

HIP HOP

DANCE ALMANAC VOL.2

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FEATURING:

John Berkavitch

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JOHN BERKAVITCH

IA: What do you do? What is your moniker?

JB: What do I do? I would describe myself as a 'Theatre Maker' and I work with text and physical performance...I think it's the best description of it now. I started as a graffiti artist, so everything came from graffiti. I started painting when I was about 12, started rapping at 15, I was about 17 when I started breaking and collecting records...and I beat boxed for a long time. The rapping became spoken word stuff, just because I got fed up of standing in open mic circles where everyone was trying to take something. I found somewhere that you could do the same lyrics without a beat and everyone listened. Then I got a bit more serious in breaking and then I started to look for ways to combine the different things to make one thing. Is that alright?

IA: I invite you to self-describe rather than other people saying you are a this or that.

JB: I think theatre maker is probably the best thing. I used to say poet and theatre maker, but I haven't written any stand-alone poetry in ages. So. At one point I probably would have described myself as a dancer, but now if people say 'Oh do you dance' I say I'm more of a skilled clown than a

dancer. I also like 'movement artist' that's suitably woolly as a term. It doesn't imply the same level of training, or regular training that a dancer does.

IA: Where did you meet Hip Hop?

JB: I come from a pretty big family and it started with my older brother. I remember being younger and thinking 'What do I want to be into?' You know when you're younger and you're thinking 'What kind of music do I want to like?' I remember stealing a tape from my older brother's bedroom and playing it in my room and I was like 'Yeah that's what I'm going to be into'. And that's what got me into it. Leicester's most popular, most successful graffiti artist and the one person who sort of carried graffiti through to the present day, he was two years above me at school. So everyone at our school was into graffiti, because he was 'our leader' and a terrifying older boy. So there was a few of us who started around where we lived, and it was an influence in that way. Graffiti was a cool thing, so we started with graffiti. I'd always liked drawing when I was a kid so it seemed like a natural thing. The rapping came from listening to music. I remember a thing at school where a teacher asked us to do a poetry assignment

and I wrote mine as a rap and performed it as a rap, and it was the first time I thought 'Oh I could get into this.' With breaking I kind of, it was kind of me on my own. It was 96/97 and it started featuring in a lot of music videos. I think 97 was the Jason Nevins RUN DMC video. I made myself a video cassette and I filmed all the MTV and The Box videos that had breakdancing in them...I filmed all those, had my cassette and used to practice in my bedroom. Pause-play-pause-play, look at what he's doing, try and copy that. Then a couple of years later, I met some other guys, who were pretty much the same age as us; they were from Wigston and we were from Alston. There was one of them who used to dance with Leicester Skywalkers when he was about six years old and his older brother was part of Leicester Skywalkers too...he was the kid in the bag. We all know the kid in the bag. [laughs]

IA: 'Surprise'

JB: So he had some foundation stuff and he showed me that. I showed him the things I could do and we sort of practiced together a bit and then we started to meet other people. We started to go out - we were about 18/19 by this point - we started to go out to nightclubs, to breakdancing nights, and

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other people started to come out. There's a real gap in the generations because all the original B-boys had stopped by the time our generation had started. So there is a big lost bit...but we met some other lads from Northampton, met some lads from Nottingham and started learning a lot more and moving around. There was a point when - this must have been about 2001 - me and a group of friends, we took on a factory - like an old closed down factory - the rent was like six grand a year, and it was huge. It had two floors that were 500 feet long...so we took on this factory, we used to just go there, hang out, smoke weed, play records and break.

IA: Where was that?

JB: In Broadstone, Leicester... which now, if we'd got ourselves a 20 year lease on it.

IA: You'd have been laughing.

JB: As it was we destroyed it. We used to play golf upstairs and try and put all the windows through. There used to be Hip Hop nights in Leicester and then we'd have the after parties in the factory. It was just a mess.

IA: How long was the factory going?

JB: It was about a year until we got kicked out. It was such a health hazard and the floor had nails sticking out in some places...but there was a bit where we'd cleaned and sanded. We had a mate who just lived in there, who was the caretaker. There was no running water and he had a little plate downstairs he'd cook bacon on...it was a different time, you know how it was.

IA: Those early days with graffiti? Did you have a tag? What were you doing?

JB: It was always all about battling. There's a real thing

hiding in bushes watching the other person come and paint it and then go away. We stayed out over night, he's in one bush I'm in another bush and we're just doing a magnets

"There's a real thing with Hip Hop and it's the battle culture that drives you to want to do it. You start off looking up to people and then you raise up to want to compete against them."

with Hip Hop and it's the battle culture that drives you to want to do it. You start off looking up to people and then you raise up to want to compete against them. Graffiti for me... at the time I was rapping under one name. My tag was Bisto. Or Biro. I didn't really have one identity. This was who I was when I was a rapper and this was who I was when I was a graffiti artist; I kinda wanted to link them all together. And... er, there's a thing that had happened when I was seeing a girl, who turned out to be a girl that a friend of mine had been cheating on his girlfriend with. There was a lot more that I'm not going to go into it...it ended up that this other guy had been going and painting over my stuff. We were in this weird graffiti war that lasted maybe two and a half years. Every day going out and painting over his stuff, then him painting over me. A couple of his mates were involved and it was just me on my side. There was a point as well, there was a couple of train sides as well that he'd painted and I'd gone and painted over. And then he painted over me. It got to a point where we were both

thing. You'd finish painting, stand guarding the wall for an hour and then be like 'right he's gone' and start walking off and I'd look back and see him there and he'd see me. It was very confrontational...but then it just died down. I saw one of his mates in a bar somewhere and one of his mates had shouted some abuse at me, I was with two of my mates and being young and rebellious I ended up diving through the window of the bar to attack this guy. Then it just all calms down. Then a few months later I'm painting this thing on the top of a railway bridge, it was a twisted 3D thing and the first time I'd tried anything like this. I was almost finished...I just needed to add a couple of lines for the highlight and I'm done. I went down to the car shop just below the bridge for some new cans, I come back up, and through the middle of my piece, in just straight silver letters as if written by any person was 'You berk.' I was like 'You berk?' This guy was from the west country and that's the kind of insult they use. I just remember looking at it and thinking 'That is it.' I phoned the guy. We used to

be friends once so we had each other's numbers, and I can hear that he's running so I know that he's near. So, I started running as well, it escalates to a thing of me standing outside of his house shouting, him shouting at me. Some stuff happened at the house, which I don't really want in print anywhere. Oh god it's terrible when you talk about your youth, I'm a role model! So I went home, and the thing he said when I phoned him, was 'It's not my style, it's just straight letters, it's not my style.' I was like 'How have you seen it? It's been done in the last five minutes.' He was like 'No it's straight letters it's not my style, it's not my style.' So I went home and at the time all my letters bent to the right. So I thought right, I'm going to work out a tag where all my letters bend to the left and I'm gonna write 'Berk' this will be funny. I'm going to go all over my stuff, all of his stuff, and for a couple of weeks I went out and dedicated...it's probably a real symptom of depression when you look at it. The amount of time I've invested in wandering the streets at night, angrily scrawling another name over my own tags. But he phoned me up a couple of days later and says 'What's all this, what's all this 'Berk'? I was like 'Yeah, yeah I've seen that, it's not my style.' The silence on the phone from him was perfect. So then I was like right, I'm gonna create this as a character. So I got a whole bunch of famous names, and combined them into one name which is John Berkavitch...no part of this was my actual name and this was in 99...no 2000...no 99.

IA: So 20 years this year?

JB: Yeah. 20 years this year. It'll be in the summer as well,

in like June or July. I started using that as my rap name as well. For some reason I found it hilarious to have as my rap name. You come in and people are like 'Ah what's your rap name?' People are like 'Blazer 61' and you're like 'Blazer 61, pleased to meet you I'm John Berkavitch.' They say 'What's your rap name?' and you go 'Yeah that is my rap name.' That's the best rap name isn't it? I just find it really funny and I don't know why. It became a thing that could combine it all. It also worked for the spoken word stuff, because it sounds like an actual name...I've lost track of what the question was.

IA: With graffiti and where you were trying to get with it, and if there was a moment you left it behind?

JB: I went to uni in Nottingham in 2004 and I'd been painting a lot in Leicester. At one point it was only me and Cost painting in Leicester, and then it started to pick up again. People started to get involved, we had a decent crew and a decent scene here. I've gone to Nottingham before, it's half an hour away, and all of my friends decided I didn't exist any more. They were like 'See you in the summer.' It's half an hour away! But they were like 'Yeah but we live here.' None of us had cars at this point and there was eight of us living in a flat together, and every day was about getting enough money for weed and smoking between us...those kind of times you know? So I've moved away, and they were like 'Well he's dead to us now.' There was one really funny week where I came out of my house and saw all my mates, and they were like 'Oh yeah we've come for this festival we forgot you lived here.' I

was like 'You absolute pieces of shit.' Because I'd come from Leicester and moved to Nottingham - and we had strong crews there - we was kind of rivals. We'd be at the same events, we'd be painting one side, they'd be painting the other...so I was kind of their rival and I'd arrived in their city... so I went and painted a few times and whenever I'd paint, a couple of days later, it'd be painted over. Which is kind of how Halls of Fame work, I didn't know the hierarchy and I didn't know who I should be asking permission from. I was very low down in their hierarchy, just like they'd be low down in ours if they came here and it just got a bit difficult to paint. I also tired of the battling element of it. When I'd gone to uni I'd moved in with a group of lads who were breakers, and I was spending a lot more time on that and the spoken word stuff was picking up as well. It was more about what you can dedicate your time to...and the dance stuff is stuff that won't last forever, so as things started picking up I thought I'm going to put a bit more effort into this. The poetry stuff, you can probably do until you're really old, but it's nice to get a head start on that. The graffiti stuff was becoming stressful, and was the most expensive of those.

IA: If you're re-doing stuff every night...

JB: When we were younger there were ways of getting spray paint that didn't cost money...when it becomes specific graffiti paint sold by graffiti artists, you're having to fork out the money for it...and it became a bit much. Dance was essentially free. Writing was free and you could get paid for that. Girls would come and see you when you're

dancing. They're not so much into coming to see you when you're standing at 3am in the morning scrawling your name across shop fronts. It's not something they're into...or maybe they were. So we just focused on the dance stuff and being at uni connected me more to the UK scene. Do you remember UK B-Boy forums? I discovered the UK B-Boy forums before I ever met any of the breakers and I remember going through it all and reading all the B-Boy

original B-Boy, me teach crazy legs how to do a headstand under lamppost.' Then I'd just call everyone out and I'd start arguments. It became quite infamous...

IA: When was your veil lifted?

JB: Some people found out, some people never did! I used to call people a 'keet' and people would say 'What's a keet?' I'd say 'You're a keet.' That was the catchphrase. I remember the first time I met

because we knew who they were, because they were local, and made some comments on there which culminated in Battle of Britain 2003/04 with Derby Rollerworld and it turned into a 60 round battle between me and Paco in the circle of impending doom where nobody was applauding or cheering because Steady was walking around making sure nobody applauded for me.

IA: 60 rounds?!

JB: It was an hour and a half... and got to the point of just seeing how long you could hold a freeze. We were both just doing a headstand. It was the worst...and we'd been battling all day. Our crew had been battling all day...and then Paco called me out as I was about to leave! It ended up in this ridiculous, all the music had finished, and we were just battling for like an hour after the event...neither of us really had much more than a few rounds and after five rounds, we had nothing left and it just wouldn't stop! You're not allowed to walk away after that situation, not allowed to just stop! After five rounds everything is done and it wouldn't stop!

IA: The forums were wild...

JB: The forums! Mike Jeffs who started the forums, went to uni in Leicester so when I used to go training at Leicester uni, I used to see him...and he didn't know. We trained for a long time and I didn't realise he was Mike Jeffs and there had been something on the forum where he had given me a warning and then I'd seen him at training where I'd been like 'Ah man this guy on the forum has given me a warning.' He was like 'That's me.' I

"I made up an account called 'Dude of Style' and me and another friend managed the Dude of Style account. Dude of Style's posts always started the same 'Hey you know me, me Dude of Style, original B-Boy, me teach crazy legs how to do a headstand under lamppost.'"

names and the comments and stuff, and I remember thinking 'Oh man I need a funny B-Boy name' so I registered on the site under the name 'Style Kid' thinking it sounded like one of these classic Hip Hop names but it was mainly about me trying to troll people. So I'd chip in and troll people a bit. I hit on this idea of setting up a second account, and my second account was going to be even more extreme and I made up an account called 'Dude of Style' and me and another friend managed the Dude of Style account. Dude of Style's posts always started the same 'Hey you know me, me Dude of Style,

Dolby D...it must have been 2007/08 and I introduced myself and he had no idea who I was. I said 'You might also know me as Dude of Style.' He exploded. He was like 'Oh my God you're my favourite guy!' After I left the forums there were several impersonators and other people trying to start up Dude of Style accounts. It actually got me more respect than any of my breaking. I'd just call people out and stuff, I'd find out who people were and private message them, calling them out as Dude of Style...people took stuff very seriously. I actually ended up in...I made some comments towards some of Trinity,

remember I spent a long time getting him to make me an admin of the forum...it would have been so good if Dude of Style had been a moderator of the forum... [laughs] it would have been hilarious. All of that has gone now.

IA: As an archive...

JB: If that was still about it would be amazing. There was one bit, one speech going fruit loops from Sin Cru going 'You know me I come round your house, pop elbow freeze to goose like your mam cooks dinner.' What is this...what is this...

IA: There's comedy in this.

JB: Yeah and people taking things very seriously. That was the whole thing of the name too. Calling myself Style Kid. Like Jingles still calls me Style Kid and all the Leeds lot still call me Style Kid.

IA: Coming back to now and your network, who are the three people that you go to, who you would seek out...

JB: Seek out in what way?

IA: They may be mentors, someone who feeds you, who supports...

JB: I think Jonzi is always...he's the reason I have a career. He's the reason most of us have got a career, those of us who are still doing stuff... whilst at uni, All Torque was our crew and we thought we were so clever. While we were dancing there Tag, well the first iteration of Tag was on at Nottingham Playhouse; it was co-commissioned by Nottingham Playhouse in 2006 and Nathan was dancing in it. Nathan was dancing in it, it was about a graffiti artist, it's

got rap and spoken word in it and I was like 'That's sort of my life...why didn't I get this job?' I thought this is going to be amazing...and so I went on my own. Nathan got me a ticket and I went on my own. I sat down and was so excited, the show starts with all the paint dripping off things and there's people in those...and then just it didn't really hold up after that and I was very disappointed because it seemed like this was going to be my life on the stage and it was clear that they'd not worked with graffiti artists in the show. They hadn't worked with graffiti artists in the studio...they had with the set, Prime had made the set and it was very clear that was graffiti and there were elements that were graffiti, but there was a lot in it that was about letters, what can we make that are letters, and there wasn't even a clear story in it. Banksy was dancing in it - Banksy from Swindon - he was the main guy and it was about him a little bit, but also about a guy who was a graffiti artist...it wasn't Banksy the graffiti artist...there was a lot of levels to why I found it quite confusing. After it Nathan was like 'Do you want to come and hang out?' So I went to meet Nathan and the other guys and then Jonzi was like what did you think to the show...and I explained that I didn't really enjoy it...

IA: In a polite way?

JB: Well I was still quite young! And I was disappointed in it, because I'd come out and I felt this was a thing that was going to be something, and it hadn't...it was just a bit boring... so Jonzi was like 'Right fair enough, how could we make it better?' I said you could make it better by hiring me, I'll write it and I'll be the guy in it. And

Jonzi said 'Uh yeah erm' I was like 'Let me do you a poem' and he was like 'Really man do you have to?' I understand his moment exactly; I'm now am at the point where I meet someone and they're like 'Let me just spit something at you.' I'm like argh, I'm just trying to relax man. You know, you ever had it when you're at the urinal and someone approaches you trying to beatbox...like I'm in the middle of something and this isn't the moment...but Jonzi was like 'Go on then' and so I performed him a poem and I finished it. He said 'Give me your phone number mate' and he took my number and around November I was on a tram, and I get a phone call from Jonzi D, and he said 'I want you to come down to London in January and let's write the show.' So we wrote that, we worked together, sat in his house, talking about all the aspects of what it is, plotted the story and wrote it... and now I'm at Sadler's Wells the biggest dance venue in the country...whilst still at uni. I didn't tell Jonzi I was still at uni...I told uni 'I'm going to be a little bit busy but I'll still be doing it.' I was doing fine art so you only needed to be in once a week; I told them I was doing a lot of research outside the studio so I'll be in as and when I can. I had a friend who learnt my signature, so they could sign me into the lecture when I wasn't there. We toured it. Got a 4 star review in the Sunday Telegraph, and for a show that promotes, not graffiti, actively promotes tagging, for the Sunday Telegraph to give us four stars, we must have been doing something right. Maybe if it had been pro-Tory it would have been five stars! I learned everything about working in theatre from working with Jonzi in that room. On that show. I did a bunch of other

things...right before I'd applied for a place on Process - Benji Reed's thing - and I remember going up to that, we had our little crew in Nottingham/Leicester and I remember going up there and suddenly there were 400 people,

he was 16...we just met at the Town Hall. Him and another lad came up to me, looking for something to smoke and we were like we've not got anything to sell but you can come with us and hang out with us...that was the first time.

made an animation in about two and a half days, mainly by me sitting at Mono's house, going 'here's the next one' and showing him storyboards and going 'here's the next one' and him drawing it and me cutting it up and making it into a puppet...

"We did a thing for Kate Tempest, a show she had called Brand New Ancients; Kate had come out for a bit when I was living in Cambodia and I'd made a few music videos for her and her band."

all using the audio visual landscape of Hip Hop to create works of theatre. Spoken word artists, dancers and actors coming at it from a very Hip Hop point of view and there's graffiti happening; there was a moment where I was like 'This is the scene. 'These are my peers.' Yesterday I didn't know these people existed and they've been doing this stuff...it was where I met Flo, Shaun Graham and people like that...all of those people from that two weeks are some of my closest contemporaries. They're people I see every couple of years, but they're some of my best friends. When I worked on Tag Katie P had been there and she spoke to Jonzi and was like 'This guy is actually all right. I've seen him doing things here, I've seen him working in the thing.' So Jonzi's definitely number one...I'm trying to think, in Hip Hop. One of the people I collaborate with quite a lot, it's not always his choice...is a graffiti artist, Mono aka Mr Breakfast. He's from Leicester and we met when I was 17 and

Then I met him again, and we hung out again later through another mutual friend who was doing some breaking and he was as well, and doing graffiti stuff. He sort of phased out the breaking and got more into the graffiti, and I got more into the breaking and less into the graffiti. He's one of the best graffiti artists in the country now...his ability, his technical ability and ideas are beyond anything I was ever capable of. We collaborate on stuff mainly by me showing up at his house going 'I'm doing this thing and I need a drawing of a goose, do you think you can draw me a goose?' He's like 'Yeah I can draw you a goose.' I'm like 'Ah man your line work is so good, it's gonna make all the other things I've got to do look bad, can you do all the other things as well?' We did a thing for Kate Tempest, a show she had called Brand New Ancients; Kate had come out for a bit when I was living in Cambodia and I'd made a few music videos for her and her band. They were doing these short films, extracts really and we'd

IA: Like stop-motion?

JB: No, like After Effects. I moved to Cambodia for a couple of years because an old friend was having a kid... while I was there, I got a job at a university teaching graphics, design and typography stuff because of graffiti. One term I got a notification with what I'd be teaching next year and After Effects was on it. I asked the head of the course he was like 'On your CV it says you can do all the Adobe stuff.' I was like 'Yeah yeah' and he said 'You've not lied on your CV have you?' and I was like 'Nah.' I had eight weeks to learn how to do it and my partner was in India doing some training. So I got eight weeks of being alone to learn Adobe to the point where I am one week ahead of the kids. All I need to be is one week ahead...so I got very good at After Effects in a very short amount of time because of that deadline. So Kate came to stay with us because she was trying to write 'Bricks That Built a House' her novel and wanted to get away from the UK with all the distractions. While she was there she was just sat in a room, a bit bored and we made a few music videos for her old band...then when they were doing the Brand New Ancient stuff, she recommended us. So Mono drew all the pictures, I took them into Photoshop, put them through After Effects and made it all work. There's been many collaborations where I just show up at

his house. There's me and another guy who do the same thing Al McKay - he's a director who's just done Humans and Misfits and another few things as well - so Al also shows up at his house saying 'I just need these storyboards done.' Sometimes you'll go to his house and there'll just be someone else there holding these storyboards and him looking very grumpy, very begrudgingly drawing the pictures. Don Quixote does that as well, he's another theatre maker working with Kneehigh and stuff. He's number two. Final one is going to be Polar Bear.

IA: Why Polar Bear?

JB: We met in 2005 at Glastonbury...there was a bunch of us who all met on the same day and it was a group of people that went on to become One Taste Collective. We were all there at the same Glastonbury and we hung out; me and Steve - he was in Birmingham I was in Leicester - were the same age...we would have been best mates if we'd been from the same place. It was funny how we met in our mid 20s, because if we'd met in our teens, we would have been doing this all together, all the way through. Then we started to collaborate on stuff but a lot more of it was just about talking about each other's stuff and guiding each other through stuff. When I saw him perform the first time, I was like 'This is the guy who is better than me, this is the guy I should be looking up to in this stuff.' Or 'This is the guy I need to work with, this guy should be on my side, and I should be on this guy's side.' He says that when he watched me perform he had the same vibe. So we just started hanging out together...and we have

a very similar musical taste. Sometimes he'll introduce me to rappers or I'll introduce him to rappers and it'll be the one that you wanted to hear, he's also my oldest son's godfather. If I'm in London we go hang out. I've got a fourth one as well! I should say Ed too. The guy I collaborate with most is Ed Stevens who was from Ghetlow. He used to be called Ottercon, let's have that in the almanac please! He founded Ghetlow Pirates but with me and him...he's collaborated on all my shows and started off with Flow, who was also with Ghetlow; then Flow gave up the game and went into...real life and got an actual job. Me and Ed collaborate on everything and I can't imagine making a show that he wasn't in.

IA: Can you talk about some of your theatre work, Shame and Wrong?

JB: There was another one but we won't talk about the other one.

IA: What was the other one?

JB: It goes really off track. It's really off track! There was a show called Pokemon Goat.

IA: I've not seen anything on that.

JB: We only did three of them. Pokemon Goat was an immersive theatre experience based on the fact that I'd lost two years of my life to playing Pokemon Go which looking back on it now was genuinely a period of work related, stress induced depression...which led me to being super obsessive with this game. It absolutely dominated my life for two years and I lost track of a lot of what was going on. We made a show about it

culminating in me quitting the game; initially when I applied for funding I thought I could use it to go and play Pokemon Go in other countries and catch regional Pokemon. Genuinely that was part of the thinking of it. Through the development of the show there was a realisation that actually this isn't a healthy behaviour and during the development period the World Health Organisation classified game addiction alongside gambling, alcoholism and things like that. There was a real sort of awakening to it and there was talk of taking it further but to be honest the show was basically therapy and I wouldn't have quit the game if it wasn't for making the show. So I don't want to revisit that. It was a different kind of show to other stuff I'm made.

IA: OK. Shame and Wrong.

JB: So Shame was first and this was made while we were in Cambodia. I was there for two years and while I was there I did a lot of...my Dad died the year before I left and being from a big family I'd taken on the idea of trying to hold it together; when I went away there was a lot of consideration of what my life had been, what I'd done and the mistakes I'd made. When I was away I got hooked on the idea of writing stories about the worst things I'd ever done. The idea was they had to be things I'd never told anyone about, so not necessarily big things but they are things...and I've done some terrible things in my life that I revel in the storytelling of, and I will regularly tell those stories of the things I once did. There was one was about a fort; I'd really wanted a fort when I was young and that keeps coming back to me. I'm

sure you've got one or two, something that happened when you were young, that you've never told anybody about and you remember in explicit detail...you can't remember what happened the day before, you can't remember the day after but you can remember it in explicit detail and that holds you back in some way. I identified five stories and wrote two of them; we developed a scratch version and worked with some dancers with the idea that the show that could go anywhere. So I can't use a lighting rig, but I can use projectors. I worked on a youth show that just used projection mapping...I thought if we could dress the dancers all in beige, with beige trench coats they're sort of...like the internal devils. I was thinking how can I make them more like devils...they're in trench coats, that's kind of like wings, I could give them umbrellas for pitchforks and an open umbrella has a veiny structure which is kinda demonic. An umbrella is a great tool for building stuff because it's a circle and it's a line. With the coats and the umbrellas, it's a surface to project onto. The idea was to make five stories about the worst things I've ever done, with the real aim to get the audience - when they leave the show - to sit down with a friend and talk about the worst thing they've ever done. It's about starting that conversation...I've seen a lot of shows where I've come out of the show and you're like 'That's great.' That's a great thing to hear after a show but that tells me you haven't connected to the show you've connected to the performer. I've seen shows where people come out and they're like 'Oh man imagine if you...' and they're talking about the story...I wanted to create something where they

aren't talking about the show, they aren't talking about me, they're talking about their own issues that are connected to the performance. So we did a scratch performance, got some Arts Council England funding - it was the first time I'd ever got ACE funding. We got 10 grand and they put it straight into your bank don't they? Straight into your bank. And I'm like...that's it, that's nuts. My bank immediately offered me a credit card, they said 'You've never had that much money before, would you like a credit card so you could spend more than that?' That was the start.

IA: Where was the first scratch?

JB: I've seen a lot of people make shows, and been involved in a few things too; I think what I learned from Jonzi is that if you get the right people in the room you get ideas you hadn't expected. Jonzi will regularly have people just pop by and he'll be like 'Oh this guy is a locker' and the locker will say something about the poetry and you'll be like 'Oh yeah, I didn't think of that.' When it comes from something that's not in someone's wheelhouse, it's always a fresh perspective. So we had an idea that we wanted to try and we wanted to spread it out as much as possible, have as many people come through rehearsal as possible; we wanted poets to look at the dancers and give their opinion on it, and dancers to look at the poetry and vice versa. I wanted to maintain ownership of it to me because I've seen projects in the past where a project has been tied to a venue and people go 'Oh we like what you're doing here but we think you should do it like this' and the artist ends up

following the venue and loses a little bit to the partner. So we spread it out; we did the MAC in Birmingham, Canada Water cultural space through the Albany, Contact Theatre, Manchester and Nottingham Playhouse...we rehearsed in each place and what that meant was no one venue said 'We don't like this bit can you change this' and if they did I was like 'I'll consult the other three venues and get back to you' because you've actually got a 25% share of 50% of this. Which also meant they didn't have to put much money in each - it was a couple of hundred quid, which was enough for us to get match funding. It also meant that when we rehearsed in each place we could get people from that area to come and see it; I'd contact someone in Manchester and say 'can you come and watch the show' because they'd look at it from a different cultural/regional thing. For the development of the full show I got six venue partners, and at each venue I put out a call for shadow artist...I think we had 54 shadow artists over four to five weeks of rehearsal. Sometimes we'd have two in, sometimes one, but there wasn't a day we didn't have a new person in the room, so there was always new energy. Every one of those shadow artists fed in a new energy and that became something within the piece. Even if it was a one second moment, it became something that was fed in. It also created a network of artists connected to the tour so when we did it in the South West, we had a network of people promoting it to their network; we had curtain raisers at every venue with one of those shadow artists. I managed to programme a 40 date tour before we even

had a show. Just by being an absolute machine, and pretending I had a producer behind me...I was just phoning venues and talking. Five stories - one of which was animation, which ended up not working, it just broke the rhythm of the whole thing too much - in the end became four stories from different directors and we cut the four stories into pieces...I did a whole serial killer wall trying to cut them into one...all four were coming from a different place in terms of how they work and nobody saw each other's so nobody knew what was going on - it was the dance that was the frame that held it all together. Some people had more time than others, some people work very quickly, some people ruminate more. But it was a successful formula. It was remarked upon by several people that it was a process they hadn't seen before - rehearsing in six venues around the country, having all these shadow artists coming in for different stages, and in terms of network that was built when you're a self-promoting artist, it's your friends that are gonna help you out, it's your friends who are gonna share your Facebook posts.

IA: That's smart, plugging into your networks...

JB: Then we did it, we took it to Edinburgh and did a full run there, we did some bits of British touring, and then through British Council we took it to Spain and Brazil, and then to finish, Bristol. Bristol Old Vic on a Tuesday night. We ended up with 88 shows.

IA: That's unheard of now...

JB: Really? That was over two years! Is that not what you do?! Because we are planning

to tour Wrong, and in my head we're gonna do like 25 dates...

IA: So Shame was the first theatrical thing under your ownership?

JB: It was the first thing that was me as me. I had some wonderful producers who helped me to get that in place. But um, I don't know if I'm allowed to mention their names or not [whispering] I had some great help from producers who skilled me up a bit in how to write funding bids. Katherine and Amy and Amanda were all very good at that. I learned a lot from working with them.

IA: Looking back at Shame now, what does it look like?

JB: Oh Shame was SO Hip Hop. Like all the way through. We had breakdance solos in it, we had bits that were definitely rapping, again Mono did all the images for it, all the backgrounds looked like graffiti, and also it came through graffiti. I remember when me and Mono were doing theatres we'd say it's like bombing theatres, it's the same as an open mic, it's the same as a cipher, it's not expected to be there, it's graffiti in the theatre. Shame was the same, it was made to not have a lighting rig, and we could set the whole thing up in 15 minutes in any space. And it all trailed back to one plug. We needed one plug and a space that was five by six metres and we could do the show. We did shows that were in a garage, shows in a gallery and one show was on a boat...there's a boat in Bristol where we did it where we couldn't fit the full screen and the audience was pressed up against the wall... it was the best gig we ever did. The whole thing came

through with that homemade gonzo, we're doing this here, we're doing it, that is the Hip Hop thing of let's fold out our bit of cardboard and do this here, this is where we're rapping. When I look back at it now it defiantly is that. It's a conversation that's had a lot, because there's Hip Hop dancing on the flyer because it says breakdancing there, they assume 'Oh the kids will love this it's gonna be great, bet they do backflips.' It has that kind of thing to it, and Hip Hop has this kind of thing to it 'Oh yeah breakdancing, kids love it, street dance, kids love it.' Or it's like ooh Hip Hop 'Swear words and misogyny.' What I've always tried to do with my work, and this is an early conversation I had with Jonzi, is it's a language, and you can use that language to say anything that you wanna say; we had an analogy of if I had a neighbour who was French and all he ever did was shout swear words over the fence at me, I'd hate French but it doesn't mean that the greatest poetry can't be written in French. It doesn't mean that the greatest philosophy that's ever been considered can't be written in French. So those ideas...Hip Hop is just another language and one that's understood across the world. When I lived in Cambodia, I made a connection with an NGO called Tiny Tunes, who get street kids in by getting them to rap, graffiti and breakdance and when I moved there I couldn't speak any Khmer most of them couldn't speak any English. KK the guy who ran it was like 'yeah man just come in and jam' and within 10 minutes all of these kids are my friends. And we were teaching each other through this thing and we were a crew and it would be the same all

over Asia, you'd see a group of lads breaking, you go over within two minutes you're friends. All of my friends now are people I've met in that way.

IA: There's a thing about Hip Hop and alternate kinships, because it's the family you choose. Can you talk a bit about some of the crews and some of the kinships you've forged in different times?

JB: Yeah so the graffiti stuff, all happened like, all the friendships...so you start out, you hang out with the people you live near or the people that you go to school with, and then some of us were into the same stuff...and we become tighter. Then we meet other guys...like I said earlier we met the kid that had been the kid in the bag...and there was a little crew of about four of us. I met some lads at Return of the

of knowing that in advance other than meeting them or going there. So now we had a group of 10 or 11 who come from these areas. That group of 10 attracted a few more from other places...in '98 we started a Hip Hop night at a place called Castle Rock Café and we ran that night for 10 years between us. That night was Leicester's Hip Hop scene and we had some unbelievable nights there. We had a night where Dr Box and Greedy Fingers were playing. It was all free and we had 400 people in there and people lining up in the street. In a café that was probably had a capacity of 52, it was unbelievable. There's those sorts of crews started and these are people that had something in common...that's the thing with kinship, Hip Hop was the thing that you saw, and you wanted to do. So when you saw other

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Max which was a graffiti jam in 1995 when I was 15. I met a guy there called Big Pete. Big Pete was painting, I was painting, we became friends. We had a little group of five or six. Turns out he had a little group of five or six from another area, this is pre-internet so there's no way

people doing it, other writers, other dancers, you can see that they've done the work and it's like 'we understand the same thing' even if that same thing is 'Have you heard the new Doom track?' 'Yeah it's not as good as...' even that knowledge of it, that

encyclopaedic knowledge of it, the 'oh did you ever hear that collaboration he did with' and 'oh yeah' and reciting lyrics to each other there's a thing there, a connection and it becomes more than living on the same street. And it works across the world. When you go out to other places and meet people there's the saying 'real recognises real' and you know this person works on the same thing you do. We share a desire to belong to the same...

IA: What about the B-Boys?

JB: It works the same. You go in and earn the respect. There was a night in Nottingham, probably at Rescue Rooms, and there was a crew from South West who were dancing; I was there with one mate and we were trying to battle them... and another two rocked up and they were trying to battle them too, so we were like 'hang on let's join up and we'll all battle them' where you from 'we're from Nottingham' 'we're from Leicester' 'that's close enough' 'they're from Bristol let's fucking have 'em' so now we're a crew. At the end of the night we were like 'we should go and train together' so we met up...then the lads we battled, we saw them at another event, and they were like 'We remember you, you battled us at nightclub and can we hang out with you 'cos we're in Birmingham now and we don't know anyone.' Then we met some lads in Birmingham who became friends of ours... and it happens that you come in, you compare scores and you earn each other's respect and now we're all friends. Or you're the worst of enemies. Could go either way! I think it's like vikings isn't it?

IA: B-Boys as vikings!

JB: Or football hooligans... who all meet up and have a fight, then at the end of it go and have a pint 'good fight, good fight you've earned my respect by punching me in the face' but I think there is a thing of that, the alpha-ing of each other, earning each other's respect by not backing down...that leads to that kind of friendship.

IA: You've mentioned a bit about mental health through your own experience and things you've put out theatrically? Can you talk a bit about mental health and your self-care?

JB: I think mental health is a stigma isn't it? There's a thing of masculinity as well in it. When you're young it's all about face. It's all about holding this up, being this guy, don't back down, hit him back. In rapping it's all 'I'm the king, you're shit, I'm the king, you're shit' that's what rapping's all about. The reason I went into spoken word was I remember being in a freestyle cypher, and one guy who was a sick rapper who I'd only met for the first time...I did some bars and he was like 'Your stuff's too deep man, you talk about feelings and stuff, I don't really want to hear about that, I just want to hear how sick your bars are.' I remember thinking 'Oh I'll have to find something else then because I don't want to just write 'I'm the king, you're shit.' That's boring and the whole thing with Hip Hop bravado that 'I'm gonna take this guy out.' All that male masculine culture for a lot of time is hinged on that...you're not supposed to show - or what we learned as kids is if you're a boy you shouldn't cry. Don't let people see you cry - that's just unhealthy. All of those. It's terrible. And also it's

weak to do that. It's stronger to cry. This is not the way I expected this conversation to go! There's a lot that can come from this! I think all of us have had stuff in our lives that we should probably talk to someone about. I resisted going to therapy for a long time and when I finally went, I can't believe I resisted it for that long. I think that everyone should, if not actually get therapy, should find someone that they can talk to about the things that bother and upset them. You see a lot with male suicides. I've known a few people who ended up killing themselves because they had no one to talk to...and I think that's reinforced with a whole set of macho stereotypes. We don't really take it into account. There's other factors that can add into it and these all sound like clichés that I'm saying but if you broke your leg you'd go to a doctor. If you've suffered trauma that's fucking with your head, you'd seek out help for that, you wouldn't try and just plaster your own leg. Or ignore the fact that your arm is bleeding. The same should be said for mental health...I don't know where you want to go with this, it's just interesting.

IA: Hearing perspectives, the things people practice, the things that are important to them is important...

JB: There was always a thing, a sort of 90s era Hip Hop thing which was focused on the phrase 'keeping it real' and that became polluted by people going 'I'm doing all these things that this other person says is keeping it real and they say it, so I'm also keeping it real.' I remember always finding it weird. When you hear UK rappers rapping about guns. Thinking 'we don't have guns' and they'd be like

'Nah I'm keeping it real man, keeping it real like NWA.' You'd be like well...that is real for them but not for us, what's real for us is we're drinking milkshakes and playing conkers, why are you not rapping about that? Why are you doing an American accent when you rap? I found that with some of the fashion stuff as well. When you see people dressed like they're in the Crips and you're in Norwich...they don't have Crips in Norwich. I'm not even sure they've got Black people in Norwich. Huge places that don't have any kind of diversity. People accept that because it's a thing and it's always disappointing to hear; there's aspects of homophobia that sit within it that try and disguise themselves as being part of Hip Hop as a genre. That's also in football isn't it? There's still not an openly gay professional football player but if you imagine in terms of statistics, there must be. They still aren't at a point where they're comfortable to say...masculinity as a whole is a really confusing complex thing. In terms of mental health, talking about stuff in particular is so important. I've had periods in my life, in a bad relationship where we've been breaking up and I've thought 'Ooh this is going to make a great poem, oh the poem I'm going to write from this.' You milk your own tragedy and milk your trauma for theatrical gain. Working in the theatre...I want to make this group of people here feel a thing. I want to manipulate you into feeling a thing, by telling you a thing that may be about a sad thing that happened to me so that you can feel guilty and feel sad about it as well... it's so manipulative and at the same time I feel like it's a valuable conversation and it's something that needs to

happen...I dunno if I'm just talking in a circle here?

IA: No. It comes back to your intention and what you want to achieve through your work, which is to encourage conversation in other people. That's what you want with Wrong as well...there was the thing you wrote around the Daddy Diaries...

JB: Oh my partner wasn't happy about some of that... she was like 'Don't put that on record.' But that's something that's not talked about as well. The amount of friends I've had whose partners have had babies and have been like 'Did you know this happens?' and we've been like 'No' because no one tells us that happens... and it's like why didn't you tell us that happens? I didn't know breastfeeding was painful, did you know that?

IA: No.

JB: Yeah, it's painful, but it's just something the woman has to do. Why do we not know that? Why is that not something that they teach you in school? I think coming from the spoken word stuff and the poetry stuff I've seen lots of stuff. I've seen lots of 18-year olds writing poems telling me what love is. I'm like how do you know what love is mate, you're 18. Or so many poems about 'War is bad.' Yet we're still at war. I don't think a their job is to give you the answers. I think their job is to ask you the questions to find your own answers. With all the work that I do, particularly anything that's narrative driven...it's not about me having profound moments and you sharing that, it's about me noticing small things that allude to something that you also notice about yourself. I think that's the work that I

wanna make. How does my experience compare to all of this? What of this speaks of your experience? That's what I want to do. With Wrong I think that's going to be the idea of it. The idea of me having, becoming and being a dad and the conversation I want it to start is people's relationship with their dads. Which is a big thing to talk about. I don't think anyone's not got a moment with their dad...and some dad relationships is that they never knew them. I've got friends who have not known, who've grown up not knowing their dads who are now dads. And you see some who are like 'My dad wasn't there for me, so I'm gonna do the same for them.' Others who are like 'My dad wasn't there for me I'm gonna be ALL there for them.' How that effect plays out is really interesting.

IA: What was the driver behind you wanting to make Wrong?

JB: It started because my partner was pregnant and it started in the middle. So, having becoming and being. It started with becoming and it started because my partner was pregnant and we'd made an arrangement, that if we have a boy I'll name them, if we have a girl, she'll name them, but we won't find out until they're born. But at the same time, if you were gonna go on holiday next week you'd think about it, you'd plan it out a bit. But imagine if you're going on holiday next week and you didn't know if you were going skiing or going to a beach. You'd think a bit about what it's like to go skiing, a bit about what it's like to go to a beach and you'd try and find the good things in both. All the time my partner was pregnant I was thinking what it would be like

if my partner has a son, what if she has a daughter and you think up these false memories almost. So when our child was born, and it was boy, obviously, there's a moment of celebration. They're kept in overnight and I come home on my own. And I go home and relive all those false memories. But now I've got a face to it. And what suddenly hit me was all of these things I thought about with my daughter and that's not a real thing. I had quite an emotional moment of losing something I never had. So, I wrote that, that was the beginning of the show. Well it's in the middle. And as I became a dad I started to learn a lot about my own relationship with my dad when I was younger. He died seven or eight years before all this happened. So there's a lot about his early life I don't know, there's a lot about my early life and his input into that that I don't know. So I spoke a lot to my mum and some older members of my family about things that happened when I was young, and found out some things I'd never known. Found out some things I had known and managed to place reasoning behind some of my early memories...I started to see parallels between how I was as a baby and how my son was, those kind of things. So in terms of turning this into a show, there's a lot of reflection in this. We'll look at ways we can make this moment of me having a baby, the same as me as a baby. I think there's things within text where I stop it being about me as a child and make it about my child. I started looking for those moments...the whole thing is 20 poems so four, eight, right. So four is becoming, eight is having, eight is being. Those eight are mirrors of each other. So either thematically,

syllabically or sometimes this one goes up as this one goes down. The idea is we are going to build the set as the show goes on and then collapse the set towards the end and everything is going to be a whiteboard; we're going to have pens and ink and draw in all the situations of the show... basically that's the gist of the show!

IA: Using the audio visual language of Hip Hop, why is that the best way to tell this story?

JB: Hip Hop is always evolving. If you look at stuff from the 80s, nobody is listening to that now. Well there's a very stubborn group of people 'I'm still listening to music that happened between 1998 and 2004 and that's the music I listen to.' Then another genre of music comes up - remember when grime started? Everyone was like 'What's this shit it's not hip hop?' but gradually you started to get into it, and it's actually valid and interesting. And the same happens when you look at Hip Hop dance, it's done the same thing. And the same when you look at Hip Hop theatre. Other elements feed into it. Most of all the show keeps it real, from start to end. We're talking about actual experience, actual life. The way that we make work is me and four breakdancers and the physical language, all that stuff comes from those foundations that we've all known. The approach to the marketing comes through graffiti, the approach to sound design is done in a sampled way. It uses Hip Hop in the sound of the music. I'm writing bars when I'm writing poems. It's all fed in and then the drawing aspect of it roots back to graffiti. We draw stuff that isn't going to last and

that's what graffiti is. And it's fine. It's not going to last forever, it's going to fade away or get painted over...and that's reflected in these moments

"We draw stuff that isn't going to last and that's what graffiti is. And it's fine. It's not going to last forever, it's going to fade away or get painted over...and that's reflected in these moments within the story. Maybe parts of it have been eroded and parts of it aren't what they were."

within the story. Maybe parts of it have been eroded and parts of it aren't what they were. I think there's a real parallel between the two... more so as I'm saying it out loud now...it's great I'm going to write that in.

IA: If you were a stick of rock, what are the three words that run through you?

JB: That's an interesting question...

IA: If we snapped your thigh in half what would it say?

JB: I know the answer to that. It's the ethos behind all the work I've ever created. And that's whatever happens it's definitely not shit. That's it. Definitely not shit. There needs to be a moment where someone goes 'Yeah that's good.' It's the work. It's doing the work that has to make that happen. There was my favourite review of Shame. The best one we ever got...well

my favourite one at least. The last line of it was 'Whatever you think there's no denying that this piece is undeniably cool.' I find with dance work,

theatre work, performative work you can be very pretentious about something. My degree was fine art and believe me if you wanna see someone be pretentious about something that's taken very little effort, you should go and see some students on the fine art course, because they'll help you find that! I've seen contemporary dance where they've said 'There's kind of this bit in the middle where we want people to fade out from what we're doing'. I'm like you want people to stop paying attention to what you're doing? Like why are you making work you want people to stop paying attention to. I've seen poets with reviews of 'Oh yeah they've got such a wide vocabulary.' Yeah but they're saying words that nobody knows what they mean! They're saying words the audience doesn't understand and who does that help? Who does that communicate with? And the same with theatre, and you watch a play and

you're like 'yeah I didn't really like it' and they're like 'yeah you didn't really get it' and you're like 'oh it was too smart for me was it?' and I think there's room for it. But it has to be accessible. So, accessibility is one of my words. This is going to take me an hour to talk this one out. I wanna make work that people can see and work that people want to see...but also work which says 'Look here's the work you weren't expecting it, it's right here in your living room but here it is me, four guys and a mat.' I think that's because that's what graffiti was. I accessed it by just being in my environment and once I've seen it I was able to research it and engage with it. Same with Hip Hop you were able to access it because it had no real building that it lived in. I think there's a real detriment to a lot of institutions...you look at a lot of these buildings that are theatres and art galleries. And there's no way that a group of 15-year-old lads are going to look at them and go 'hey let's go in here' this massive glass fronted building with strip lighting, I want to be in there... oh what's going on in here? Oh it costs 30 quid to see what's going on in here, and it's three hours long and you probably won't get it...I like work that's an hour long, that costs a tenner and that is made in a language that people understand and relate to. I think a lot of that language comes from Hip Hop culture. I think when you look at advertising design... the interior of McDonalds wouldn't look like that if it wasn't for graffiti. You watch any dance programme on TV, that wouldn't look like that if it wasn't for Hip Hop. You listen to any pop music, that wouldn't be like that if it wasn't for...its root, all of this, it came from this small group

of people in 70s New York and influenced people that we now look at as mainstream. We've essentially reached a point where the language of Hip Hop is mainstream. People are able to access it. I'm really struggling to not sound like a prick as I say this. You know like when Shakespeare was about, and Shakespeare was doing his stuff and people were like 'Oh look at this stuff he's doing.' It was established, but it also spoke to the common man. There's an element of that with Hip Hop. What has it been around what 50, 60 years?

IA: 50.

JB: I'm so lazy I'm not even doing the maths. But yeah, 50 years this has been a thing and people understand these words. 50 years ago, a man was doing a head spin everyone's mind was blown, you go and do a headstand now in the middle of the town, mind's are blown. It's maintained and held onto that wonder. And we've progressed it. Again, I lose track of what the question was.

IA: It was around the three things for you.

JB: Accessibly. Yeah there's gotta be some wonder... spectacle. Honesty has gotta be the third one. I feel like it can't ever be about pretending. When I work with young actors or spoken word artists, whenever there's a dramatic moment, dancers are the best for it because they feel like they need to do loads to show the drama, and you're like nah mate just be sad. And they're like this is what sad is. And it's like nah you're showing me you want me to be sad, just be sad. And I think that they need that. There was with

Shame a bit in it about when my sister died. And through the rehearsal of it we always just skipped that bit and I was like in this bit I talk about this and that's that. So then when it came to the actual shows, it wasn't scripted at first or over rehearsed. And the cast knew that this happens and when I walk off stage that's the end of it. So I would just do it and there was a bit where I was just in the back of the theatre and I'd come back...I genuinely needed that bit in the back. There was a point halfway through Edinburgh, that point we were 50-60 gigs deep, there was a point there where I realised that I'm just saying the same words I said yesterday, and I've been saying the same words for about 20 shows and I don't need those two minutes at the back now. It became a real question for me about 'Am I now exploiting this trauma, that had happened? Am I no longer talking honestly about this thing? It's not me genuinely being sad about a thing that I am sad about.' Part of the reason I drew the line at 88, we got to 88 shows and I, there was talk of booking more. What I did was I deleted all the audio and visual files from my computer.

IA: What?

JB: Because it's all mounted in my computer, I deleted all of it. So we couldn't do it again.

IA: So, there's no record of it?

JB: Nah. I deleted it all. We've got a video of the actual show. But in terms of all the projection and all the...

IA: They'd all have to be built again from scratch if you did it again?

JB: Yeah. I'm not doing that.

IA: You've gotta go round to see Mono.

JB: Yeah. I've got the original images. I just don't have the ones that were mapped in the show.

IA: What was the decision behind that?

JB: That was a thing...it was the story of my sister and it got to the point where I'd had enough of talking about that to strangers. It felt like I was starting to exploit it and originally when we started and first did it, it was for me. I'm talking about this for me and other people felt that...but it got to the point where anyone could be saying these words, an actor could be saying this.

IA: It doesn't need to be me saying this...

JB: Yeah, and that's the difficulty when you work with autobiography. You take aspects of your life and if you talk about it, it might become a thing...I had a feeling like I don't want to talk about my sister any more. Let's do something else. At some point we'll have to do that with Wrong as well, because there's lots of remarks in there about my partner's private areas that I feel like she won't like me doing for a long time...she wasn't very keen on it. The first time she realised was the first time she saw me doing it live on stage...it's a bit harder to get out of it at that point. I also like putting things in my shows that my mum never knew and she'll come to shows and be like 'Oh I didn't know you took acid on the park when you were 15.' I'm like 'Course you didn't mum.' Let me tell you all the terrible things I've done in

my life, well you can see them in a show, because then I can say it wasn't technically true. Elements that aren't real.

IA: What is it like to be you right now?

JB: It's tough isn't it? I'm doing alright. I think I'm doing alright. I've got two kids. I've got work booked until December. We're planning to remount and tour work next year. I think I'm doing OK. At the same time, I've worked in a big theatre for a few years, and I felt that's what I wanted to do forever. It turns out it wasn't necessarily the right fit for me...I'm being so diplomatic in this...it wasn't the right fit for me. It wasn't the right boss for me is the bottom line. In the last six to eight months, I've applied for...I think interviewed for nine jobs. And each of them I've considered this could be my job until I die. Big jobs, senior managers at theatres, galleries or institutions. Ones that you step into and work your way up to a thing. But all of them I've got to the last two or three people...and there's a thing of it, I should be applying for this level of job if I'm getting to the last two or three...eventually I'm going to find something you know each time the process involved is a multi-stage interview with presentations, and in order to live that I have to put to myself...here's what I need to do. I need to imagine that this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life. I need to put all of myself in that, in order to give this presentation, this interview, this one hour, to give this everything I can to let these people know I am committed and able; then you do that and you don't get the job. The reason you didn't get the job isn't anything you did 'We just think this other

person would be a better fit.' It's always that 'We felt the other person was a better fit.' It's a bit much isn't it. You've convinced yourself you're gonna change your life and move to this place and do all of this and then you're not. You're just gonna carry on and it's like arrgh. It's a bit tough. I know people...this is something I talk about in therapy a lot as well. A memory of something that happened when I was a kid that I feel badly about and I'm aware there are people in the world whose day to day existence is so much of a struggle and then I'm here being entitled about 'Ooh can't get the right kind of milk anymore.' I know it's not the same thing, I've applied for a job and I didn't get the job...I'm not constantly a victim of harassment, I'm not living below the poverty line, I'm not being attacked or judged because of who I am, and there are people for who that is their day to day existence. I feel like I'm doing all right. I'm a cis gendered heterosexual White 39-year-old male, living in Britain, no one is trying to oppress me, I'm fine, do you know what I mean?

IA: I've got a few more questions...

JB: I realised I've just meandered for two hours.

IA: What else do you want recording that we haven't spoken about? Could be something important, a memory, or something we've not spoken about...

JB: I don't know. That's an interesting question. Ask me the question again in slightly different phrasing.

IA: What do you think is the most important thing that

you would want recording...

JB: [laughs]

IA: ...that has a relationship to Hip Hop?

JB: I think we've kind of touched on it already. I think Hip Hop is and always has been, an incredible tool for uniting people. I think everybody wants something to belong to and I think Hip Hop offers that...I think Hip Hop offers that in ways other things don't. You can't say 'other musical styles do' because it's not just music. The core elements of Hip Hop are like a performing arts department. When you're at school and you could go to dance or drama or...and it continues to evolve and grow. I mean you could make a Hip Hop film, there is a way of making a film that is very Hip Hop. You could carve a Hip Hop nightstand. I mean you can put Hip Hop in front of anything. You could have a Hip Hop zoo! Imagine what a Hip Hop zoo would be like?! Immediately you can see it. I don't think there's anything else...maybe punk? Because there's the fashion and the crossover...maybe there is a way of moving that's punk? I think it spans much wider than anything else and it's a place where you can belong and translate internationally. Do you know the book *Where You're At* by Patrick Neate? About Glocalisation. Thinking local acting global. I mean that is also the answer to climate change. But the idea that what you're doing in your neighbourhood could be relevant to someone in Japan...that they could see your video or hear your music or see how you dance or look at your graffiti and feel that relates to their experience as well. I think that shared

experience is something that the world lacks in a lot of ways. Like that way to empathise with someone else's situation, we learn that through Hip Hop. Sounds like a soundbite.

IA: You've mentioned about those in the Hip Hop community who archive, preserve and those who are evolutionists who want to take it and move forward. Where do you sit in that world?

JB: I think what's funny is that it's those extremes. There are those who wanna be just like the old school and forget whatever you did. There's those who don't want to be listening to any of what I'm doing; I think a combination of both is what you've got to be. Coming through graffiti... graffiti is very strict in its hierarchy. You know your place in it and it's always about looking at those that have come before, while pushing your own stuff and I think that's true across Hip Hop. You need to recognise where the foundations have come from while pushing your stuff forward...but you also have to recognise that while there's a point where you might have progressed this form as far as you can, and now it's down to a younger generation. When you see older generations and younger generations sniping at each other and the younger generation is like 'I don't care what you did, we're doing this' and the older is like 'you've got no respect' it needs both. It's each one, teach one. You can learn from anyone. I've been doing a thing recently, I watched a Ted Talk about active listening. It was a thing where we enter a conversation...a conversation isn't about listening to the person, it's about waiting for

them to finish so you can tell a version of their story. And this thing was about actually stopping doing that and accepting that every person you ever talk to, could teach you something. Be it a two year old child, be it a 90 year old woman, I'm just saying...I'm just naming people, a bus driver, erm astronauts, people in shops, people on websites... [laughs] people on websites? Do you like websites? But the idea that every person has something that you could learn from. I think my position is I look at everything that has come before to see what I can get from that. To see what can help me to push those who come after.

IA: Where does race and class sit in your work and your world?

JB: These are very interesting things. I come from a family of seven siblings. Five of my siblings were adopted. The five who are adopted are all mixed race in different combinations. Growing up I looked up to my older brother, my older brother is fairly dark skinned and fairly tall.

IA: Is he the one you stole the original...

JB: Yeah yeah. I stole the original tapes from. I used to also get his clothes as hand me downs. And they'd be huge so I always used to have the baggiest clothes. I remember a time where I'd be excited talking about rappers I liked and music I liked. Through my teens my older brother would have a thing he'd say which was 'Look mate you don't know because you're not Black.' That was what he'd tell me...and there was a long time I'd be like 'no no I do know' and then I realised

no I don't. Do you know what I mean? There was a thing of my brother being attacked because of his race, and that never would have happened to me. In the work I make I can only tell my story. It is a difficult thing. Again, I was chatting to my younger brother the other week about how when we were kids our dinnertimes and tea times and stuff and he would be like 'remember when we'd have bread and butter

talk from my point of view. In the work that I make and the opportunities I try and create I'm very aware of that in those opportunities. In the R&D thing we do at Roundhouse, we've been really pushing... in the next iteration of it we're really hoping we can offer bursaries for anyone from low income from outside of London to come down and do it. I think a lot of access to the arts is restricted for people

removing the word 'quality' which it is at the minute and replacing it with 'relevance' and I don't understand why those two things can't exist together. I feel like you could make quality work that is relevant and you can make relevant work that has quality. I don't know why you should... you shouldn't be funding bad work. All that does it make the people making it look bad and all that does is create a negative narrative that isn't necessarily representational. Race and class is a hard one to talk about as a middle class White guy. I think it's something that should regularly be addressed. I've been a school governor at my kid's school and in many a situation I have challenged other people within the school about their own unconscious bias...and how that's effecting their decisions that are being made. My kids and their cousins share a surname, like one of my kids is in the same class as his cousin, they've both got the same surname and his cousin is mixed race and very tall and he's not. There's questions around how their experiences will differ growing up, going through the same school system, having the same grandma and looking different to each other. A friend of mine, him and his brother are pretty much identical to each other, apart from my friend passes as White, and his brother definitely is Black, and they've had very different experiences because of that. I'm very aware of my privilege and I let that inform my work. It's a hard conversation, I'm always much happier to listen to people talk about race and class because I know it's not my story that needs to be heard.

"I was chatting to my younger brother the other week about how when we were kids our dinnertimes and tea times and stuff and he would be like 'remember when we'd have bread and butter at every meal' and I'd be like 'yeah man why don't we have bread and butter anymore?' and he was like 'Cos we're not poor' and I was like 'Oh yeah you're right' that's cos we were poor."

at every meal' and I'd be like 'yeah man why don't we have bread and butter anymore?' and he was like 'cos we're not poor' and I was like 'oh yeah you're right' that's cos we were poor, it wasn't a treat it was because we had two fish fingers, four chips and some bread and butter every meal. And he was like, we were working class then and we're probably middle class now. Although some of my siblings are definitely working class...it's a thing. I can only

from under represented backgrounds and I think there is a whole lot of work being done at the moment, which is probably why nobody is giving me the jobs. I agree with that. I agree that we don't need another white middle-class guy working in the industry. I'm fine with that. I think that my place will be found eventually, whatever that is. There's a slight question around...I know Arts Council England are changing their key criteria in the next couple of years and

