

One & Other Project

My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today to interview Phil Cadman on the 28th of July 2010 on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other Oral History Collection. And Phil, as you know, we are here to conduct a post-plinth interview. We are doing it on the telephone actually. So Phil, just to bring you back, you went on the plinth to remember or to show the work of your pupils from the school where you work right?

That's right, yes.

Yes, and I was just really curious to know more about the reasons why you chose to do that on the plinth.

Because I had been a teacher for a year in a primary setting. I've been a qualified teacher for sixteen years or so, but I'd actually moved into primary school teaching and I just thought it would be a really good opportunity to... I was given an opportunity to actually be in front of people and show people what I was or what I was doing now. So as much as lots of people thought I might get up there and take a guitar and do some songs and do things that I'd been doing for the last ten years or so, I thought it'd be a really nice thing to do to say, well this is what I'm about now. I'm a teacher. So I decided to actually be a teacher up there and actually put the kids first and the kids' artwork and let them into the opportunity that I'd been given through the plinth experience.

Okay thank you for that. So you mentioned that you got into different kind of school or kind of system. How does it compare them, what you were doing?

Well basically I'd spent my last good five years as, as a musician and running a music venue so I'd actually gone into primary school teaching once I'd stopped doing the kind of rock and roll thing. So it was, it was just really nice to actually stand up there and you know kind of say that this was what I'm about now, more of a teacher and less of a rock and roll.

And why was it important to you to do that?

I think, I think at first when I told people that I'd actually got some time on the plinth, it just felt that from the suggestions that people were giving me, that you know for what I should be doing up there, it was all about me, and it seemed you know to get up there and do some songs, to get up there and do some kind of entertainment, and it all, it all seemed to be about projecting me, which I've felt like I've done enough of that, and now it was time to do the thing that all good teachers do and let the kids shine.

I see so what prompted you then to train to become a teacher in the first place?

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I've always wanted to be a teacher. I think teaching and communicating ideas is something that I've always done in whatever work life that I've been in. You know, I've always involved myself in things that involve communicating to people.

So let's go back to your career in music. You talked about it in the pre-plinth interview, but we never found out how it all happened.

Oh, what happened sorry?

How did you get into music?

I've always been, but I grew up in quite a musical church background. So I grew up and my earliest memories are of singing in church, playing instruments in church, of wanting to be just like my older foster brothers or my, you know, my older friends, is you know playing music. So I've always played music for a lot, you know from way back ... and to you know to use that as a vehicle for communicating to people in songwriting is something that I've always done.

So just to bring me back, you began to write songs when you were very young did you?

Ah yes, yes, I think it was my, probably about thirteen, fourteen.

Okay, so did you always know that you wanted to do that?

I just find it is a really good way of looking at how I was thinking ... of kind of a way of journaling my thoughts and dealing with things and communicating to people. I do find songwriting incredibly therapeutic, but also a way of then taking those ideas and communicating them to people.

Do you play any instruments?

Yes, I mainly play the guitar, my main songwriting instrument. But I treat my songwriting as my instrument.

And were you ever able to have a career out of your music, songwriting?

I did, it did put a part of the meal on the table but I like I say I spent nearly four years running my own music venue, just to be immersed in music and be part of a music community.

So tell me more about running this venue, how did it all happen?

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It was part of going back probably eleven years ago now; I was part of a music collective in my hometown of Wigan. One of the founding members of the music collective and out of that we started putting, putting nights on in the town with local musicians and then regional musicians, and then international and national musicians, so it was, it worked quite well and from that, the place that we, we actually used as our venue came up, became available to run as a business as well, so I stepped forward and took it on as a business.

And what did you like about doing that?

What I really enjoyed about it was that I was involved in music. As you know as a career, twenty-four-seven kind of existence in music and promoting music and bringing back certain musicians and poetry and comedy and you know you know trying to create that artistic community within a venue. So it, and that's what I liked, is the production, the producing, putting on events. It worked quite well.

Okay, so just to go back now to your life story, you know your parents, are you originally from Wigan?

Yes, yes.

And so were your parents as well?

Yes, both Wigan born and bred.

And what did your parents [?] if they're still alive, I don't know?

They're both still alive. My mum and my dad have always been foster carers so they've done. But also bakers and confectioners and lots of things within the kind of catering industry.

I was very interested in the fact that you've also done quite a lot of different things with your life, and you've mentioned that you've gone traveling around you know the world, when you were in your twenties, and then that you were a mechanical engineer as well.

Yes.

When did that happen?

I was a mechanical engineer for the first four and half / five years of my working life, until I was about twenty-one. Yes, I've got a short attention span so it's not that I get bored easily, but when I achieve in things, I usually find

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that I need to move on to another challenge or something different. So you know, after doing a mechanical engineer, I found it very easy to find the longest course at university that I could spend my time there playing rugby and being a student.

And then you also mentioned being an educational researcher at one point?

Yes I hung about at university after I finished my degree and stayed on as an educational researcher, for a couple of years, which was which was really good because it allowed me to continue doing you know academic work where sometimes I think people rush straight off their degree course and don't get given the chance to actually fully try out their academic skills and so you know and kind of road test in a more free open-ended way what they've just learned in an academic sense. So I've got, got a chance to hang around for another couple of years as an educational researcher at the university, which was good.

And when, at what point did you then take on the leather goods company?

That was after I got married and came back home to Wigan from Nottingham, then my mother-in-law, she has wanted to do [?], bought herself a leather goods company and because of that, one night she decided that she didn't have enough time to actually run it so she asked me would I, did I fancy doing that. So I did do and for a good four years, I think it was in all, I ran the leather goods company making handbags and leather accessories for, yes, for four years.

You mentioned in your pre-plinth interview that you were approaching your forty actually your fortieth birthday just before your time on the plinth. And of course now it's one year on, and I wanted to ask you because I think you mentioned that you're still changing and life is all about changing, so what's been happening in the last year?

In the last year I think the ...I've developed a greater commitment to teaching. I've, I've my I think my biggest change over this last year or so is to get involved in the process of what's happening to me, rather than just the achievement and the excitement because like I say, quite a few times in my life, I've achieved and achieved well and achieved not particularly easily, but quickly. And once that achievement's hit me, I've got bored and wanted to look, look for something else, but the thing about primary school teaching and the teaching that I'm doing at the moment, it is even in the day-to-day things, day-to-day activities, almost in the process of achieving, those challenges are fantastic. And I think that's been the, the biggest change in me in the last year or so, is to actually get more involved at the process of what's happening rather than the outcome, rather than the you know, the dull of the

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achievement, and it's, it's great. You know, less goal oriented, more enjoying the ride at the moment.

Can you give me some examples then of this change?

I think it's I think there's a stability and acceptance, that comes with it, that you, that you're not frustrated with the day-to-day things because they're all part of it, you know. I used to find it very, used to get frustrated with day-to-day activities because you weren't going anywhere or they weren't achieving something but you know these days, you know, maybe with age as well, it's just really nice to actually enjoy the process a little bit more.

Thanks for that Phil. If I can just bring you back now, to the time on the plinth. Do you remember what it was like to be up there?

I did, I did, it was quite strange in the way that you were ... I'd expected to be more on my own than I was, and I was looking forward to kind of an hour's worth of being alone in a crowd but that didn't happen. As soon as I was up there, it just you know, I did take my blackberry up with me so as soon as I was up there, the Facebook went wild and texts and emails started hitting me so it was quite ... yes it was, it was quite a strange thing to be, how can I put it, that that I was you know. It wasn't a communication with the people who were around me, and the immediacy in the square, it was a communication and the kind of points of contact with people who weren't there, you know who hit me digitally, and contacted me in other ways. But it just, yes, I found that unexpected.

Are you seeing that people were contacting you on social networking sites during your time on the plinth?

Yes, yes. It literally after, after five or ten minutes, my blackberry basically went wild. People you know demanded that I waved to the camera, you know people actually you know choosing trying not to believe that it was actually me up there, yep it was through, through the Facebook and emails. Yes it was, it was yes, there was quite a lot of contact.

So you know when you got a place on the plinth, you got sent a booklet to encourage you to contact your local press, media, newspapers, and your communities and so on. Did you do any of that?

I didn't, mainly because it's a strange one because there were so many people who were expecting me to make it about me being on the plinth, and I didn't want to just rush to the paper and say, "Hey I'm on the plinth." What I'd liked to do is move in the house at the moment, I've got all my plinth stuff in a box, and one of the things I was going to do over the holidays, was bring it to

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an end, or think about what it was and make some kind of collage or a montage out of the outcomes or the bits and pieces around it, like t-shirts and stuff off the net, text some of the bits and pieces and maybe then actually go to the press and that's to say you know there's a book coming out, these kids, about their artwork, you know, they've been part of an international piece with an international artist, you know [?] these kids done well. So I was, I'm very, I'm still very reluctant to go to the press because you know I don't think it was my opportunity to put me forward but I think there's a way to go to the press to actually say I think these kids done so well, I think these kids done a good job to be part of an international art event like this.

You mentioned Facebook; I assume you must have posted something on there to say you were going on the plinth?

I did, basically the main way I communicated was with a round robin text so everybody ...a group text and on the Facebook as well yes.

So where you aware that there were two online groups of people following the plinth project, both participants as well as just followers? There was one on Facebook and one on Twitter.

Yes, I was but it's a strange thing again. I don't feel that I was up there kind of as me, do you know what I mean. So for me to actually join a group to say hey I'm one of the plinthers, feels really strange, although I'm privileged and I feel it's great to have been part of it, I feel that it was less a part of me and more about what we did with the kids. So to actually have been part of a Facebook group would have felt you know as a, as a plinther. I didn't feel like a plinther, I didn't feel like part of that group.

I see. How about following the project, did you watch it at all, during the course of it?

I did. I actually went, I logged on to the website quite a few times to see what was happening, to see what people were doing. Yes, I found it very interesting. Yes and it kind of it guided me towards what I wanted to do as well. You know, I kind of didn't, as much as it's about being on a plinth and, it was to show kind of, I wanted to show where I was at that moment in my life and not to make a statement because I didn't want to make a statement because there were so many people who made good and fantastic and meaningful and heavyweight statements on the plinth, that if I felt, if I tried to make a statement, I think it wouldn't, it would have belittled what they were doing as well. So you know that's another reason why I kind of handed over the opportunity to the kids, to do the artwork and let them develop or you know be part of that opportunity.

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How did you come up with the idea?

Well we'd actually for that year and the year before, we'd actually studied the field and made our own field sculpture within the school using a lot smaller models and just, I think as a, as a graphic, as an aesthetic thing, the gathering of lots of peoples, little clay models just looked fantastic, and with seven and eight year olds, it's a great little piece to do a homage to Zoë, for this year, and the year before, we've actually all created our own clay models and made our own version of the field. So as a class we were aware of Anthony Gormley and also the parents, some of the parents, of the kids who were in my class and were in my class last year, had actually taken part in the original modeling clay creatures for the original field, or one of the original fields. So that's why we got into that idea to you know be kids, the kids [?], had actually created the first clay models to be, to kind of carry that on.

So presumably you had the children of the school watching you during your time on the plinth?

They were and a few other schools around the place, around St. Helen's because of colleagues and family friends, there were quite a few people tuned in.

So did you find out the impact that it had on the children?

The children found it strange and it was I think because it was such a tight ... they didn't see it as an event, how can I put it? If they were in Trafalgar Square looking up at a person up on the plinth, then they would, I think that impact would have been great, but for it to be confined to the computer screen or a TV screen, I think it just became another product of TV. I think it kind of, it devalued it a bit, but four weeks ago, I took another group of kids down to London for a few days, and we went past the plinth on our way to the, the London Eye, from Downing Street to the London Eye and we stopped and I explained to them what we did and it kind of because we were there, because we weren't interacting through a computer screen or a TV screen, it, it just came alive to them and they kind of, they understood it more so because you know, they you know, it became, it became of a greater value because they were actually stood underneath the plinth and saw how important that place was within the geography and the community that is the UK.

Now how about the impact on yourself, having gone on the plinth?

The actual the physical thing of going on the plinth was an event, you know it was, it was that physical you know, again, but I actually think the run up to it, and again looking at what people expected me to do when I was up there and thinking about what I wanted to do when I was up there and thinking about

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why I wanted to do what I wanted to do when I was up there, you know I think it had ... it allowed me a nice opportunity to be quite not just introspective because, because you know, people, people reacted to my opportunity not just, it wasn't just me thinking about my opportunity. Lots of people, uh it created a lot of discussion, it created a lot of ways of me looking at what I'm doing and looking at me from other people's perspective, which I thought did have an impact on me and allowed me to actually go no, that's not how I see myself. I'm not going to do that because of this reason or that reason, so it allowed, it allowed myself to be, explain to other people a bit better I think.

Can you elaborate a little bit more about this issue about the way you were seeing yourself and how it affected yourself, perhaps through examples?

Well basically I'd spent four years communicating my ideas through my songs and that involved a lot of ego and a lot of fronting, different musical kind of ventures, so people, a lot of people knew me and experienced me stood on a stage and communicating that way, and I think very, very easily people assume that you're a certain type of person and, you know, I didn't get on a stage just to be a rock and roll star. I got on a stage to communicate ideas to you know to try to communicate an artistic idea or communicate you know some kind of thought process. So but it was, it was still, as much as I you know thought that I was doing something very worthy, still people thought that it was, you know, quite an egotistical trip to have been on, and that I would use the opportunity on the plinth as a, as an egotistical trip again. But it gave me the opportunity to actually say no; you know you know my rock and roll years weren't about that. It was about this, this is why I did it, this is why I enjoyed it, this is what I got out of it. So yes it gave me an opportunity to explain myself a bit to people.

Well thanks. So what would you say you got out of those years when you wrote your songs and you were in the music fields?

I think I've developed something that is, it's like, it's a mirror for myself, it's my sanding board, it's my way of getting my ideas together to see what I really think. So it's an artistic vehicle for something that is, is reasonably introspective, it's my, my songwriting's my journaling, it's my, get my ideas down on a piece of paper to see what I'm thinking and to sharpen up those ideas, maybe communicate those ideas to people. So yes, that's what my songwriting and performing has been and still is now. You know, it's my way of kind of making sense of what's going on in my head, in a, you know, with a little bit of an artistic pursuit.

And so what would you say your songs have been about?

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Incredibly eclectic, you know. It can ... gosh yes, incredibly eclectic so there's never been one particular theme, you know, yes. I couldn't pin it down. It hasn't been. It's never been about one thing it's been very incredibly eclectic, but usually very narrative. Usually you know trying to communicate some kind of idea, oh this is what I think what do you think kind of attitude.

Thank you for that. I just wanted to ask you about your family, how did they see this experience?

It was great because the kids came down with us and they kind of took the whole day's event in as well and, you know, they ... this artistic pursuit and kind of being involved with things like this has been part of the kids' lives you know ever since they can remember, so to see myself up there and then Louise has followed me. My wife followed me up there straight away after as well because a place came free and they begged her to go up onto the plinth. So they saw both of us up there on the plinth and they just, you know, they don't necessarily question the enormity of it all, they just, you know, it's mum and dad involved in musical artistic kind of pursuits that they always have been and do.

So what would you say the project was about in your opinion?

I think it was a chance for people to represent, a chance for people to say you know this is what's important to me. This is what's important to me you know as part of my culture, my place, my time and that's what I kind of got from people, so whether people were making grandiose statements, critical statements or whether they were just up there being all, whether they were sharing their pursuits, or their hobbies, or whatever, I just thought it was a really good... I actually, I looked the idea of it, of actually being able to represent people's humanity as they saw fit and the things that were important to them and you know, it gave, it brought about a real, it kind of, it gave it gave a canvas for a real great mix and great palate of humanity, of...

And is there anything else you'd like to add about the experience of going on the plinth that perhaps I haven't asked you about but may have come up to mind, just by talking about it?

I enjoyed ... one thing that I really, really enjoyed was to be part of something where people were so enthusiastic about the thing that they were part of, you know, it's very easy to be involved in events and happenings and work and career and, you know, these people who were putting you onto the plinth, who were talking to you, who were dealing with you, it was all, a real deep knowing kind of honest appreciation of what they were doing and you know and enjoyment of what they were doing, which I've really, really enjoyed. I've really enjoyed being, not just part of it, but part of their enjoyment of it as well.

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So your wife went up as well?

She did, yes.

Yes so tell me more about her.

In what respect?

You know, what does she do and how did you meet?

She's a teacher, a primary school teacher and we both met because we played in bands together.

And whereabouts did you meet?

Well we met through church circles, gosh, some nearly twenty, twenty-five years ago.

And what was it like for her to go up there, since I've got you on the telephone, it would be interesting to find out how her experiences, you know, of the plinth compare to yours?

Do you want to speak to her?

Well possibly not because I would have to get her consent. I'm just asking you know what you might have talked to each other....

I think she was thrown into it, and I think it with all good art, you've got to think about it a bit first and she was very happy to go up on the plinth and very happy just to sit and read a book and spend an hour on her own and just enjoying the you know the piece and quiet and the solitude of you know being alone in a crown kind of thing. So she was, I think she enjoyed that, she enjoyed the because of Louise's musical background and because of her studies at university, she did art history and was you know she we've traveled, Europe, looking at looking at things that we've read in books and studied at university, so it was, it was really nice to be part, I think she, she loved being part of something that was a follow-on from some of her favourite artists, like Rachel Whiteread. She loves sculpture and you know we have traveled and followed Antony Gormley's work so to be part of it was a privilege for both of us.

Aw, that's brilliant. And Philip you've mentioned the church a couple of times. Are you religious?

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Not particularly not religious no, I'd like to think that I'm quite spiritual, but definitely I don't do things because I have to, I'm not very observant. I you know, I don't have a [?] religious observance or feel that I need to do you know just because of my faith. But I do you know I do believe in something bigger than myself, you know. I do believe you know, even in the creativity, that we're, we're all part of and the things that we make and bringing to being and produce, it's just I think it's part of something that's bigger than us, you know, how other people want to define that, I want to keep that spiritual window open, that has an impact, you know I do think it, opening yourself to something like that, gives you a bit of grace, gives you a bit of humility.

When you mentioned doing music through the church, what denomination of church were you following then?

It was a free church, basically quite an evangelical church that uh was basically a kind of a house church movement.

Okay I thought I'd ask you one more question about being a teacher actually, since of course it was a very important part of you on the plinth, for what you chose to do. You mentioned that you were planning a lesson for your national poetry day on the following day of the plinth.

Yes.

While you were up there, did you get it done?

I don't think I did. I can't really remember that being an outcome of the time that I was on the plinth. I know I was going to do that, and I know that it was national poetry day, but I can't think of it as being part of the outcome of the day. I can't, I can't remember actually doing that lesson, or what that lesson was about.

That's all right.

As much as poetry is a very big part of, I'm quite passionate about poetry and it's a big part of my, my literacy teaching, but no, I can't remember that lesson.

What sort of poetry do you teach in schools?

It depends. This, it depends what I'm teaching and what reasons I might be using the text, so we've done gosh, we've I've done performance poetry which would have included wraps [?] and also because of that for the kids to understand about rhyming couplets and you know how to hit rhymes and patterns and rhythms of rhymes. We've actually looked at Macbeth, and yep, quite a lot, quite a lot of different, different forms of poetry, so we've written

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poetry about the, about what we can see in the clouds, we've written poetry about what things will change. So we've looked out of the window and had a think about what things aren't going to be there tomorrow and what things, what things are still going to be there. And so we've, we've wrote poems about change, so and we've wrote songs as well, you know which at the end of the day are just poems with music to them. So yes, we use an awful lot of poetry, or we play with word, we paint with words, use poetry quite a lot in year three.

Now just as a closing question, question, what would you say that you love about being a teacher?

I like the opportunity to communicate ideas. You know, to get people to value opinion and value ideas and not just take them on board but use those ideas in different contexts and combine ideas and combine learning to create new ideas. I just, I like being that person who can, who can actually communicate what I, not just what I think is of value because you know there's lots of people who'll put value on things depending on the perspective, but just things that I just enjoy and that I'm passionate about and enthused about and you know get the kids to enjoy you know writing, you know to enjoy drawing, to enjoy the mystery of maths, you know, just to get enthused about things that I find particularly interesting. You know, as a teacher, I don't want to, I don't want to teach kids the things that they could go home and do at home. You know, I want I want to actually not, not you know not like that cliché statement of make a difference but if they're going to come into my room and be taught by me, that they get something that you know can really, only be taught by me, you know, or else you just might as well be somebody else or you might as well stay at home if it's, if it's an activity they could do on the kitchen table, well why come to school, so you know the big difference between home and school is me and the environment that we create at the school so we, we try hard as a school to actually create opportunities and experiences and learning outcomes that they just wouldn't get at home and they wouldn't get anywhere else as well. And that's what I enjoyed as a teacher, and particularly being in the school that I'm at, the chance to actually do me.

Thank you very much; I hope you've enjoyed the interview?

Yes, I have thank you.

Thank you very much for your time tonight and good luck with the move as well.

Yes thank you very much, we've got another two days of it left, so we'll get there eventually.



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Fantastic.