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From the producer's perspective: Kayza Rose

Jessica Bowles

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Kayza is a creative producer, artistic director, activist filmmaker & Arts Council England 'Change Maker'² who uses creative practices to draw attention to marginalised voices. She is a powerful advocate for a greater diversity of perspectives in the media and shares her experiences including as a teenage parent ('Brave Conversations' Radio 1, October 2019) and as a queer person of colour, most recently in gal-dem's³ collaboration with Channel 4 (October 2019)

As a 'Change Maker' her work was located with Duckie, self-described 'purveyors of working-class entertainment' whose mission is 'to inspire creativity, resilience and confidence in young queer, trans and intersex people of colour. The focus is on developing artistic skills; personal development; using art as an instrument for social and political change; strategies of survival and community building'. There in 2017 she developed 'QTIPOC⁴ Creatives' (Queer, Trans, Intersex People of Colour Creatives) in partnership with Duckie for young, working class LGBTQI+⁵ BAME⁶ creatives without any formal arts training. After the success of the first cohort of creatives, the next 'QTIPOC Creatives' arts school will be opening in 2020.

She is presently the Operations Director at Mzz Kimberley's LIFE which she developed with Mzz Kimberley to support CliniQ and combines her work with her roles as Chief Operating Officer at AZ Mag & Wahala Film Fund, Artistic Director at AZ Hub, creator of 'Allies Corner' an event to encourage conversations with and across the trans community about being better allies. She is a guest lecturer & curriculum consultant at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and an Artistic Director at Family Dinner which is a sober, day event focussing on QTIPOC mental health.

Kayza is a co-creator with Campbell X of QTIPOC Family, an intergenerational event centring LGBTQI+ BAME people with DJs, film, performance and community participation. She is Head of External Events for UK Black Pride.

JB: *You were a Changemaker with Duckie, how would you describe your role?*

KR: I definitely consider myself to be an activist. So that means allyship, in some ways, it also means standing up, taking risks and trying to make sustainable change in society as well as in the arts. But it's not just about other people, it's about changing myself.

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Changing the way that I see things, and speaking to people I wouldn't normally speak to, challenging myself.

In terms of working in the arts, it was to do with my activism, and the fact that marching in the streets of London doesn't create sustainable change. Yes, it creates a moment for people to stop and think, or moments for people to be mad at you and try to run you over, which has definitely happened, but it's a moment. What do you do after that moment? Whereas art is forever. You know, once you see something it's imprinted on you, or once you have experienced a piece it stays with you. And also, Duckie record everything, so it's archived.

JB: So do you deliberately kind of push yourself out a comfort zone? And if so, how do you do that?

KR: Saying yes more. Saying yes more to things that scare me. I've definitely been doing a lot more of that since I did Changemaker . . . that kind of forced me to focus on me, and not just the activism, not just other people. Changemaker was about me, my growth, my work. And so it forced me to say yes to a lot of things. To be on TV more, to be on radio, and all these things I had been avoiding. But also, to take ownership of the contributions I have made. Because what had been happening before was that people were being credited for my work because I wasn't speaking for myself. So, it's also about making sure that what history says is true. You know, I did this, I can claim ownership of it. And also that, generally, black women are not given permission by society to say that they've done amazing things. And I've done some amazing things, and I need to be there to talk about it.

JB: Are there things that you think organisations could do, that would help them to welcome more diverse artists, theatre-makers, of all kinds, into those organisations?

KR: Well, this is going to sound like a plug, and maybe it is. Invite the Changemakers to come and help you. You know, they have the ready-made formula. Hundreds of people applied to be Changemakers, twenty people were chosen. Speak to those twenty people, pay them for their time, invite them in, and we could perhaps help you with some of those things. Because we're Changemakers, because we've been through a specific process, because of the type of work that we do. Also the people who did INTERSECT,⁷ they would be some good people to speak to. We have ready-made formulas within the arts that we're not utilising.

JB: And thinking a bit more about those formulas, what would you say were the top one or two or three formulas that really did work?

KR: I would say, for instance, a pilot that I did when I was doing Changemaker with Duckie, called 'QTIPOC Collective' we've changed it to 'QTIPOC Creatives' as it's in development and we're applying for more funding for it, but it was an art school for people of colour who hadn't been to university and who identified as working-class. We believe that these people should have the chance to experience the arts, experience making work, and experience some of the nepotism that is afforded to other people. In 'QTIPOC Creatives' there will definitely be some heavyweights in the arts to come in and speak to these young people. They'll definitely have mentors, they'll definitely have space to grow and learn. And also, not just around performing arts, they might want to be a DJ, that's an art form. They may want to be a graffiti artist, that's an art form. There's not just one way to make art, and I think that because the arts is a notoriously classist place, when

people pick those things, they're kind of discouraged from doing it. Whereas this space is a space that welcomes difference, welcomes change, because actually our society is that, so it needs to reflect that in the art that we are supporting.

JB: Do you think that there are ways in which universities and arts organisations could be more proactive in supporting this kind of work, and if so, what would make the biggest difference?

KR: Money. It always comes back down to money, and unfortunately with all these cuts that are happening, it makes it very difficult to pledge that. But also, materials. It may be that you have materials and spaces within your spaces that we could come visit with the young people to give them some idea of the options that they may have if they pursue a career in whatever field they're looking at. So, if it's a performing arts university, or somewhere that is actually training people, then I think that this programme specifically could use your spaces to speak to your tutors, your professors, even down to the person who runs the entire organisation.

It would be great for them to see who the 'C-Club' are, meaning the CEOs, who the senior teams are, who the board are, what do the board look for when they're picking somebody to do a fellowship. You know, all these things are very useful for people trying to get into the arts who don't have a traditional arts background.

JB: One of the findings of our network so far is that we (arts organisations, theatres and universities) are not platforming work that we could be platforming. Whose responsibility is it to seek out that work? And how might it be better and further developed?

KR: I would say that, the same way that the music industry has A&R people that actually go and scout, that's what universities need. They need to be intentional. With the music industry, it's intentional, they want new work, they want to find the most diverse group of people, and bring them in and say, 'we discovered that.' Universities need to follow their lead. It can't always be an academic way of doing things, it has to look beyond that. But I think, yeah, appointing people as ambassadors or associates, but actually it's their job, it's their role, they're paid to go out and look for various art forms. And not traditional ones. You may find the next Kenrick Sandy⁸ in a youth club in Peckham. How would you know that unless you're going to all the youth clubs, unless you're going to all the various spaces that young people are hanging out. Going to skateboarding parks, you know, skateboarding is an art form. And along with that goes graffiti, and B-Boy groups, and all of these things are art forms. So, going to all of these spaces, doing what the music industry has been doing for God knows how long now –

JB: There's a question that often comes up about 'risk' when talking to organisations about support for developing emerging artists, how do you think about risk in relation to your own work?

KR: It's a classist undertone, it has classist undertones. It basically says, if we're not used to you, we don't want you here. You're not allowed to do this, you're not allowed to be who you are, you're not welcome. And that's what risk means to me, where people say, 'oh yeah, well, you know, it's a bit risky,' then it makes me feel a bit anxious about continuing to work with them, because actually, all work is a risk. All art is a risk. And it depends on who's calling the shots. Because for me, it's like, the things that I find the

most exciting are the things I haven't done before. And when it works out, it's amazing, but you do find that with marginalised groups, they're not allowed to fail. They get that one chance and that's it. Whereas, what is it, Pale, Male and Stale, those groups of people who tend to be quite privileged, middle/upper class people get to make a billion mistakes. And waste all the money, and then they get more money. Whereas marginalised groups don't get that chance. And so, who's doing the most risk here? So, that's risky to me.

JB: What are the biggest barriers you've faced when you're developing yourself in your sector? And thinking about those barriers, what could universities and arts organisations do to help?

KR: Identify or get rid of those barriers. Focus on mental health. I think that my biggest barrier was myself. Was my mental health. And not confronting that, or not feeling like I could speak about my needs in specific spaces. And also acknowledging privileges in certain situations. So the fact that I can say to whoever wants to work with me, 'okay, these are my needs, I have dyslexia, I need you to write up the notes, I need you to do this, I need you to do that,' I would prefer to travel before something, because with my social anxiety I'm allowed, I have permission to communicate my needs. And it doesn't mean I will lose the work, it means that whoever the person is goes away and thinks about how they can make that happen so that they can work with me. There's a value in that, and we don't always have that. So I have to acknowledge my privileges in the situations where people want to work with me for whatever reason, and so they make it happen. But it needs to be like that for everyone, it can't be the privileged few because of who they are, because of who they're associated with, because of who's backing them in the arts, they get to have permission and others don't. I think we need to do a lot more for others on mental health. And I think that's one thing that universities can and must do, because it's our duty to take care of people. And it's not just about physical, it's about mental health. And providing spaces where people can lay down, chill out, people have a space where it's calm. And people understand that when someone's in that space, they maybe need some follow-up. That's been my biggest barrier, is my mental health.

JB: What is the most pressing concern for you right now?

KR: Access, or lack thereof. Not everybody can afford to go to university. Not everybody can afford the materials to explore their discipline, or disciplines. So, access. Access is the biggest concern, and the biggest question is how do we provide access in a sustainable way? But I like what you said earlier about universities [acting as a 'connector'] ... it's the only way to create a situation where there is a middle person, where the person doesn't work at the university but is working in a partnership with the university. Because that's what's worked with me and the Changemaker initiative. That was a bridge between Duckie, the Arts Council, and the people who felt like they were pushed out and not accepted and not welcome. So, I guess, something like that where universities could potentially bridge a lot of the gaps. It's not going to solve all the problems, but, it's a step. It's a gesture.

Notes

1. Interviewed in London 22 July 2019
2. The Arts Council's 'Change Makers' Scheme 2016–18, was a 2.6million pound initiative to Increase the diversity of senior leadership in art and culture by locating a cohort of leaders

who are Black, minority ethnic and/or disabled in National Portfolio organisations and Museums supported by a targeted senior leadership training and development programme. Host organisations also were encouraged to use this as a development opportunity to adopt cultural change that could be a catalyst for improving their contribution to the Creative case for diversity. Further info can be found at www.artscouncil.org.

3. gal-dem – an online and print publication committed to sharing perspectives from women and non-binary people of colour, www.gal-dem.com
4. QTIPOC – Queer, Trans, Intersex People of Colour
5. LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Questioning)
6. BAME (Black, Asian Minority Ethnic)
7. INTERSECT is a British Council and Diversity Arts Australia led knowledge exchange. The programme aims to strengthen international connections between those who are changing whose work is seen, what is seen, how it is seen and who sees it.
8. Kenrick Sandy MBE, is the Co-Founder and Co-Artistic Director of Boy Blue

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Notes on contributor

Jessica Bowles is an academic with a background in professional practice as a theatre designer across the UK, including at Dukes Playhouse Lancaster, Young Vic, and the RSC and as a producer of large-scale festival experiences. At Royal Central, she wrote the BA (Hons) Theatre Practice Course, along the way introducing new undergraduate programs to Higher Education including the first Circus and Puppetry courses to be offered at degree level. In her role as Head of the Centre for Excellence in Theatre Training (2008–11) she led research into the factors contributing to the sustainability of graduate companies which in turn led to the development of the MA/MFA in Creative Producing, the course she now leads. Between 2010 and 2014, Jessica was on the Management Board of the Centre for Creative Collaboration (C4CC), a University of London initiative to bring together leading researchers from London's universities together with creative industry freelancers, small businesses, and students. In 2011 and 2015 she produced the educational component of the Prague Quadrennial, the world's largest festival of performance design and space. Her educational and research practice focuses on the materiality of performance and the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of performance-making including work with the Bartlett School of Architecture UCL, ScanLab and SHUNT exploring 3D scanning and live performance. For over 20 years, Jessica has been active in the development of Puppetry and in 2014 was invited onto the Board of award-winning company Theatre-Rites, a field leader in the creation of experimental theatre for children.