to live with them and then I had a week off from touring, I was in a band by that point, it was a year after college. Mum was like, "Argh, can you pick Bim up from kindergarten and play with her at the playground for two hours and then come home and I'll be back an hour later and cook?" Because I was doing a family visit and I was like, "Yeah, I'd love to," but I was a Mohican fucking extremist by this point, crass, anarchy you know? And picked her up from school, charmed by this cute little four year old. So I said, "Okay so show me around the place then." And she was like, "So this is the kitchen, this is the living room, and this is where mum sleeps and this is where Peter and Kim sleep." I'm like, "What?" That is how I got told that it was happening again. Exactly the same thing happened.

Your poor mum!

I know. She carries the anger, suppressed in a cough, to this day. But we're there for her. So that was that and, you know, he's a very talented man, he's a stage manager, but more importantly, a music composer of great and mighty works that are hugely famous and he's part of a secret song writing cartel that write a lot of the hits that we hear that are supposedly written by the artists but aren't and all their money goes to heroine hospices and other charities and the press have a signed deal with these people that they will never blow the gaff on them as long as the money still always goes to those places, loads of people have signed up to it; people you wouldn't credit, like people from Fleetwood Mac and it's a big conspiracy that the music industry know about but the punters don't. So he's one of those people. I would sit there and he would play on the piano and a year later I would hear that tune in the charts. It would happen over and over again.

So I picked up a lot from that; what I got from Peter was I compose loads of songs now. It's because I sat there listening to his chord structures and they absorbed into my brain and I understand them at a subconscious level and so when I write I have a sort of ... the Celtic chord structures seem to come back.

And A-level college, what did you do? Which A-levels?

I did ... so I decided to do History, Sociology and English. History and English were my two favourite subjects, but I needed three A-levels for university and Sociology, when I looked at everything, seemed like a good one. I should have done the drama course ... well no, whatever ... and the first term, I was already quite political, I had gone ... in that last year at Kent College, our history teacher was a lovely guy, who was a staunch socialist and saw a mini-revolutionary in training in me and so when I wanted to go on the Rock Against Racism march, ie. go to an awesome gig and get drunk ...

I love all these titles; I can't help but laugh at them!

He saw it as me wanting to express my politics and gave me a day pass, unbelievably. I got absolutely wankered and was so weak with booze that as I was marching a band who were on the back of a truck ... the guy looked at me and went "Come here" and just held his hand out and got me in the truck and I just sat ... and it was The Ruts, I had no idea. So the band The Ruts, I sat on their truck to Hyde Park for the big rally. It was wonderful; I had a great time, just sobered up enough for when I got back. He knew but didn't care because he saw the fire in my eyes of political stuff and he thought, "My work is done."

So when I came to the college I was already very political and I had this real right-winger, and I was like, "But sir, history is only the version of the victor," you know, and all of that sort of stuff, "We've got to have another perspective on all these things, because otherwise how do we know it's true and that's how it really happened?" And he was like, "Because I'm telling you that's how it happened," you know, and I'm like "We'll I don't think it did it did happen like that." You know, I did all that business, and he and I agreed that that was not going to work, that he was still going to be teaching history, but probably I shouldn't take history as an A-level because I probably wouldn't pass if we were arguing in the first term of the first year.

There's not quite enough space for interpretation at A-level stage is there?

No, I would say not until PhD level almost these days. So I stopped doing that, which actually, given how much I was into other stuff, gave me the space to actually pass two A-levels that I probably wouldn't have ... I would have failed all of them if I'd had three things to do. I did English Lit and English Language as two separate ones, I don't know why they did that then, but they did. I scraped through on Sociology because I was a bit naughty and didn't do the revision; there were a lot of names and figures you had to remember but I got the concepts. To this day, I see the world through those eyes [telephone rings] I'm so sorry.

[Break in recording]

So when did you leave home and first get your own place, your own independent home?

Well because of the thalidomide compensation, and because my parents had done this thing where they'd signed it off at twenty-one ... so I couldn't get access to my compensation until I was twenty-one; a lot of my other thalidomide people had had it when they eighteen but my dad had seen where I was going as a teenager and thought "He's going to spend it all on drugs or partying" and held it back till I was twenty-one which was really sensible because he was bang on about that. And, of course, I was awarded x amount every year – it was fifteen grand with me which just accumulated because we were very frugal people who'd lived on bread and lived in one room, so didn't get me a brand new this that and the other. We'd occasionally think, "Can we afford a small holiday in Margate or whatever?" and do that. So there was all this money and I was entering into ... we were talking about me leaving home, second year of college I think it was or maybe I'd left college by then and there was talk of, "Well probably now the best thing for you to do is to buy a house, you've got enough money to buy one better than you renting or doing any of that."

So at twenty-one, punk drummer in a band in Colchester, I found myself with a house but I was just taking loads of acid and just wanted to be a punk and have sex and get loaded and all those things and so my house ... I sort of put Dan in it, my best friend, because he needed rent-free accommodation, there was no electricity there for a while and stuff, but he lived in it like a squat after I bought it and then I moved in as well and we slowly did up the place, but like two twenty-year-old punks who take drugs would do up the place, so found a bit of second hand carpet, you know, I mean it looked like a squat. We were in a band so

we just made the dining room, the band room, with scant regard, no regard, for any of the neighbours and just hammered out music.

It would be a dream come true to most punks.

All the time. I left my back door open, even when I went out. People would be there when I got back, only friends, it was party central. Then I got my video recorder stolen ... heroine had entered the periphery of the scene that I was in and then uncannily around the same time I had my video recorder stolen and so I had to start locking the back door. But this house was amazing and so I left dad's quite ... although drugs was the one thing he didn't tolerate so I had to really be under the radar, so once I left him, there was no radar left and, you know, really debauched scenes of loosing the plot for three or four days would ensue with my friends. Lots of shagging, lots of other people using the other bedroom as a shag palace. It was party central.

What did the neighbours think?

Well the neighbours were George and thingy, the Polish builder and his wife, who had a young baby and so they were like ... we negotiated, they went, "Look, if you can turn it down a bit, and not do it then, you won't mind all the baby crying all the time," which I could hear. So I was like, "Yeah, great. And can you build me a four-poster bed?" So he built me a four-poster bed, and he built me some shelves, he was a really good woodworker, builder. And so we were really quite pally. I think they were really pushing their most tolerant attitude out to meet me, because I must have been hell to live next to, but it was okay. I knew some of the older people in the street. I knew the local pub, it was a nice little time but the police would arrive sometimes. It was fairly out there; it was fairly out there. But we were like ... Colchester was full of soul boys and punks ... do you remember the difference? Before Alien Sex Fiend just brought punk and dance music together, before that it was one or the other, 'Ignore the Machine' was the song that brought them together, I know it very well. We were the punks. There were whole swathes of Colchester ... because Colchester was a soul soy town, a squaddy town, and a soul boy town, with a small enclave of punks, and I was in that small enclave. It felt great. We hung out up at the university. The punks hung out there, because all of the good bands went to the university. Got to see Siouxsie and the Banshees and the Ramones and all those people, really brilliant bands, I had a really great time. And I was in a band myself, and then became in the band scene in Colchester, which was very healthy in those days, blah blah blah blah blah blah. Went on for a couple of years, band was doing well, decided to move to London.

What was your band called then?

The band I was in that moved me to London was called *Living in Texas*, the most successful band I was in; we had four or five albums. Various different record labels, ending up with EMI in France, we went on TV a lot being a really shit mainstream rock band who weren't very good.

Okay and what age are we talking at here?

Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. So twenty-one, got my place in Colchester, by twenty-three living in London, so it was only a couple of years.

So did you sell your Colchester place?

No I didn't ... it was all about being an anarchist and being a punk and I had fucking ... I had property, that was like, not the message ...

It doesn't go right does it?

It doesn't go with the image and stupidly I went, "Right, I don't want to own property anymore." When I think now. Do you know what I would own now if I'd have kept that? I would own a two million pound, Victorian, five-bedroom house in Clapham, not that I want that, but anyway ...

So what did you do with the house though?

Sold it. No, rented it for a while, and just didn't like that either, it felt even worse actually, being a landlord, so just sold it, and put the money in a savings account and didn't touch it for years, just lived in squats and housing associations. Bust open a few squats that were then licenced to a housing association. I was right in there in London with all the people doing that, that whole scene. Not that they knew anything about the twenty grand I had in a bank account, and not doing anything with it either! So on both levels it was stupid. Cut forward fifteen years and it was time to buy a place again and the money had accumulated and so I was still able to get somewhere. Although I was paying a mortgage on it, it was still enough for a down payment on the flat in Brixton, which is what happened years later, ten years later.

So you just sort of put that money on one side in a way, and pretended it wasn't there, so that you could live the lifestyle.

Pretended it wasn't there so I could live the lifestyle. Really silly because ... well it's silly on every count but that's what happened. We forget how political we were in those days, it's extremely important; Tories were scum, I meant they are again now right? For a while they weren't for a bit, but now they are again. And it was anti-nuclear, women's right to choose abortion, free Nelson Mandela, CND, all of those things, all of the time.

It was really different wasn't it? It felt like there was something different in the air around the 1980s as well I think.

Alternative comedy, you know, no more Bernard Manning. Disability sadly didn't get to ride on that particular bandwagon, we had to wait for our own one later on but everything changed and I was part of that change. I was at the forefront, in my town, of the change. And they've got, at Colchester; the most influential person in my life was Mica. I was seventeen / eighteen and she was thirty-two, a politics graduate, a revolutionary Marxist-communist-feminist, who wore a boiler suit and had pink hair, who told

me, "No you can't come to Greenham Common with us. It's a woman's camp." "But I thought it was about anti-nuclear."

And Crass, the band, hugely influential. The album *Penis Envy* changed my life, I could have gone down a different route altogether, but instead I got told to behave properly as a man, and took it to heart.

They were brilliant, Eve Libertine ...

I got to meet them, you know, years later. A bunch of the worst floppidy-doppidy hippies you could ever meet. "Really, you're wearing cheesecloth? Wow, you've reverted to type then." They used punk as a vehicle didn't they? They were hippies ... have you ever read the book by the drummer?

No I haven't read the book ...

Fascinating. Penny Rimbaud's book. I can't remember what it's called now. Fascinating. He was an art teacher in the early seventies, who wanted to be an agent provocateur and then when punk happened, he basically orchestrated it. Steve Ignorant and the other ones were the real deal, but the rest of them were as calculated as the Baarder- Meinhof Gang, but in their own way.

Ah, don't shatter my illusions!

I'm not saying that's wrong ... *Shibboleth* I think it was called, the book ... I'm not saying it was wrong. 'Berketex Bride' and all those songs ...

Shaved Women ...

[Sings] Shaved women, collaborators! I know, and that Jesu Christus.

I couldn't listen to that one completely being at a Catholic school ...

Gave everyone the willies right, because that was real devil people.

I couldn't even listen to the Siouxsie and Banshees the Lord's Prayer one, on the back of one of her LPs. Because for me it was ... I couldn't break out of my ... it was too blasphemous for me actually be able to cope with.

Years later, spending some time with Rock Bitch in their commune, practicing the Satan sex magic people, rid me of all of those preconceived ... it's all learned. It's all learned, it doesn't mean anything, none of it means anything. It's all learned.

But when you're a teenager, you know ...

Yeah, I remember hearing ... someone put that on before the gig at the St Mary's Art Centre that used to be a church. And we were in there, in an old church, listening to someone say, "Jesu Christus, fuck your pig god" and all this and we were like "Arghhh!!" It was really bad.

I even felt bad having the record in my room, I thought it seemed bad that I had the LP in my bedroom as a teenager.

I liked Crass, I liked Crass a lot. There but for the grace of Crass and their ilk, I might have gone down the Oi! Route. I don't think I would have, because someone would have gone "You can't do a proper Nazi salute with those arms" or something and that would have been it.

Very, very grateful for that time. And Mica was a revolutionary, and saw me as a thalidomide victim. I was in denial about my disability and I didn't do talking about my disability at all until I was thirty. It was just something we didn't speak about and she just bided her time. She just knew at some point I would wake up and get angry and she wanted to be there and point me in the right direction when I was angry. She was an agent provocateur, revolutionary-Marxist-feminist who, I said the word, 'cunt' in natural parlance in the pub and she punched me in the temple so hard that it almost knocked me out and as I lay there on the floor, dazed and confused looking up, she lent over and went, "I like my cunt." Like that. And I remember thinking, "Fucking hell." That was different; things were different after meeting Mica.

All great part of the political journey. It was a natural place for me to be with her. And we fucked, and we fucked, and we fucked like no one's business; we fucked so much. I was seventeen, she was thirty-two, she went, "No do it like this. Don't do that, do this." You know, how lucky am I? It was wonderful.

Was there a point ... in most interviews that I've done so far, there is a sort of ... it's not like a denial of disability but it's more a kind of, somehow being so busy getting on with life and dealing with everyday things, that it doesn't come up in people's minds to really, really think about it. And you just sort of mentioned it ...

Well I didn't have a framework for understanding it until I was involved with the disability rights people who framed disability as a social construct, in the social model of disability, rather than the charity or the tragedy model or the medical model. And, you know, I'd been on all those marches and then I saw some disabled people campaigning for accessible public transport and realised ... and finally tapped into my genuine righteous indignation, that actually it was about my disability. "No everybody. Not that I'm pissed off because I've got short arms, but I'm pissed off because I'm treated like this because I've got short arms." I'm not invited to the parties, I didn't get the auditions ... dah dah dah dah dah dah ... you know, those avenues were not open to me for the stupidest reason that my body looks a bit different and I do some things differently. And I finally had a framework but I also had a lot of other disabled people going, "Yes, you can be one of us. You can be part of this great movement." And I had a political movement that was mine to own, and be part of, and I just jumped in to the deep end. I literally turned around to my band and said, "I don't want to do this anymore. I'm going off to be disabled." Pretty much. And they went, "It was only a matter of time Mat. Fair enough, see you later." Other things were going on in my life but, Mary Duffy, the Irish Thalidomider, to use Buddhist terminology, the woman that banged me on the head and gave me enlightenment, very influential to me.

So at this point in time ... we're looking at probably early twenties?

Well early twenties, I was just taking drugs and being in rock bands and shagging.

So was it from more towards the age of thirty.

Yes I was thirty. But I was in denial and it is denial. The phrasing I use to explain it to people is I had to 'come out' as a disabled person.

Yes, I suppose that's the way I was trying to phrase the question in a way.

It is, it's a coming out. You always know that your body's different, but the coming out to me was accepting that it hurt emotionally to be treated like a second-class citizen and what was I going to do about it? Now that I'd identified the problem, I had to do something about it.

Did you have any particular experiences where you were treated like a second-class citizen along the way? Was it mostly looking for jobs or ...

Yes, it was just when I decided to become an actor and a couple of really, really bad audition experiences. I'm really over-sensitive so ... I was put off acting for over sixteen years by this school audition experience, then my mother invited me to see Graeae, this production of *Ubu Roi* and Matt, my brother, came along as well ... I think in retrospect it was a pincer movement to get me to go to something they thought would be good for me and it was a non-religious epiphany. I saw a sold out audience laugh and really enjoy a very professional, good piece of work by all disabled actors, and my entire world was turned upside down.

Who did that?

Graeae Theatre Company. G-R-A-E-A-E. Jamie, the bloke with Cerebral Palsy, unintelligibly spitting cake all over the audience for the first five minutes, it took ten minutes to understand what he was saying. I had a lot of impairment challenges to deal with but the social experience was that the audience were enjoying it. They weren't embarrassed, they were in ecstasy, and that maybe I could provide that kind of ecstasy for people, and not just embarrassment and I literally, a week later, was knocking at the door of the theatre company and I said, "You don't know me, but I want an audition. I'm not an actor, but I'm the son of actors, it's in my blood, I feel like I've come home." And they were like, "Are you going to cut off the two and a half foot long dreadlocks?" I'm like, "Do I have to?" They're like, "Not yet, but you will do soon if you want a part in anything." So I thought, "Fuck it. I'll reinvent myself." So I called around Dylan, the son of Mica, his surrogate mother who's my friend, Oona, the young fifteen year-old who was living with me at the time who Mica had asked me to look after because her step-father was hitting her and a couple of other people. And I said, "You're going to witness the reinvention of Mat. We're all going to get loaded, and then you with this razor are going to cut off all my hair." It was great.

Did you really have very long dreadlocks at that point?

Yes. I'd gone down the crusty route, you know, I'd moved to Brixton and been in a reggae band. I'd left all that French rock business behind because it didn't really suit me and I didn't like the singer any more and I was only earning a hundred quid a week. So I went home and started dealing pot and being in a reggae band, in a crusty band, in Brixton.

What was that called?

The Grateful Dub. We were big in festivals for a while; we were legendary. People went to us to laugh at how out of it we were.

Really?

Yes.

So your main money earning was really through what you were doing with bands and ... you never did, what you'd call a day job?

I've had one job in my life; ten days of being a courier. I was dealing fairly heavily ... I don't mind this being part of the history as it's something in my past and I was punished for it, put an end to it. I was dealing just to my friends in bands, but it was keeping me afloat and I thought, "This is illegal, I could get busted, I should try to do a normal job. I've got a car, what can I do with a car? Courier work." I bust my gut. You have to drive illegally and you have to do eleven jobs a day to make any money. Eight jobs is what would be natural to do in London, you have to do eleven, which means you have to break the law and you have to be really fast everywhere. It's exhausting; if you're not there at seven, you don't pick up the good jobs, and you don't leave till seven and you have to drive like a psycho all day to earn, after tax, one hundred and twenty pounds.

The following weekend ... I knew bigger dealers than me ... a guy visiting wanted a large amount that I didn't have but knew A and knew B and made two hundred pounds introduction fee for me introducing him to the bigger dealer and it was at that point that I pretty much decided never to work again, in straight work. But then years later I got busted. Stitched up, grassed, busted, tied up like a kipper and realised I was going to have to not do that anymore. Actually get gainful employment. This time I was working at Disability and acting, so I started tutoring a youth drama group for disabled kids at the White Horse and slowly started working into my areas of interest. Picking it up. Then I was lucky enough to get an acting job, and an agent and an Equity Card.

Give me some ages for these. So when were you busted?

Busted was 1988. No, first little bust was 1988 and then the big bust was more like '91ish, but I carried on taking lots of drugs until '95 when I just stopped it all. I was doing martial arts at that point so I just went head long into martial arts for my buzz, rather than coke. I was with Patou we met around ... we met a year before I had my disability consciousness so she lived with me all through the change in my life, the politicization. She had her own stuff to go through, her environmental-ecological, we became this awesome unit of forward-thinkingness which was wonderful for seven or eight years, and then not cool for a few years and then we split up. So thirty, awakening disability coming out, leaving music and doing the full disabled thing, '96. And by '98 I was a professional disabled actor I suppose.

Because I remember seeing you around on TV ...

My golden years were 2000, to 2004. I had a lot of work. Channel Four liked me at that point. I had some great work. Documentaries, dramas, voice-overs. I was getting loads. They foolishly ... well I foolishly turned them down on a thing. They weren't giving me acting work but wanted me to be a presenter and I saw that as cheap. They offered me a whole series Mat Fraser's Extreme World. A bit like *Duncan Dares* if you remember that from the '80s but with the added spice of my disability making it all exotic. And I said, "No, I don't want to do that." And then I had an argument with somebody doing a voice-over the following week and Channel Four just dropped me. It's the way it happens.

Do you regret that now, not taking the series?

Well I don't regret anything, because otherwise I wouldn't have ended up here right now in this place in my life where I am and I do enjoy it, but I think probably it could have been a mistake to turn that down. I still think my best bit of work is yet to come but, you know.

Well there's still loads to come isn't there? What about relationships going back? You've woven into the story a few people you've met along the way. But did you ever find that your disability had any impact on your being able to find partners?

No, once I learnt to turn the negative into the positive, not at all. You always want what you can't have. The sort of women who were interested in me are women that think and feel so I, all my life, my younger life, wanted to shag girls called Sharon who went out with rugby players, who had slutty short skirts and vomited on a Saturday night.

Sounds attractive!

Because those are ones who aren't available to me because they take a look and they go "No, you don't look like David Beckham." Not that he existed in those days, but you know. More fool me eh? However, my slightly Nickishness was counter to the belief system of most of the women I slept with and that caused problems which I deserved feeling the brunt of but most of the time I was fairly respectful. But I was always up front. I was very like "I want to have sex. I don't want to have a relationship. I always want to be your mate, but I feel that if we have sex it will deepen our friendship and I'm down with that, but if you're not then that's fine, but I would like that." You know? So I was always very honest about it. And I did great. There was a pool of us, there tends to be doesn't there? A small community of about thirty people that inter-mingle

within themselves only really. Not to say we were swingers or anything ridiculous like that but, you know, quite a lot of us had shagged quite a lot of us by the end of it.

And were they mostly people that you were involved with in terms of acting and music?

No. Music yeah, acting no, disability a bit. I came along and there was a bloke, the head honcho of the disability rights movement was called Johnny Crescendo, basically Bob Dylan in a wheelchair, singing for disabled rights, but through the medium of folk music and guitar. I came along and went, "No, no no no, I'm going to do this by rap." I was a rapper and reinvented the message and made it contemporary. Consequently all of the women who were under thirty-five and who were single and in the movement, many of whom became available to me, some of which, you know, I don't know what to say. I'm not, what was the line? "I'm not shagging another girl, I'm liberating her repressed sexuality." But I'm sorry, but there is an element of truth in that. I'm really sorry, I know it's the horriblest, sexist thing to say but there's an element of truth in it. If you make a woman feel ... if you make a person, it's actually not about gender here, I don't think so much if you make a person feel really hot and really sexy because of the lustful way you approach them and deal with them and they come away feeling hot and have had ravaged sex and the sort of sex they don't always have then everyone feels better afterwards. I'm sorry, it made me feel better and I know it made a lot of my partners feel like that. It was great; I don't think it was a bad thing.

But you had some fairly long relationships along the way as well ...

I had three very long relationships ... with Kat and Patou, I had sex outside of the relationship, behind their backs, because I still was suffering from what we are now terming a Nickism but that's slightly unfair, this awful sort of conquest thing going on. So with Kat ... Kat was there when my dad died, Kat was fifteen and I was nineteen, we were family friends. I cried into her lap once because there was nowhere else to cry and one time it was all too much so I went to her house and broke down and cried. That was a kind of teenage love thing and years later we became partners and we lived together for a long time but it was through all the coke and the dealing and the going on tour stuff so we split up and that's why I went to Brixton where I met Patou. It was in the music scene, we had a lovely time together but, you know, I don't think either of us were wholly faithful with each other for wholly fucked up, psychological reasons.

How do you spell Patou?

P-A-T-O-U.

That's how I thought it might be.

We were together sixteen years.

Wow, that is a long time.

We experimented a little at times, but not much. It was a monogamous relationship – I kid myself we had an arrangement but we didn't have an arrangement. But she's a woman, you people have intuition that we don't, she would have known about that, why didn't she confront me with that? I don't know. It was all a bit weird. It was something we sadly never spoke about but anyway that's what was going on in that time. And I've got Julie now. So it was Kat for seven years, Patou for sixteen and it's been Julie for the last five.

Right, I didn't realise you'd been together with Julie for that long.

Well, there was a year and half cross over which I feel terribly ashamed about. I was out of love with Patou, I wanted out but when you build up a life for sixteen years it's a damn hard thing to break. When you have the whole fucking middle class suburban success house in Teddington, a lifestyle and, of course, I woke up one morning and didn't want any of it any more, it was not what I needed, and we didn't know how to approach it and I was very scared for a year. And when I fell in love with Julie and stuff as well it was difficult, it was a very difficult time. I feel bad about the three month period particularly where I was lying but then it was all out in the open and it wasn't like it was just ... she had some casual sex I think outside of the relationship, I certainly did. I was locked into the touring thing and, you know, one is ashamed to admit it but half of the conferences I ever went to I went because I thought I would have sex there, not because I was interested in the conference.

And now Julie ... is Julie based in New York?

Julie's a New Yorker. We have a difficult, complicated lifestyle.

Yes, how do you get to meet up?

We met ... Patou became very hard line as I guess she was hunkering down in what she felt very safe in as everything else seemed to be slipping through her fingers maybe, and I found it really oppressive being in the house for a while because, you know, I wasn't allowed to say this about that politician and, you know, "There should be no more children on earth," really extreme stuff and I had developed my cabaret skills, I was then singing a lot, I noticed that burlesque was moving into the cabaret scene vociferously. Neo-burlesque started in Coney Island in 1990 basically, the late '80s, that's where it came from, New York. And I had worked in the side show in Coney Island because of my freak show work since 2000.

Yes, I've seen pictures of that.

So I was kind of aware that it was going on and I was working there and they said, "Fuck, we haven't got an MC for tonight, will you do it?" And it was like, "I'm tired, man, I've done a grind show all day," and they were like, "No, you have to do it dude because there's this woman who's currently Miss Coney Island and Miss Exotic World, which is the Oscars of burlesque and she's the best in the country." Unbeknownst to me she was, like, "Can I bail on tonight's show, there's going to be no-one there, it's the first of the season." And they were like, "No, there's this really awesome guy from England" and it was like that. Backstage it was immediate attraction. I saw her work, I really liked it, she saw mine, we hit it off incredibly. We started emailing each other, that was the lethal part, I was out of love and all at sea, trapped in a life I didn't want and not knowing what to do with it. Her husband was becoming increasingly gay and coming out as gay.

We tried through emails to help each other, “Why don’t you try this?” “Try that, that sometimes works for us, why don’t you try it?” But underneath all of it I think we were very attracted to one another.

And then somebody offered me to work and said, “Mat, I’d like you to work with a non-disabled artist, I’m going to commission you to do some work. You’ve done a lot of solo work and it’s great, I’d like to see what you do with somebody from another discipline.” And I mentioned this to Julie and she said, “Well, what about me? We could do *Beauty and the Beast*?” And I was like, ping! It was just like, “Of course, why haven’t I gone down this ... re-imagining fairy tales and disability, this is a fucking vein, a rich, deep vein.” And we did that awful thing of convincing ourselves it was about an artist project, which it was, but it was also about us being allowed to be in Zagreb together for a week, away from everybody and, of course, immediately fell into bed and did all that and we were in love a week later and then it took another year to disassociate previous relationships and do it with a degree of decency and respect and timing and stuff. It was very difficult.

And how much time do you get to spend together now?

Well, her life’s changed in the last three years in that she’s got a regular touring thing in Europe, which is annoying and good. Good meaning when there’s three days off I can do a mercy dash or she can and it doesn’t cost an arm or a leg, bad in that she’s never at home and she likes her home. So we spend a third of the time here, a third of the time in New York and a third of the time on tour, that’s pretty much how it goes. Half of that touring time is together and half of our home time is together. So we spend about two thirds of the year together and third not together, in six week lumps.

Well, that’s not too bad, two thirds of a year ...

At first it was really awful but we seem to be settling into it and Prunella Scales and Timothy West, one of the longest serving couples in show business, said that that’s the secret of it that they’re only together for half of the year. It’s all or nothing for us. When we’re together we’re really together, like physically in the same room 24/7 and that’s not natural. So we’ve started to try and play house a bit more where ... certainly in New York where I’ve been developing my career since ’05. I have plenty to do in the day that I can get lost in and so does she and we meet and we’re just like any normal couple. Here it’s a bit less like that because she’s developing herself and London is ... [bleeping noise] ... is that me?

I don’t recognise it. I think it might be outside. Does anything you have make that noise? I don’t own anything that makes that particular beep.

I’m going to go and check.

I’ll pause you for a second.

[Break in recording].

And I still love Patou very much and I still feel bad about it but I still think it's for the best because we had stopped each other growing as people. We were doing the opposite, it was becoming reductionist and we were closing each other down and I needed to go off and do stuff, so did she. I once heard her on the phone ... I mean once it was out in the open and she got over the shock of being the one who was told the news rather than teller of the news, she admitted that we had been done for the previous two years and we should have split up before anything acrimonious had happened. But I overheard her saying, "What do you mean? I've just lost the love of my life" blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and there's a little bit of me that somehow ... I don't know, we weren't good for each other but sixteen years is very hard to reproduce. And I love Julie to death but she's ... and she's very different to Patou. She's a performer; neither of us have had to share the ego space with another large ego before, that's been interesting. It's tempestuous with us ... I mean Julie is like ... I've gone from the archetype feminist woman, who won't wear make-up, to a show girl who considers herself a feminist, but here idea of feminism is very different to that which Miranda Sawyer yet again espoused very recently on *The Culture Show* in that way that she does, it gets my goat I don't know why. Not what she's saying but the way that she says it. Julie can run down the street in six inch heels – is that a good or a bad thing? I don't know, it's there, it's her life.

I think it's fine to have different versions, isn't it? It's what's behind what you're doing that counts.

But I've fallen into the world of striptease, it confuses me sometimes but there it is, it's there. I know what I think about the genre – notions of feminism, of course, are rife all the time and it's a consideration but I'm certainly not going to be the one to say what is and what isn't feminism. It certainly isn't my job.

I don't think I could say what is and isn't either.

Is feminism the equality of women? The emancipation and equality of women? Have we all ... from being told that all pornography is women hatred and for me feeling guilty for looking at women's bodies, which I remember doing, we've now arrived at a place where that's not necessarily the case. But have we come full circle? That second book by Germaine, you know, the one she didn't write for twenty five years and then wrote. And she went, "No, no, no, when I said integration I meant assimilation. I didn't mean assimilation, I meant integration. I didn't mean just rejecting all those ideas, I meant bringing them with you, you know, sort of thing."

But most young men think the word feminism and the feminist movement means lesbian and they're fucking stupid and young men are so scary. If you tap into their attitudes on women it's so scary, almost worse than the stuff we reconstructed, I think. But my generation are not like that. I occasionally meet a young person who re-establishes your faith in young people like a young boy who interviewed me yesterday, he's doing a PhD on freak shows, lovely guy, really sorted, respectful, he gets it. So there are still some nice men out there. But now I work with women who are sex workers, all my friends are sex workers.

And that's a kind of total full circle round, isn't it?

It kind of is. That's fine, I love all my friends and I think what they're doing is awesome. When you see somebody being a victim in their life you try to point it out to them, ask them not to, but most of the women I know are very on top of what they do and enjoying it. No-one I know has been coerced into what they're doing. And Diva, Diva Hollywood, that's her professional name, Dolly Halliday is her real name, reacted to

the new ... she was in an installation with a live artist, reacted to the diagnosis of her having MS by becoming a stripper, that was her way of reacting to the news.

And how much of your time is spent now ... how much time do you spend on the burlesque scene, if you like?

Half my time.

Half your time, yes.

At least. Because my wife is a chief exponent of it. I mean, you know, I'm very proud of the fact that Julie is the bad girl of the scene, the performance artist political dangerous one, who rejects any previous notions of like retro or classical stuff, only does, like, virtual art terrorism but using her body. I mean we are naked all the fucking time these days on stage. I know my mum thinks that I should wind it in now that I'm fifty and I'm like, "Yes, I would. It's just people are paying me a lot of money." Am I missing that film role that I should be waiting in the wings for? The big film role that I'll hopefully get. "Don't work at the Box," this late night club where I take all my clothes off for money, for the kids of millionaires. "Don't do that, it's demeaning and it'll stop you getting your job." No, it earns me thirteen hundred quid a week and the call won't come anyway and when it does come it won't give a flying fuck that I've been stripping. It won't even know and it certainly won't care. If the call comes ever, it probably won't, but if it does I think it's okay so I've just chilled out. Julie helped me with that. It's like, "Stopping what career, man? Wake up!" "No, no, I can't because nobody respects people that ..." "They don't respect you anyway because you're disabled. You can do what you want." And in a way I can.

I just want to be a film actor, that's all I want to do, just have nice roles in really awesome films. But thus far that has eluded me. It doesn't matter when you're an actor how old you are but I had hoped to have been that first disabled leading man but it didn't ... and maybe because I took my eye off that ball and went and did burlesque for five years is a contributing factor. I don't know. But you can't regret what you do.

What sort of role would you like to do? What would ... if you envisage your leading man role, what would you like to be?

A romantic lead.

A romantic lead, yes. Not like a detective or a CSI specialist?

No. I've done an action film, *Unarmed But Dangerous*; I'm the lead in it. It's awful but I've done that now. I've done a Shakespeare. I've yet to do panto. A romantic lead. Now, in fact it's quite nice being a bit older and society still not being ready for a disabled romantic lead yet that's kind of manly in that way.

What's a romantic lead though? What kind of movie? A romcom movie?

Mm-hmm. I'm not saying you have to be like George Clooney and everything. You can be a nerdy, fumbling, nervous guy who gets the girl. But you have to get the girl.

Okay. So you want like a mainstream, happy-feely film.

Yes, with emotions and reality and three dimensions and life as we know it. And, sure, dealing with the disability stuff, of course, not necessarily talking about it all the time. But of course it's there, you only have to look at me. But that's been my real life, falling in love and stuff like that. And I know how to house it around an interesting drama. I know they're not going to strike it as a Mills and Boon, you know, I know the girl has to have a personality disorder in order to like disabled guys and then I get larey and rid her of her personality disorder. I understand how stories have to be, I do, I write them and I've been doing them for years. I suppose what I like is that you can't ... the disabled person has to ... at the moment, where we are in society, unless it's an issue-based, do-gooder film, the disabled character is going to have to be a subsidiary character, not the lead role, then it can be the best friend of the lead person. Or the father of the girl, that's what I'm angling for at the moment. I just want to write for the next ten years and I'm finishing a couple of cheap projects now but then I want to write, like, father and daughter move to a new town, it's actually about the daughter but you get some disability dad stuff in there as well.

Because I could see you in a really cool detective role, you see, and then you could have the love interest on the side.

A man has just written me an entire detective series called *Funk* that's doing the rounds now. So far we've had rejections from four television companies, all of whom say, "We love it, it's just not weird enough. It's too normal. If you want Mat in it, and we get it, we know he could do it, we've seen him act, but the rest of it is just like a normal crime drama which is a bit quirky here and a bit quirky there. We need it to be weirder." And, like, I'm too weird for everybody else. So I'm kind of, again, stuck in that middle ground. And in the year while we all think, "Hmmm ... what do we think about that?" I'd rather be earning fourteen hundred quid a week than not earning anything.

Well, there's no point not doing, is there?

It's at two in the morning. Do you go to The Box? No. Does the television executive of Channel 4 go to The Box? No. I'll tell you who goes to The Box, the Rothschilds and the Mitfords. They actually go to the fucking Box and all these really posh kids know me as Seal, the weird flipper guy who strips down to full nudity every night for their shock. I'm a shock act. I'm cool with that. Old politicians are really like, "How can you demean yourself? You're doing it for the ridicule." And I'm like, "No, what I'm actually doing is confronting their preconceived notions of sexuality, throwing it in their face, they'll laugh at me, they'll point at me, they'll ridicule me to their friends." But you know what? Inside some stuff is going to be going on that I caused and I'm on stage going, "Yeah baby, I'm here and I'm beautiful and I love myself. So do you, you know it, you little thing, come on, you know you want to do me." "Oh no, it's horrible!" And I love doing that; I love the confrontation of it and the celebration.

Anyone that I know sees it as a pastiche of striptease with body positive self-love, get paid by the enemy to do it. Why not? Why wouldn't I want to do that? "Entertaining millionaires, Mat? What's happened to you?" someone said. And I did think for a minute, "Yeah, Crass wouldn't approve of that, would they?"

No, probably not but then you said that that was all a construct anyway.

Yes but it was an important construct. They wanted the kids ... they didn't want them all to think that Jimmy Pursey from Sham 69 was saying anything important, they wanted to ... they wanted people to fucking burn the state, get punk, get them all angry enough, rile them up with the music. I think that's a good thing. I just wished I'd been to that commune in North East London.

Spend a day there.

Did you?

No, I said I'd love to have spent a day there.

Me too. Golly!

What about medical. Going onto something slightly more everyday. Any medical problems over the years? I remember reading that you were having problems with the drumming at a certain point; it got painful for you to carry on? Is that right?

Well, it did but I was also taking a lot of cocaine and we've all ... a lot of us have got weak kidneys, cocaine is processed through the kidneys and lower back ache and kidney pain are interchangeable. The lower back pain started when I stopped drumming, whether because I wasn't being mobile and working my back like when I was drumming or after having stopped my body went, "Right, do you want to see the damage you've done?" I don't know which it was. I've always known osteopaths; there's always been lower back and neck things for me. I keep it in check, I'm really supple and lithe and I do lots of stretching. I don't do yoga but I stretch for at least half the time in the gym when I go to work out and I know it's very important and I changed my diet and I'm healthy. I don't want to be like Rob Morton, the thalidomide guy who died from a heart attack two years ago, you know. Or three years ago.

Was he very overweight?

Yes, smoking and drinking and never moving. I want to be one of the fit ones. It's important to me to be fit, I want my mobility, I need my mobility. I was looking at the way Geoff hauls his swimming suit down, he uses his toe. He can get his toe up to the top of the back of his waist and haul his swimming trunks down like that. You need to be supple to do that; you need to not have arthritis in the knee. So it's a slightly fear-based intent of mine to stay healthy in the light of other people's failing health.

What about your drumming for the Paralympics ceremony? How did that come about and what was it like?

Three years ago I had no work in October / November / December. I got offered by Graeae, who I'd since disassociated with because I think their work's very amateur under this current directorship and actually is a disservice to perceptions of disability sometimes, they did a musical based on all the music of Ian Dury about a young group of kids who lived in 1979, worked at Fine Fayre and wanted to go and see Ian Dury and the Blockheads at Hammersmith Odeon and it's the story of that night. They never make it and the old man, who's ill with cancer, dies on the trip and, you know, there's a lot of drama. There were fifteen Ian Dury songs in it and would I drum for it? I used to be a drummer, didn't I? I was, like, "Wow, I'm actually free, I can still drum, I love that music, what the fuck, I'm going to do it!" So I did it and we had fun but in it we did 'I'm Spasticus Autisticus.'

That woman then got to direct the opening ceremony of the Paralympics and wanted 'I'm Spasticus' in it but of course the committees were very like, "Keep it clean" and she was like, "No! We're going to have protest and stuff." And she said, "Mat, will you come and drum on it?" And I'm like, "Well, I'm not on the tour now, you've already toured with another drummer." "There are two floats, we'll split the band into two. Come on, we need you. You can just mime." "All right, well I want a silver drum kit and all of that." And unbeknownst to me, the singer, the main singer and the sexy girl were in front of me so I was the best frame for any television mixers perspective. I was in the best shot, totally in the background, but because I'm a drummer with short arms, there was a couple of close-ups of me. I came back and Julie had wisely watched it at home and went, "There was, like, close-ups of you and then it cut to Ian McKellen holding a sign saying 'Freedom,' it was amazing!" Unbeknownst to me, Chris Martin was watching it and unbeknownst to me Coldplay were doing the closing ceremony. I didn't know anything about the closing ceremony when I was in the opening one.

And then like two days later I got one of those weird telephone messages in your life that you get, saying, "Hi, this is Chris Martin from the band Coldplay, I think you're really awesome. If you're free Tuesday and Thursday and next Sunday we'd like you to come and see us play in Cologne on Tuesday, we'll fly you over and fly you back, it's fine. Rehearse Thursday and we'll do the gig Sunday." And I was free and I was like, "Yep, yep, I'll do that." Coldplay is so easy. Great fun.

Amazing he phoned you himself.

Yeah. It's all amazing and everyone's all really amazed and it's super and I don't want to just seem anything but whilst we are being brutally honest, you know, I think they got slightly more out of it than I did. It was wonderful. I'm not that impressed by global fame, it's entertaining and fun to be in a bit but in itself it's not impressive to me. Great works of art are impressive but the fame of the artist is not, you know. They got to look like they had a disabled mate who was drumming with them at the Paralympics. That's all I'll say. It was a two-way thing. I'm very happy to have done that and I'm really glad I did and they're really nice people and I charged them a fucking arm and a leg. I charged them ... I just plucked a figure out of my head and they went, "Yeah, okay" because they're super-rich. And they paid for it, not the Olympic committee.

That's interesting.

And other groovy things happened which, off record, is that a German woman with one arm called me four days later and said, "Please can you get Coldplay to pay for my new prosthetic arm? I'm in my brother's band but they've gone all psychedelic and now the whole thing won't work and I need a whole chord to play for the left hand, I call it my keyboard arm. I'd happily call it my Coldplay arm." And I responded to it, "That's not how it went down. They brought me in, I don't know them," you know, but I BCC'd it to Chris Martin's PA

who I knew would give it to him and, you know, to cut a long story short, three weeks later they're paying ten grand for the arm but they don't want anyone to know about it, they're very private.

He's a lovely guy, he grilled me on disability all the way over on the plane to Cologne and I grilled him and said, "Please don't play 'Fix You'" and he was like, "We could never play that at the Paralympics, that would have totally the wrong message and I'm like, "At least you understand that." And I said, "I'm not going to do it if you say I'm inspirational or brave or heroic, I'm just a drummer." And he was like, "No, I'm just going to go, this is Mat Fraser who's going to drum for us on this song." I'm like, "Good, we can proceed." He was a lovely guy, a sweetheart, I mean just ... I get it now, I get why girls think he's sexy. He's also huge, they were all massive.

Is he really?

I'm a tall man, he's a head taller than me almost and he works out, you know.

That's funny, I never thought of him as big.

You think of them as wimpy because they're Coldplay, I know, right. They're not, they're big guys.

So then I got flown to Cologne on the Tuesday. Picked up, posh car, private airfield in Luton, the Harrods private airfield, I guess they rent the jet off Harrods who rent it out to people like that. You've got like a private security belt and x-ray machine in there, private jet, you don't have to switch off your mobile phone or your computer or any of that throughout the flight. It was, like, fresh soy with ginger and garlic and all this posh food, obviously it would be and beers and marguerites. Nobody was drinking, nobody was eating. It was a job for them, it was a day trip. It was fascinating to see that. Then the next day I went into the studio, recorded the song in case they had to flip it to record if the sound quality was so bad. As it happens that didn't go down and we played live. But they were really getting somebody they trusted to see if I could do it properly or not and if not I was going to mime and they were going to do it themselves, you know, it's very simple drumming so we were fine on that front.

When I did it I thought, "I'll be all happy and smiley and I did. I was very stoked to do it, everybody thinks it's the beam from ear to ear; it was about playing with Coldplay. It wasn't. It was about being in a stadium after having watched the Paralympics for ten days and seeing it sold out every day and playing in front of seventy five thousand people and the culmination of a celebration of disability, the like of which I'd never seen in my life. And so I was just full of joy and zeitgeist. About ten percent of that was, "Ooh, I'm on stage with Coldplay." I've been on big stages before, not that big, of course, but, you know, I'd kind of done being in a rock band already.

It was more being part of that event itself.

That was what did it for me and people don't get it, they think, "You looked so happy to be there, it must have been the thrill of playing with Coldplay." "Yes, it was ..."

But having that massive arena ...

That was very interesting, the disconnect, you know, I don't know how they connect with their audience because you can't see them or feel them or smell them and I'm used to being able to do all three with audiences, you know. But it was wonderful and I hope that we don't all go back to how it was before. We will a bit, but I just hope it won't be quite as far back as it was before. I hope that it did ... a lot of my disabled friends hate the Paralympics because unless you're fucking killing yourself trying to do a marathon, you're not a proper disabled person, you know. Most disabled people just want to watch it on television like everybody else.

Yes, yes. I think, if nothing else, it's just brought that vision of different shaped bodies into people's ...

It was the Adam Hill show afterwards that got it for me. The Extra Footer or whatever it was called with that, like, weird mutant hand guy with the lobster claws, sorry, they weren't, I just used that sideshow terminology, like just in your face, gesticulating and being normal as if it was me, normalising different bodies. I hope, though, that that man is a pundit now on different sports programmes and not just relegated to disability ghetto. I suspect that somewhere in the middle will be the case.

So that was what the grin was and it was really, really fun. The bemused, slightly not quite understanding look of Jay-Z at my presence was also fun. Rihanna was a sweetheart, as I said, so a wholly positive experience all round.

Mingling with the stars!

Indeed, but I've mingled with them before. I've mingled with film stars as well. I don't know why I'm not impressed by it or affected by it.

Well, because you've spent your whole life around actors and acting and theatre and stage events. It's not ... it would be a totally different thing if it happened to somebody who'd spent their whole life working in a bank to be suddenly somewhere with people who ... you've got used to being with people who perform in some way.

I have. Women that I've always fancied all my life ... I got very tongue-tied when I met Debbie Harry. She was my teenage poster on the wall and when I finally met her, I got completely tongue-tied and star struck a bit.

She was cool though, wasn't she?

She was, very. So sexy.

And the songs and the snarl.

Everything about her was wonderful. I also really fancied the members of the band, The Slits because they were very weird and avant-garde as well. And fantasised about Joy de Vivre as well but they I would have been nervous with. But the big stars, I see them all the time at The Box, all the fucking time. They're arseholes when they're drunk in the end because I only see them at the end when they're drunk. Keira Knightley, fucking Jude Law is there all the time to the point where we've become almost friends now. So it doesn't impress me. I'm trying to think who would impress me. I bumped into Stephen Hawking at the opening ceremony, that impressed me.

Yes, I could imagine that would ... also just because of the oddness of communicating with him through the technology ...

I didn't interact with him. I bumped into him and said a couple of things then thought, "Right, yes, he hasn't got time for this conversation. It's going to take him ten minutes to get back to me and he's on his way somewhere. "I'm a big fan of your work, Stephen, I've never read it but thank you. You're awesome." That was amazing but I talked rubbish I suppose so I was a bit star-struck. I'm trying to think who ... Bruce Lee would have done it for me. Elvis, Elvis would have floored me. I can't think of anybody else. I met Johnny Rotten.

What about Sid?

Well I saw Sid when I went to the Marquee once an "Excuse me, mate" was my interaction with Sid Vicious and I was impressed with that for a long time. Ian Dury. I met all these people in pubs for two minutes or something in various rock places and it was nice but nothing star-struck me. I find it odd the way people are about that. It's odd. I was watching Jude Law and the women coming up to him ... it must be difficult being like that. No wonder they hang out with their own sort.

You'd feel a little bit, I suppose, like everyone wants a piece of you.

His ability to dismiss people was ... phew ...

But I would imagine he has to do that.

On a daily basis. He's a babe magnet isn't he? And he's known as a bit of slapper so all those girls who think their lives will be better if they sleep with a celebrity, will line up.

Yes, I think it must be difficult having all those people investing their fantasies into you. "If only I could be with them then my whole life would change." That's a massive responsibility to have, isn't it, if you're in that sort of role?

Kim Cattral is a friend of Julie's and came to our wedding and was born in Liverpool and when Julie was teaching Kim to strip for a show, a film that she did, we were having this affair and she was hoping I was going to leave my wife so we could be together so Kim got all that. And then three / four years later when

we got married she was like, "I want to come to the wedding, I want to meet this guy." She must have a lot of that. You know, the ultimate older woman, the ultimate Mrs Robinson. She's still got it, I can tell you. I was this close to her and she's still got it.

She's amazing, yes.

She's very sexy. A very beautiful woman, sexy and lovely, a lovely person. Born in Liverpool, thinks of herself as English. But yes, Kim must get a lot. I get it. It's ridiculous.

Because you're a stage presence as well.

I'm a stage presence and I'm also, you know, people study me now. I'm part of the Media and Disability course or the Disability Politics course and young disabled people who go to Treloar College which is a sort of performing arts college for disabled people, I'm one of the few people that are cited by the tutors as people who have got success in the field and they put all that stuff on me and then they finally meet me and it's weird. I don't like it and I immediately try to undercut it. I don't like fans, I like friends. Friend me on Facebook and then we can talk and stuff like that. So it's a bit odd.

You're a subject.

I suppose I am to some people. I'm also ... I'm very in everyone's face, very visible in lots of shocking things and in those sort of books ... *Reframing Disability* and stuff like that ...

I just had a browse at that whilst you were taking your other phone call.

That's the Wellcome ... I've just taken on a year long project with four different museums – the Wellcome Foundation, Hunterian Institute, The Royal College of Surgeons and someone else. They're all really medical. They want to reframe disability and they want me to do a performance about it next November, a year hence, so I've got to start doing the research for that soon.

Well no doubt I'll probably come across some things to do with that at the Wellcome.

Did you see the recent exhibition they did at the Wellcome?

Superhuman? Yes.

I had to review that for *The Culture Show*.

I saw your review as well for The Culture Show.

It wasn't mine, it was Louise's. I went, "Well, I don't have time, I'm rehearsing for a play." She said, "We've got you for one day." I said, "Look, we have to write pieces to camera and agree on what we want to say about it and go first and have a meeting." She said, "No, I'm going to do it another way. I'm just going to film you and you're just going to shoot from the hip and then we'll edit it all together and then we'll do a couple of bits after that." So we had to do it that way. But it worked out all right.

Yes. It was good actually.

Yes, I don't think I really did it justice, the exhibition.

Well, there's not really long enough on those pieces to say an awful lot, is there? And the exhibition had a lot of things in it. There was only one small part that was related to thalidomide, wasn't there?

Yes, one tiny part. It was quite a small exhibition I thought, overall.

It's going to change though because they're ... there's a massive investment there at the moment so they're going to turn most of that building into exhibition spaces. So it will get much more exciting. They've outgrown that space I think, haven't they?

Great. I've never been before.

The collection is amazing, what's actually in the Wellcome collection itself. It's fantastic.

I don't do enough of that in my life, visiting stuff. I went to see the Gerhard Richter exhibition at the Tate and it was stunning.

It was amazing, wasn't it?

He is so good. So prolific and so many different styles, just mind-blowingly good. That was the last good exhibition I went to, I think. I missed Laibach, I used to love Laibach, they did a retrospective at Tate Modern but I missed it.

There's not been an awful lot on recently that you would have particularly missed.

I'm going to see Bishi Bhattacharya on Friday night. She's really good, a Malaysian English artist.

I know the name but I'm finding it hard to place her ...

She's very iconically dressed, like ...

Yes, I think she came and did a talk at the Wellcome actually. That's how I know about her.

I'm a big fan of her work; she's a big fan of mine. We're mutually fans so I've asked her to co-compose and record with me the theme ... we're going to be doing *Beauty and the Beast*, like, proper *Beauty and the Beast* in the theatre with a director and everything. A six-week project. I've asked her to help me with the music because I like her weird sort of sitar meets Celtic and her vocal layering. I think she's a really interesting artist. It's always important to network with one new person in each project, I think, that expands your horizons a bit.

Mat, I think we're up to the present day. Shall we stop for now until the follow up one?

Yes, sure. How do you work the follow up ones?

The follow up one ... I'll transcribe all of this one and send it to you by email so you can read through it. If you come across anything where you think, "What the heck did I say?" ...

Stuff where I'm bad-mouthing other people.

You haven't bad-mouthed anybody so I wouldn't worry about that. But I'll transcribe it literally verbatim so ...

Oh God, you poor thing.

That's okay, I don't mind. I type very, very fast.

How did you get this job?

Oh, I'll tell you about that off tape because nobody wants to hear about me.

Okay.

So I just want to say thank you for today and I'll get the transcript to you.

Thank you, it was a pleasure.

END OF RECORDING