



This is a transcript of the conversation between hosts Patricia Cumper and Pauline Walker.

**PW:** I'm Pauline Walker.

**PC:** And I'm Pat Cumper. And this is our wrap up of series 1 of The Amplify Project.

**PC:** We chose this particular theme, because we like the fact that it was both laid back, but also had a kind of warm, almost tropical feel to it. So that was one of the many decisions we had to make in order to create The Amplify Project the way that you see it, what else did we have to decide Pauline?

**PW:** So we love the music theme. And it was called 'Chillin' in the West Indies.' And it was this word, serendipitous. Yes, it...

**PC:** ...was exactly serendipitous. Yeah, but the rest of it was really quite hard work, wasn't it? It was a matter of finding the funding. Thank you very Arts Council England, deciding on how it should look, how they should sound. And the technical side of it. You can talk about that.

**PW:** Yeah, so the technical side, it was - it was a challenge. But also, I think we've done a good job in the end. So we had to learn how to do the intros and outros, how to edit out lots of ums and ahs and...

**PC:** ...and yeah, it's amazing how much you learn about the way people speak and the way they think, yeah, by editing the audio.

**PW:** And for us as well, it was quite interesting, because, because we were recording during the pandemic, we couldn't all be in the same place. So you and I as co-hosts, and our interviewee, were in three different places. So I think for the first podcast, it was slightly hairy, wasn't it? Because we hadn't figured out that we should be using Zoom just for the imagery, so that you and I didn't talk over each other. So that that was a bit of fun. Working out

**PC:** I think we learned on every single podcast, some, some listeners there, there's something about either the questions or a technical thing. Technical, because we're all - we're recording in three different places has always been interesting. Yes. But I think we've created stuff that people can listen to. And I think that that was that was the main aim. Yeah, but yeah, we've done 10 podcasts, we've had more than 1100 downloads, which you

know that, that means they've been way more or less listened to that, but we can't really keep tabs on the listens. Well, I can't find figures...

**PW:** foot for listenership. So it's not as easy to get your listenership figures as it is for, for downloads. But yeah, we know lots of people came to our website and actually listened from the website, as well. So yeah, it's been brilliant. And we've had a fun. Yeah. And we had a great mention of The Guardian as well. I remember the excitement around it. Adjoa Andoh. She named us as one of her cultural highlights. So that was an exciting time for the team, when we all found that out and retweeted that.

**PC:** But I think what's been lovely about it is that the writers have trusted us. Yeah, the podcasts have been really quite open. You know, we've never really had a difficult or hesitant interviewee. It's always been, I think, once you establish the fact that all we're there for is to hear what they have to say it really, it was a joy to do. We've been really lucky, I think. You know, there have been some real obstacles to overcome. But yeah, we've been really lucky. That we have to admit, and sometimes I'm a little lazy about reading, we've had to read for this project

**PW:** It's been a pleasure, though, sometimes a bit intense. I do remember Anthony Joseph, because he's a surrealist writer, surrealist poet that some of his work... and I admitted that in the podcast that I found it a little bit difficult. I loved reading it, but couldn't quite fully understand or get it and he said, well, that's part of the point. So, so that was good. But yes, we've done an awful lot of reading.

**PC:** It's been so amazing, the sort of range of writers and the use of language and the ways in which people's you know, family cultures and stuff have come into it. And then for somebody like me Rachel Long, for example, I found I was reading her poetry out loud. Because I found that was the easiest way to bring it in. And then Trisha Cooke, just as a whole range of stuff. You know, you'll begin to explore some of the things that she's done. You know, and it's, it's the reading has been a lot of my bookshelf has suddenly expanded.

**PW:** Oh, I love that. Yeah. You know what I did the other day, I got rid of some of my old DVD that I hadn't listened to for, or watch rather, sorry, hadn't watched for quite a number of years and giving them away to the charity shop. So I've just shelf space for all these new books that I've had so that that's Fantastic. So every time I look at that shelf, it's like, oh, yeah, that's all the writers that we've spoken to.

**PC:** It's brilliant. Yeah. And what's lovely is, without pre-empting too much, we're lining up. Oh, yes, series two people. And we've got some amazing writers, some really amazing writers. And I think that that's going to be because we now know exactly what we're doing and how to go about doing it that I think this is going to be even more, both enjoyable for us, but hopefully enjoyable for the listeners as well. I mean, we do shape the questions. And yes...

**PW:** So we kind of, we start out with a little bit of background, we want to find out, kind of like, you know, what stories and words mean to them, meant to them as they were growing up? And then we kind of move into the now you know, why did they start calling, you know,

were they happy to call themselves a writer, black writer, and actually find out a little bit about the craft, what their writing process is, which I always find really fascinating. I love hearing writers talking about how they, you know, how to create stuff, where the ideas come from the inspiration, love all of that. Love all of that.

**PC:** And then we always end with a little bit of a celebration, we ask them, and writers are so odd about, we write what's best thing about being who they are. And some of them absolutely really have to stretch to find something. I mean, where they're going, of course, this this this, but we can't say it, we have to ask them to say what's the best thing about being? So we have that kind of beginning, middle and end, don't we? And the answers are always fascinating, I think at some point with a new programme when we sort of contrasts the various answers. Yeah. So the other thing we found, and I think we're allowed to say this, because we're both women, the men take on the title of being, you know, author or playwright or poet, far younger than the women do. The women tend almost to have to be very successful at what they do before they then take onto themselves. You know, say I am a poet, I'm a playwright, or a novelist, which was fairly consistent with all the people that we spoke to.

**PW:** Except I do have to say that like Juliet, who is a playwright, Juliet Gilkes, Romero, I loved her, you know, she's quite bullish about being calling herself a writer, and then a black woman writer, you know, she's very definite about all of that. And I think she did find that early on in her writing career as such, not so much in her life. But in her writing career, she really kind of grasped that handle. So I loved hearing her talk about that, actually,

**PC:** Yes, she was lovely. Soy Negra. I think that's going to be a watchword. I'm a black woman. We, when we first put the website together, we thought about doing something called the library where we would just put bits of things in that we had a really interesting... which was, you know, new books that were coming out and interesting articles and all that sort of stuff. But actually, what we've found, well, you tell us what we decided to do?

**PW:** Well, we found that, actually, that kind of those bits and pieces should actually probably work better on Twitter and Facebook. And actually, we need to engage a little bit differently by writing blogs. So we started writing, we've got three up there now. So we've only been doing them very recently. But they've, they've really been bringing people into the website and increasing the listenership as well. And they've been well received. So I think people kind of, you know, I always want to be behind the scenes. And not so much at the forefront. You know, because we want to showcase these other writers, but it's, it's been great actually just been able to put down our thoughts and feelings about, you know, writing on, what's, what's happening for us, you know, and other writers in the world.

**PC:** And to sometimes just pointing people towards bits of podcasts that we think are particularly interesting responses to it. Then we also had this as a major challenge that we faced, you know, we've all worked with cultural organisations, but they were established organisations and whatever marketing we were involved in, was from the basis of an established organisation. We were brand new. So finding out how to market ourselves was one of the really sort of big, big challenges.

**PW:** Big challenge. Yep. Absolutely. Particularly in the middle of a pandemic as well. Yeah. Yeah. I think we've been doing okay. Yeah. I mean, the feedback that we've had on, especially on our socials, has been so positive, which has been fantastic. So hopefully, you know, we'll continue getting good feedback as we go.

**PC:** I think the word of mouth has been very good. And I think what happens is we've, I felt, understood that you would have to lay in a kind of foundation and then begin to build on that and that's just really posting really regularly. And having regular blogs and that kind of stuff. But yeah, all that's been a kind of education. Yes. Although we've been around the arts for so long. It's yes, an education, starting something. I'm going to ask you to choose a couple of your favourite moments. What are your most memorable moments from all...

**PW:** My most memorable moments. So one that I mentioned before, which is kind of like a general one across all the writers, So it's about hearing the writers talking about, you know, how they got the ideas or being inspired by what inspired them to write or create their piece of work.

**PC:** One of the things that struck me, was really memorable for me was, oddly enough, listening to in the very first podcast, listening to Alex talk about what it was like to come from a - a care home into Brixton as a Black child, but not knowing anything, obviously, history and background and finding his way through it. It was just, you know, that you felt a kind of loneliness.. And I found that that was very memorable. But then, Collin talking about how his father is really by hustling that was quite memorable too.

**PW:** And also there was, there was that moment in Anthony's podcast where we were talking about, I said, Can you, can you read us a humorous sonnet, I think, and actually, it was quite a dark subject, which was about 911. And at the end of that, he suddenly said, Oh, that was a very humorous, was it? You know, that was a bit, you know, it was about life. But yeah, that that was a memorable moment.

**PC:** Yeah, a lot of it has been just really interesting.

**PW:** So do you have an entertaining moment? From the podcast?

**PC:** All of them were entertaining. I have to say, Colin Grant is a hell of a storyteller. You know, he really was. And it just seems like Rachel Long has just these shots of humour that she puts into things, and they kind of land and then you realise, you know, you, you giggle five seconds later, because it's, it's suddenly landed. All of them to me were vastly entertaining but there was Juliet's passion. Yes, my subject. There was a Dipo's certainty. You know, he's a playwright, and he's taking his space. And then you've got Diana, who's, who's exploring all sorts of things in what feels like a very gentle but very place strong way.

**PW:** ...she's a cerebral writer as well. I really get that feeling from her for her three books...

**PC:** ...observation of detail...

**PW:** Yes.

**PC:** ...You know, the texture and detail in the way that she works is, you know, lovely.

**PW:** Can I tell you my entertaining moment?

**PC:** Yes, please.

**PW:** Which was one of our recent podcasts. So in Trish's podcast, we loved Trish's podcast, but it was when we were recording the excerpt from Cinderella...fantastic actor, Ashley Joseph, he, he created all the six parts that we asked him to do in this, in the short excerpt. But that was so funny because we laughed actually through the whole take. You and I quietly on Zoom, and actually on clean feed, so yeah, I found that really entertaining, his different voices sugary and spicy...the two ugly sisters.

**PC:** Yeah, it's quite bloodthirsty as well. Hacking up her foot to get that was ...

**PW:** Yes, that was very dark as well.

**PC:** But what's nice for me is that it's all interwoven threads because Ashley has been in a lot of the pantomimes of Trish's work for Theatre Royal Stratford, so he knew immediately what our style was, and in doing some of the, the inserts that we've done the excerpts from the place, yes, we've got to work with actors that we've worked with before. You know, and, and the readings, we've had some lovely people do the readings. So it's been a way for us to reconnect with people that we worked with, but also been able to spread the Arts Council money around so that we're making sure that people, you know, it's not massive, but we are putting money into creative people's pockets at a time when it was difficult. So we've I'm really quite proud of that. Yes. What about inspiring,

**PW:** Inspiring, so you mentioned Dipo before? Exactly. So for me, he was very inspiring. And you know, his, his bullishness at saying, you know, I am a playwright, and I'm gonna own that space and take that space, and nobody's gonna make me feel bad about, you know, being a playwright. And maybe the other one was Nick, actually one of our earlier interviews with Nick Makoha, a poet. And I loved where he was saying - that he was talking about, you know, whenever he starts a new creative piece of work, that you have to be humble enough, these are his words, you have to be humble enough to be willing to start at the bottom of the mountain, every time you need to start that work. So it's about you know, it's not glamorous, really, is it being a writer, but actually that commitment that you make to yourself to say, actually, I know I'm starting again from scratch, and you know, I'm climbing that mountain because at the top of the mountain, I know that I will have done my best so I found that really inspiring.

**PC:** My ones are Juliet, partly because she was so international. You know that she was talking about Mexico and Haiti and you know when she says Soy Negra...

**PW:** Yeah.

**PC:** ...it's kind of, a world, you know, call to arms, which I thought was absolutely lovely. But the other one that I really, really liked was Hafsa, Zayyan.

**PW:** Yes.

**PC:** With her book. We are all birds of Uganda, which won the #Merky Book publication.

**PW:** Yeah. #Merky Books Prize.

**PC:** Yeah. Partly because she's so fearless. She's at the beginning of her career, and she took on a huge story. And when you talk to her she has, and like all the writers we talked to, she's been reading voraciously for a long time. But she was just really strong in what she wanted to say. And I really, yeah, I was inspired by that kind of the confidence that she stepped into her first work.

**PW:** Yeah.

**PC:** I thought that was that was really interesting.

**PW:** Yeah, right. Really right.

**PC:** Yes. Yes.

**PW:** So that was our lovely series 1. And now we're looking forward to series 2....so the writers that we hopefully have got lined up.

**PC:** Yes.

**PW:** We've got Leonie Ross, Dreda Say Mitchell, Levi David Addai, Roy Williams, Theresa Ikoko, Sara Collins.

**PC:** What's absolutely lovely is the writers are happy to do it. When we first put this out there, I think some were a little nervous, but they're really happy to do it now. Can you imagine some of those conversations as well?

**PW:** ...Sara Collins book, The Confessions of Franny Langton...

**PC:** And I'm reading This One Sky Day/Poppy Show.

**PW:** Yes, I love that.

**PC:** So yeah, the reading continues. I mean, fortunately, with Roy, I've seen quite a lot of his plays. I don't feel that's quite as intimidating, but yes, there's going to be a lot of reading and thinking...

**PW:** and a long career, you know. And with my other hat on the Alfred Fagon Award, he won the first Alfred Fagon Award, he's won it twice. So, you know, this is somebody that really knows his craft.

**PC:** And I've just finished producing one of his plays for Radio Four. So, exactly.

**PW:** Yeah.

**PC:** All these things are interwoven into it. Yes. Yes. So, so that's going to be series two. And of course, like we said, we like... the Arts Council England very much for funding the first series. But what we have to do now is, we have to raise enough funds to produce series two. So we've set up a GoFundMe, the kind of, spreading the word about that and asking people to contribute...that also just, you know, if you like the podcast, tell people and ask them just to download it or have a listen. Because, that's the whole point. That's why we do what we do. We want you to understand the lives, the work, the craft of these people. Yes, there's so much more than the one book called, the one play that occasionally you see this, this continuity of thought and craft and skill. And yes, there is a black British cannon.

**PW:** Exactly, there is.

**PC:** And where can the podcasts be found?

**PW:** So they can download it from our website, which is [theamplifyproject.co.uk](http://theamplifyproject.co.uk). Or where you can find us on all podcasting platforms like iTunes, Spotify, Google podcast, Deezer PlayerFM, Stitcher, so we're on all the big major podcast platforms.

**PC:** So that's us. We've done a really quick podcast of us. And we hope you'll join us again for series two. Have a listen to the ones on series one, there's some gorgeous people on there. And yeah, wish us luck with the fundraising. We're gonna do our best.

**PW:** Thank you.

**PC:** Bye, bye.

**PW:** Do check with our website, [theamplifyproject.co.uk](http://theamplifyproject.co.uk) for other podcasts in the series and for further information about black British writing.

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