

## **Will Young**

### **Singer-songwriter, Actor and Podcaster**

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Will Young, award-winning singer-songwriter, actor, and co-host of the Homo Sapiens Podcast. After winning the first series of ITV talent show, Pop Idol in 2002, he released six consecutive chart-topping albums and four number one singles. He was also nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award in 2013 for his role as the master of ceremonies in Cabaret. Will is a regular speaker on issues around sexuality and mental health, and is a patron of several charities. He's just announced his return to music after a four-year break with the release of his seventh studio album.**

**Will, thank you for joining me.**

You've got nice nails, haven't you? I was just looking at your fingers.

**But they're dirty. You're not supposed to look. I'm absolutely horrified now with that. Really?**

**Yes.**

I think they're lovely. Honestly.

**Thank you very much. I think you're lovely as well.**

Thank you. Yes, thanks for having me.

**That's no problem. It's a great pleasure. Tell us about the podcast, then.**

Well, the podcast, yes. Chris is a great friend of mine. He was a video director and we met on one of my videos. We actually met at a party, funnily enough, and I'd copied... he'd done an amazing Yves St. Laurent film with an actor called Simon... can't remember his surname now. Great actor though. And I loved it, so I copied it for my website. I mean, literally copied it. So he came up to me at a party and said, "Hi, I'm Chris and I did this thing." And I said, "Oh my god. I want to tell you that I copied you." And he really liked that, that I was honest.

**He could have taken it the other way, couldn't he?**

Well, he knew already, so he probably hated me. We just got on really well, and then we did a video, and we've just stayed great friends. It's the great thing about the creative industry is you just find your pack. We've always swapped ideas. We did another video together and he said, "I think we should do a podcast. I think it should be an LGBT podcast like Woman's Hour. There's nothing in that space."

**A queer Woman's Hour, I think you once said.**

There you go. Queer women, that's probably him. It sounds better. Yes, we just started in his kitchen, really. It was very rudimentary.

**How many years ago was this?**

It was probably two and a half, three years ago.

**Because it's been quite a while now, hasn't it? It's really successful.**

Yes, I mean we were amazed. We went immediately into the top five on the Apple charts. I just think because...

**We immediately went into the top 150, so there you go.**

Did you? Well...

**No one listens to this.**

Well, that doesn't matter because I'm enjoying talking to you! We thought basically that there was obviously a space that needs to be filled, you know? I don't listen to podcasts, I don't. And now I make a point of not listening to them because I don't want to start copying other people's, and I worry that I would stop being authentic – and I think it's really important to be as authentic and in the moment as possible. Chris listens to a lot of them. But it's been brilliant. We've kind of had a plan for it and we've got to where we wanted to go. So our third season we went around America.

**You've met everyone from Sam Smith to that transgender rodeo star.**

Oh, wonderful! One of the biggest stars of this season has been Natalie the Uber driver, because as we went to different places we spoke to people and just pressed record. Asked them, of course. And we wanted to know, and Natalie was fantastic. She is gay, she's black, and so she's representing quite an interesting cross section of a type of person in LA in Trump's America. She started off by saying, "When I was 18 I tried to kill myself because I knew I was gay." that was the first thing she said to us. I was like, "My god." She was the most inspirational woman. So it's funny, we have very famous guests like Jeremy Corbyn, Sam Smith, Alan Cumming, and really, the ones that can often shine out the most are the everyday people. I actually call them everyday heroes. I want to have a website called Everyday Heroes where I just have three-minute conversations with people, because all around us there are heroes. You know, you're a hero, I'm a hero. We have things in our lives that we all have to overcome.

**I'm no hero. I'm lazy. I've let myself go over the last few months.**

Hey, stop that!

**I've put on about half a stone.**

You stop that right now! It doesn't matter. So you know, that's why I love doing it. And also, we just get so many people writing in saying how much they needed that in their lives. Yes.

**Also, I've listened to a few of them. It's great fun as well, isn't it?**

It's really fun.

**You're clearly having fun as well.**

Well, Chris just makes me laugh. I mean literally, we get in, we start talking, and Matt our producer goes, "Can we press record now?" Because it's not... we literally just start talking, and I'm really proud of that, that we haven't moved to suddenly become more kind of broadcastery, do you know what I mean? Sort of fake laughter and fake... genuinely, the last one we did this week – we record on Mondays – he literally is making me crack up. He is so funny, and that's why we're such good friends. And he's very intelligent, and I love listening... when I listen back to what we've done, to check it and make sure it's all right, I

love the questions he asked, and I love his intelligence. I genuinely love him as a friend, so I think that's why it works. I think that's the other thing, is people liked hearing two friends talking about stuff. We would talk about stuff whether it was recorded or not. We talk about what it's like to be in a relationship, we talk about gay shame, we talk about why Amazon parcels are driving us mad. You know, all those things. We talk about why I think currently people are stealing my logs from outside my house.

**Are they?**

Yes, I think so. I'm thinking about getting a camera on it but then I suddenly thought...

**Well, cameras are about 100 quid...**

Exactly.

**Unless they nick that as well when it's delivered.**

Well, I know, where's it going to end? I think people are taking my logs. I ordered a very large pallet of logs, I mean, literally they couldn't get it into my tiny little front garden, and now they're just there. And then I thought, "Well, if people need to take the logs, knock yourself out."

**I've seen lots of episodes of The Sopranos. I'd kill 'em. I'd kill 'em all. It's the only way. You've got to send a message.**

Well, you're right, you know, and actually that's a very good point. I think I might just make my Dachshund try and go for their jugulars. She's very, very vicious.

**What kind of feedback have you had? I know gay shame is a regular theme of the interviews, and that frankness for me was a huge change from the Pop Idol era when your management said that you had to kind of be unthreatening and not sexual.**

Yes. That's just such a sign of where I'm at now, you know. I'm 40.

**You look good for 40!**

Thank you, yes, it's a hell of a lot of work! I just literally throw my face into face masks and scare the dogs. Yes, I'm so different to then, and I think you've just got to have no fear, and if you have no fear no one's got anything on you. They just don't. Because what's someone going to say? And I think it's very important, no fear and no shame. You can have healthy shame.

**Yes, if I've stolen a book from the local library, it's fine that bit of shame.**

Do you know what I mean? Yes. Although I do have a book that I stole when I was at university.

**Well, you should rightly be shamed for that publicly.**

I don't care. I threw it out. I threw it out the window and my friend caught it.

**Oh, that's theft.**

It was a journal, actually. It's theft, yes. You heard it here. The Political Quarterly. It's in my study. But I think if you own something, so I own things, there's nothing that anyone can say because it's like, "Well no, I own that. That's fine." You know? So that's very important. Also, now I'm older I've got things worked out in my head. What it is to be gay. It took me a long time to get over gay shame. I didn't even know what it was until I was 34.

**If you think about it, it's faintly ridiculous that we have a society that shames people for their sexuality. I don't care what anyone's sexuality is, and I mean that in a nice way. It's their own business.**

I think it is. I think there's always going to be... you know, the hardest thing is kids, because kids want to... particularly boys... the thing is that to be called gay at school is the ultimate kind of... if you've been black-carded, if you've been marked with that, you might as well... I know why kids, why the rate of suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide is almost twice that much of young heterosexual, heteronormative boys. Because it is like having a black mark, you become a social pariah in that moment. The reason for that is it is the ultimate shaming tool. How that can be changed, which is brilliant now, is from a younger age where you now... I wrote some stories on CBeebies, called Two Dads. My youngest nephew Maxwell, who's eight, absolutely loves that story. He just can't get over the fact that someone might have two dads. He thinks it's the coolest thing in the world. He doesn't care about two guys. The thing is, we put the agenda, as adults, on kids by sexualising it. Kids aren't sexualising it. You know? But we think, "No, you can't say those stories to kids. They'll think about a man bumming another man." It's like, no. Kids don't care. They just want to know that people love each other and, oh, how great is that? So I think if we get in at that level, which people are now, it would change the whole agenda of them, what it is to be gay when you're 11. But we've got to get in young, and unfortunately I think people are so hung up on the sexual act, what it is to be with someone. You know, the sexual act of a man being with a man is still... people are obsessed with it.

### **It's weird, isn't it?**

It's very weird but it's kind of an English thing. We are obsessed with sex, but we sort of hate it and shame ourselves. And it just seems still so sort of vile and disgusting to adults, because we've grown up in that. Kids don't care.

### **But even heteronormative married couples, a man and a woman, if they've been married 25 years, they're not shagging either.**

Well, exactly.

### **Is it a generational thing? Like the decline of religion and the fact that with every single incremental generation it becomes more and more... I was going to say more and more acceptable of course, I meant it's less and less stigmatised, is the right way to say it.**

I think so, and it is becoming more...

### **And things like your podcast, frankly.**

Yes, I think that's done a lot, and I think probably me being a pop star who was gay from the beginning of his career, publicly gay, you know, that makes a difference. Of course it does, and all those people that came before me, my god. There's a phrase, you stand on the shoulders of giants, and certainly I just stood on the shoulders of giants. They'd paved the way. So it does get better with every generation, and now these stories are just... they're just brilliant. Chris and I are hoping to do some more stuff with kids, with stories.

### **I remember when George Michael was outed, and I remember feeling very sorry for him at the time because the narrative was he'd withheld it from us and misled us. Like his sexuality's something to be ashamed of, or that it's our business what he does in the bedroom. Who cares?**

Well, the narrative was so different then, and of course, you know, when you're a pop star, sexuality and being sexual can be part of being a pop star, and that can be embraced in a very healthy way. I remember when I knew that I wanted to be a pop star, I knew that my sexuality would come into it because people who are in pop become adored, and it's like yearned after and sexualised. So, for me I always knew it was going to be the case, but I think it just becomes so much more heightened then. So yes, it's certainly what happened to George Michael, but what he did was brilliant. He then came out with a video called Outside, do you remember?

**I loved it, when the urinals and they turn...**

With the urinals turned around, and they were sparkling. It was just genius. So what he did was remarkable. But he got set up. It was awful. He got set up by the police. Awful, awful.

**It is awful. But I watched Faith, the video for that, on Vevo a couple of months ago and it was obvious he was gay back then. If you look back now with Captain Hindsight, just the way he was dancing was so flamboyant.**

Yes, I think people just... it's so different now. People don't even care. You know my niece said to me, 16, when we interviewed Sam Smith, she said, "Oh, I didn't even know he was gay." And that's the way it should be. But I remember years ago when I used to do promotion in Europe, I'd go over to Holland – and this is right at the beginning – and no one would even ask me about my sexuality.

**It's a progressive country.**

They literally would not ask me.

**Was it not of interest to them?**

No. That was just such an interesting marker at the time for where the UK was and where other countries were, but then of course if I went to America, I remember even six years ago going on American Idol and I was doing an interview, and I mentioned a boyfriend, and I'm not joking, the person from the record company came in and cut the phone call off, because she thought I'd done something... she was like, "Oh god, no. Cut it off." You know. So, therein lies the difference between lots of countries.

**What's it like to be famous and be so adored and be so recognised? I know so many people seek it. A friend of mine, she's an actor who's in Game of Thrones, and she finds it quite stressful actually, because people always want a selfie. They go up to her as if she owes them a selfie, and if she happens to be in a hurry to catch something and she has to apologise, they give her the most frightful looks and say, "Oh, she's stuck up."**

You just have to become very boundaried, and I'm really into boundaries. Luckily, because I've done, you know, that phrase, "a lot of work on myself", I'm very boundaried. I don't give a shit if someone... it's not for me to control how someone reacts if I say, "I really can't do this. I'm with my nephew in Toys R Us," or whatever. I don't care, and I've had that. I have had people go... someone, I remember, when my van had broken down coming back from a festival – I've got an old Bedford van – and she wanted a selfie, and my van was literally blowing up. And I said, "I can't do it now." She went, "Oh, you're stuck up." I was just like, I said, "Oh fuck off." But you know, very occasionally that gets upsetting, but actually it really doesn't bother me, honestly. It is not top of my list.

**Why do you have an old van? Surely you should be swanning around in brand new Bentleys and Rolls Royces and everything.**

Well, I collect cars, I collect old bangers, basically. I've just bought... my accountants will kill me! I've just bought an old Honda scooter from the '80s.

**Wow.**

It is so cool. Got it for £200 in Holland. I love 'em. Anything old, I love 'em, and I'm a child of the '80s so you know, I want a Mark II Escort XR3i, which I have.

**I'm trying to get one of the original Mustangs. I found one but it's like £150,000 and I just afford it. I've got a new one. I love Mustangs.**

Have you? They're great.

**I want a new one, I want the original one.**

Oh, you've got to get it. They're great. They're great fun. What am I going to spend my money on? I spend them on cars. And I don't have a very flashy collection, but it's my collection and I love it.

**So you're not like Jerry Seinfeld where you get stuck in your own traffic.**

No, but I'd love to do that. If I could be Chris Evans, I would.

**Yes. Jay Leno's another one. He literally has a hangar with about 200 cars.**

Well then it becomes like taste. It's all relative, if you've got that money, fine. listen, it's basically collecting matchbox cars when you were a kid. It's just the same thing.

**It is. I love it. I've got a Tesla now, as well, I love that.**

Ah, now which one?

**The P90.**

Which is...

**PS.**

Oh okay, yes, they're good.

**Yes, they're really good.**

I've got a bit of a thing about electric cars.

**Drives itself. It's like sitting... I used to love Knight Rider when I was a kid, and it literally drives itself.**

I had an old Porsche 924 that looked like the Knight Rider car. I wish I hadn't sold that actually, but yes, those electric cars are incredible.

**So do you spend your entire leisure time just thumbing the pages of Auto Trader every week?**

Yes, I do.

**I do have that image in my mind for some reason.**

I actually do, yes, because I've got a few friends that are into cars. I just love it.

**I love cars.**

I like seeing the price of them.

**We should do a cars podcast. The media's shite, anyway. Let's do a car one.**

Let's do a car one! Yes, it's just a passion, and my family are car mad. My mum who's what, 67, she drives a Nissan GTR. It's pretty much a supercar.

**I had the old 350Z roadster back in the day.**

Oh yes, they're nice.

**Oh yes, it was.**

Her car is one of the quickest cars I've ever been in in my life, and she's got an Audi RS4. she's really into her cars. My grandparents collected cars, so we're a bit of a car family.

**There must be... I don't know, it's almost a cliché question to ask, but the kind of downsides to fame. you've spoken quite candidly about how you were recovering from PTSD from going on Strictly.**

No, that wasn't because of Strictly.

**Forgive me.**

Yes, that's all right. You're forgiven!

**Thank you.**

No, I was ill going into Strictly, and I tried to get out of it. I really did try and get out of it, and unfortunately I wasn't strong enough to remain boundaried actually on that.

**Because actually there's a lot of stories in the media now about how ITV and all of these broadcasters that create these shows owe a duty of care to the people that star in these reality shows because they're suffering from traumatic episodes. I think they offer counselling to people who've been on Love Island and so on.**

Well, I think they have to, given what someone just told me yesterday, I didn't know, have they had two people who've killed themselves?

**It's horrendous.**

I don't watch it, but I think duty of care now is a great thing and I'm pleased that that's come into TV in general, and film and theatre. I know the last show I was in, in the theatre, there was great sense of duty of care. They were very big on it, actually.

**Well good, to their credit.**

Yes, absolutely. I took a week off because I was getting... it was too much. I was burnt out, so I said, "Right, that's it. I'm taking a week off." The good thing is now that the climate's changed. You know, a producer cannot go, "That's not good enough." So when I wanted to take a week off, I went to my psychiatrist, said, "I just need you to write a note, basically, because they're going to need it for their insurance or whatever," write the note, went in, "Here's the note, I'm off for a week." The thing is, I have no problem with that because I'm much better at looking after myself. Having left Strictly, actually, it was one of the best things I ever did in my life. Turned down £100,000, which I was being paid. All the potential benefits of it. Best thing I ever did because now I know, well, I can leave at any stage. I'm not trapped. There's nothing worse than feeling trapped. And now people can... you know, bosses, you do a lot of work with big execs. I go into companies and talk to them about their mental health and tell them how they can organise their companies and use myself as a model, because I'm my own employer and employee; I'm schizophrenic.

**I think it's called multiple personality disorder now.**

That's it, I'll take that. I just say, "Look, this is how you can do it." And bosses now can't ignore their employees.

**But why should they? Not only because of the care that they should take of the people that they have a duty to, but also it's not good for business, frankly, to have burnt-out employees that can't perform.**

No, well that's what I say. That's what I say, exactly. I think also it's not good for their brand. You know, clients might not go to a brand that have a bad record on wellbeing amongst their business, within their business, within their offices. So it's not good for the brands, and it certainly would be why companies like ITV, they're probably shitting themselves, you know what I mean? Of course they are, because someone's killed themselves. "Better grapple this back." It's not that it's their responsibility, but...

**But if it makes them have a better regime next time, and that fewer people then suffer those mental injuries, then frankly it's worth it. Something good's come out of it, I should say.**

Yes, definitely.

**It's incredibly inspiring how open you are about all of these things, because again, we talked about the sexuality thing, but even mental health was stigmatised. It was perceived as not being manly to suffer from panic attacks. They used to call it shell shock, didn't they, where people would suffer mental health problems, but it was a shameful thing to be hidden and certainly not discussed openly.**

Totally, and I think it's got to be discussed, certainly for myself, appropriately and contained. I don't go into my local café and go, "Can I have a latte, and by the way, I'm having a panic attack." You know, it's got to be contained in that way, but I think again it's that thing of like, if it's open and it's being shared, then the shame goes, because shame is 50% of any problem, most of the time, in my opinion. So, get it out in the open. I'll give you an example. My friend rang me last night. I haven't spoken to him for a bit. I know he moved house and he's got a new fellow, and he's really happy. He's doing his music. And he rang me, and he said, "Have I done something to offend you? Because I feel like we haven't spoken for a few months and I'm worried that I've said something." And then he said, "And I've been going over in my mind of things that I've said that you're probably offended by, so I finally decided that I just need to call you." I said, "I'm so pleased you called me. No, you haven't offended me." I'm mentioning it because he'd brought it out into the open.

**He'd over-thought it, it seems.**

He'd over-thought it and he'd never actually checked in to the source and gone...

**"Am I arguing with a Will in my head or the actual Will?"**

Exactly. And we don't check in with the source because we're worried that they're going to think we're mental. So it's like, oh. We don't want to do it, but if I have said something to a friend or I feel awkward about it now, I get in touch with them pretty much instantly and say, "I'm really worried I offended you then." Because then I stop the chatter in my head, and they go, "Oh, don't be silly. No, you didn't offend me at all." So I stop it, but I never used to check in with that because I'd be worried. It's a weird cycle. I'd be worried that they would think I'm mental. You know, "What do you mean, when you poured me some water you worried you offended me? Oh, how stupid are you?" Of course no friend's going to say that. No friend of worth, anyway.

**Yes, agreed.**

But we don't do that because we're terrified about what others think of us.

**Isn't that odd?**

It's very odd.

**You can see it with... I'm as guilty of this as everyone else, with people on Instagram. Everyone's just trying to show off and say, "Look how great my lifestyle is." It's not even about shiny things like cars. It's more than that. It's, "Oh, look at my lifestyle and look at the great days I'm having every day." And of course it's not the full truth because no one puts the totality of their life on Instagram because 90% of my life is boring work graft. Oh my god, you know. Chris and I did a talk, actually, we did a TEDx talk on friendship, and one of the things we said was the people that we should have support from are the very people that we're trying to impress, which is our friendship group. Isn't that odd?**

It's crazy. We're all trying to keep up appearances with the very people that we shouldn't be having to keep up appearances. The problem is that sometimes when people share, we might share with the wrong person. This is what I learned – after I had a breakdown, which I highly recommend – there were two camps of people. Ones that were emotionally able to cope with their own stuff, so could handle me saying, "I'm feeling miserable today," and ones that couldn't. The ones that couldn't are in the bigger category. So I had to quickly learn



which friends could cope with their emotions so they could handle having an adult conversation, and open. All those friends I am now so much closer to, and then it's a two-way thing. They share with me. It's wonderful. Basically Chris and I used us as an example.

**There's a power in vulnerability, isn't there?**

Totally. We just don't want to be vulnerable. It probably goes back to childhood where our emotions were not validated, and so it just carries on. But I must say, the best thing that I ever did was open up to friends, but the worst thing that can happen is if you open up to a friend and they invalidate us, because then it's like, "I feel ashamed of feeling this, and now you've just completely invalidated it." And that's really difficult.

**The tough thing there though, as you rightly said earlier, is that says more about them, frankly, than you.**

A hundred percent. But you know, it's very hard to see that. So I always say to people when they say, "What can we do about mental health? What would you recommend, your one piece of advice?" I say, "Openly share with people who you trust." Because often what we do is we... it's really... I find it fascinating because I like studying it. Often what we do is we open up... because in our childhood we've opened up, and that's been rebuked. We then just search out people that we're going to open up to who will rebuke us again. Do you know what I mean?

**A vicious circle.**

It's a vicious circle because we're so used to that. Our nervous system is used to that. Our brains are used to it. That's why people get in the wrong relationships, who actually sometimes when they kind of get better and more well, often friendship groups will change a lot, because we suddenly look at our friends and go, "Shit."

**I haven't had a drink in about eight or nine years, but I had drinking buddies back in the day, and you know, I'm still Facebook friends with them and if I see them in the street, but I have no desire to sit in a pub with them for five hours and get pissed.**

That's the thing. that's a very common thing, and I had that when I stopped drinking. Suddenly there were certain friends that I realised, my god, after two drinks we'd just talk about the same thing. And do I want to for the rest of my life, get shit-faced on a Friday and a Saturday night?

**I find it amazing that drinking people think teetotallers are boring because after three pints, everyone talks nonsense loudly and repetitively, and they're dull.**

It's really fascinating, that, it is. Again, it comes back to people having a problem, like if you're vegetarian, people go like, "Oh what, do you think..." They take it as a personal rebuke, as if they're being judged for drinking. That's what I find. It's like, I don't drink and then they can suddenly think, "Oh, well you're judging me." But they don't. I don't, anyway. But no, that's a very interesting one. And a tough one. A really tough one. I never thought that I could go on a date without a drink. I never thought I could go to a club and dance without a drink.

**People think they can't dance and have sex without a drink.**

There we go. Sex is another one.

**I've got friends who've never had sex where they've not had at least one glass of wine in them.**

There you go, yes. And that's fine, you know, it doesn't matter in many ways, but I certainly wanted to challenge that in myself.

**Our whole society is predicated actually on alcohol. If you have a great day at work, you have a drink to celebrate. If you have a terrible day, you have a drink to commiserate. Weddings, christenings, special occasions... Holidays.**

**Everyone's out to get drunk, and I think it's really odd that society views alcoholism in a kind of really binary way, like you're either an alcoholic, basically a bum or a tramp, or you're a high flyer. And the reality is everyone's on a spectrum. Totally.**

**I have a lot of friends that are about four and a half out of ten. They are drinking for the wrong reasons, often to excess, but it's not yet ruined their lives.**  
Well, you know, functioning alcoholics. I mean basically, I'm addicted to cigarettes. If that was alcohol...

**That's why you drove here, isn't it? So you could smoke in the car.**  
Yes, I love it. It's so bad.

**I'll never buy a car off you. They'll all stink of fags.**  
They absolutely stink, and amount of times I get told off when I rent a van or something. Yes, if I was drinking as much as I smoke, yes. My friend is an alcoholic and I say to him, "Look, your choice of drug is alcohol. My choice of drug is cigarettes."

**My choice of drug is sugar, and I don't say that lightly. I'm addicted to like, biscuits. It's really hard, that.**

**It is, it's horrendous. I can't even give it up. I have relapses. I was sugar free for five months last year.**  
Well done.

**Thank you, but then I was at a wedding and there were some homemade brownies and they looked delicious and I thought, "I'm going to eat one of them." And then I was back on eating any old crap.**  
You know what, hearing you say that, I relate to that. I can literally just wolf down a whole chocolate bar no problems, and a big one.

**In like three minutes. That's what worries me.**  
Oh, yes. I noticed that when I stopped drinking, actually. I just literally just went to chocolate. But of course there's always going to be something to replace, but the key thing is that I really try not to shame myself for it now, you know what I mean?

**I'm not judging because you're a smoker.**  
There's no point, but we shame ourselves, you know. It's like, "Oh, I've done it again. I'm such a dreadful person." I'd never talk like that to anyone, and what I say to my friend is, "Look, you choose alcohol. Other people choose sex. Other people choose shopping. Other people choose types of friends that they have." Everyone is on the spectrum. There are very few people that don't have addictive personalities, and the ones that don't probably had a very good childhood, to be honest.

**Well, and we wish them well. Does it...**  
I don't. I hate them.

**Yes, me too, actually, I just want to sound like I'm agreeable.**  
Screw them.

**Yes, screw them. Does it help though, that in our society that as a person who's famous, as an artiste, that you're kind of commoditized, and people don't think that you're a human being, that you're Will off of Pop Idol?**

I would be lying if I said because of my job there are problems. No. It's actually the opposite. I wouldn't be doing mental health talks if I wasn't famous. I wouldn't be doing stuff with animal charities. I wouldn't be doing my music, which I love. I wouldn't be doing the podcast, I wouldn't be writing a book on gay shame. You know, all these things, the joy I get out of stuff because I'm famous, is wonderful. I don't really think that people say... I don't feel like I'm a commodity. I've got a really good way of protecting myself. I've worked out a way now that I just really see my music, which is tied in mostly to being famous, and because I'm really at the forefront of that, whereas if I'm acting I can hide behind a part and that's great because that's just like playing dress-up as a kid. I just keep it in its box. So like, I found out yesterday that the new song I've done has gone straight to the highest rotation on Radio 2, and it's Record of the Week. Now, that is joyous news.

**Congratulations.**

Thank you. It's wonderful news, and I have to modify myself and not get too elated. The reason is I used to get so elated, and completely rely on my joy being whether I got that or not. Does that make sense?

**Yes, because it won't be Record of the Week in a week from now.**

Exactly. So it's like, I have to just be a little bit more like, "That's wonderful." Think it's brilliant, that's so cool, but not go on a big high. Because what I used to do is go on a massive high and then a massive low, and then a massive high and then a massive low, and work was a disaster because of it.

**Krusty the Clown once famously said that he wanted the incredible highs, the terrible lows, and the creamy middles, and that's where happiness is.**

Be a doughnut.

**Yes.**

So I have a good way of keeping it in its place, and of course, look, I'm not Gandhi. Of course it oscillates, and sometimes it doesn't work, you know.

**Because they are literally buying you, even though we say we shouldn't commoditise you, we literally are doing that, aren't we, because we're... I was going to say buying these CDs. That really shows how old I am! But you know, like downloading your music and even an executive on ITV or BBC, when they're putting you on a show is kind of giving you a celebrity mark out of 10 that they're commercialising. He will drive that many viewers or listeners.**

Yes, and that's business. You know, at the end of the day none of it matters. It really doesn't matter. I'm not going to be on the street. There are kids who are dying all over the world every day, so I put it in perspective. The joy of something, realising that none of it matters, is wonderful, because then everything's a bonus. It doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter. I have to bring it back to basics. That's why I don't get stressed, because before it could become very stressful. Because yes, your worth is based on, in pop, in my industry, is very much based on how many followers you have on Instagram, and that could become really soul-destroying because I think, "Oh god, I don't have enough, so I can only get on this show or I can only get this sponsorship." "Oh god, that person's got a million followers." So I just make sure that I'm very disciplined about not going down that route because it's very addictive.

**But also, let's say you have a million followers on something, well, why should that make you happy? What about the next guy who has 1.1 million? Where do you stop?** That's the problem, isn't it.

**And it's not indicative of any kind of worth in any event, anyway. Not to disrespect say Kim Kardashian, but she's got like 45 million followers on Twitter.**

The thing is, I think where it gets mixed up is that will be very good for her business, so it becomes an addiction. I have lots of meetings with people that I absolutely hate, by the way, not the people, the meetings, and they go, "This is how you can get..." So, for me, because it doesn't work, I didn't go to a meeting with Twitter. It's not anti-Twitter. I went to a meeting once before, and I am just not into that realm. I don't want to try and get more followers. It feels so inauthentic. Other people love it and that's great, but I can't maintain my authenticity and hold my shape when I'm in that realm. It stresses me out, I feel insecure and I feel less than. And I don't want to do that because...

**Because you're playing the part of Will at that point.**

I just don't like it. I don't want to feel less than, I don't want to feel... I'm like, I'm going to get enough in life without putting myself in a place that is unsafe for me. Social media is a realm that I feel fundamentally unsafe. I really don't like it.

**It's the old thing, isn't it, going onto Twitter or Googling yourself is like walking into a room where everyone hates you.**

Oh, god. I just don't like it, so I have people that do social media for me. Occasionally I post and it's quite fun, but very rarely because it terrifies me. So I just stay away from it.

**Do you ever kind of leverage your celebrity status to make it like a... I was going to say a difference in society, but I don't mean that kind of cliché. for example, like you had Jeremy Corbyn on as a guest talking about LGBT rights. Giving him a political grilling, is that something you like, and is it also helping reframe the narrative?**

**Because frankly, like Donald Trump, like Jeremy Corbyn, like me, we're old white blokes. We can't know what it's like to be gay or discriminated against, because frankly I've not suffered that discrimination. Well, I think, there's the great thing of like, we can all recognise our privilege, and that's all we can do in any... wherever we come from. I'm middle class, white, 40, you know, I've had it easy in many ways. You and I both look good, as well. So that opens doors.**

Yes, exactly. Just flash a smile. Yes, there's nothing I love more than leveraging my fame to bettering a cause, and bettering a cause for people that I don't think can fight their corner. So I'll go hell for leather. Unfortunately sometimes I'm a bit rude, but you know, I wouldn't do it for my music, but my god, I go for it big time.

**It's win-win, isn't it, because Corbyn wouldn't be interviewed by you unless you had a strong following. He wants to be seen to be interviewed by you, but on the other hand that's an opportunity for you to educate him and hold him to account.**

I think so, and also, I had a thing with Nicky Morgan when she was education secretary. I have to watch my tongue on this. In the end, long boring story, but in the end I said, "I'm just going to stand outside your office with a sandwich board telling you how many transgender kids try and kill themselves." Which is 54%, over half. "Fine, you don't want to meet me, I'll just stand here." And I'll do that. I wouldn't do that for my music because that's more serving me, but if it's serving other people I get really passionate and a little bit of my mum comes out. I can slightly lose my rag sometimes. But I just won't take it. I won't stand for it. I won't stand for people who won't look after particularly young people. You know, like why would you not be doing this? It drives me mad, and it drives me mad that politicians talk in this ridiculous language when they say nothing. That really needs... the way the politicians talk

has to change now. It *has* to. The way they talk in the House of Commons, it's like an old boys' club.

**It's awful.**

It's disgusting.

**It is.**

It's disgusting the way they shout at each other. You don't get that in a New Zealand parliament.

**No.**

Their prime minister is amazing, and she's respected. Listen, whatever you think about Theresa May, I don't think I've got an opinion, but don't frigging shout, "Wah, wah, wah," at each other. And then politicians come on the radio and they say nothing. Just talk like a human being!

**They don't though.**

They need to change it because...

**It's like a gladiatorial combat where they're trying to beat John Humphrys with a stick.**

It's crazy. Just talk normally. They don't give you anything. They're terrified the press will get a soundbite that they're going to use against them.

**Yes, well they will frankly, that's the problem!**

I know they will, so an interesting one because I do empathise with them.

**It's like they have the right to be paranoid because a paranoid person thinks people are out to get them whereas a politician acknowledges the reality that people are out to get them.**

But how great if you have a politician that goes, "Yes, I know, I said that. Yep." Or, "I made a mistake."

**"Are thoughts allowed? What's wrong with that? Shoot me."**

Yes, that's what I said. It's a shame they've run with that, but then that's the press. I know it's really complicated. My friend is head of press for the Conservatives, and I know it's complicated, but I just think it has to change. someone like... I have to say that's why I like someone like Nick Clegg, because he is actually quite a normal person and he talks in a normal way.

**I've always liked Nick.**

Whether I agree with his politics or not, or where his new job is now, but at least he spoke like a human being. They just don't, and I don't think they can fully just say it's because of the press. If they want to change the agenda, they need to change it, you know what I mean? Because I could be like that. I could sit there. You could take a billion quips and sound bites from this interview and it could be split a billion different ways. But let's just... anyway, that's my rant over.

**What do you think our society at the moment is obsessed with public bathrooms and defining people by their binary gender? You look at slavery, you look at the emancipation of women and gay people, there's always one thing that the bigots and the stick-in-the-muds seem to obsess over and at the moment it's, you must be a man or you must be a woman. I don't give a shit what anyone's gender is; as long as they're happy and they're living a productive life, let them get on with it. In America,**

**you know, when I go to Starbucks they're all gender neutral bathrooms, and problem solved.**

Yes, it's great that. I think definitely for transgender people, really, there's so much prejudice against them. I think what it is, it's always fear, because okay, I mean... here's a bit of a crap example but I'll go with it anyway. My family dog, it's sort of all of ours, is a Siberian Husky German Shepherd, and she goes for the postman sometimes. Dogs often go for the postman because they wear high-vis jackets, and high-vis jackets fizz around for dogs' eyes, so they're scared because effectively they're having something fizzing walking towards them.

**There's also an element of them thinking they're defending the pack.**

Totally.

**That that's their job.**

Totally, because they don't understand what it is and they're scared, and they go and attack, and that's what people do. If they don't understand, they can't get their head around what it is to be transgender, they go on the attack because it rocks their identity. If we can't understand something and our whole identity is based on women go in those loos, men go in those loos, if you can't modify yourself and be more fluid you're going to get scared and it's going to rock your world. We did an interview with Skin from Skunk Anansie and she said a great thing. She said, "Just give people a moment." She said when she was living in the countryside, she was a black, bisexual woman. They'd never seen a black woman or a bisexual woman in rock, do you know what I mean? And she said, "I just had to give people a moment." And I think...

**To kind of get over the fact that she's a black bisexual.**

Yes.

**Wow.**

Because she was like, "They've seen someone like me before, so I've just got to give them a little bit of a moment." I think that's something that I try and keep in my head. I cannot force people to immediately understand something, but people have to respect it.

**Don't you judge the worth of a person, though, by their ability to genuinely empathise, you know, to see the world through the lens of someone else, be it the dog or you or a black bisexual?**

Yes, I do find it hard, and also particularly because the people that I like to be around are liberal-thinking people that are flexible in their thinking.

**They all voted remain, let's be honest.**

Let's be honest. You know, and of course, I do find it difficult, and I'll go for someone when they start becoming bigoted. We interviewed a guy called Andrew Moffat, a headmaster of a school in Birmingham, and he introduced an initiative called No Outsiders. It's a 99% Muslim school.

**Sounds inclusive.**

Very... he didn't want to... what his thing was that he said to parents, "I'm not going to tell your kids that you should say that being gay, for example, is right, because your religion and basically the way you live your lives is based on one of those strong pillars in your religion, your religious beliefs." He goes, "All I'm saying is let's understand and have a policy that we welcome people and we have no outsiders. We might not agree with it." I think it was a very good way of looking at things. Do you know what I mean?

**I see! I actually interpreted it the other way. When you said no outsiders, it made me think of Royston Vesey. Like an episode of League of Gentlemen, like “We’re not having any outsiders here.”**

No, quite the opposite.

**I see. So my sarcasm was misplaced.**

Well, yes – but I get why you were thinking that. So that is a great example of recognising that... I would not go in a debate with someone to try and change their views that being gay is... that they agree with it. It’s a waste of my time. I don’t need to. But what I do ask for is respect and empathy, like you said, and understanding, and there’s a difference between the two. So when people start going into attack mode, then you’ve got to defend yourself. It’s sad when people do go into attack mode. I’ve got a friend who’s got a kid who’s transgender, and she’s now changed her name and she’s wearing the right school uniform for her, which is a dress, and the school, because of legal rights now, they have to give her either a gender neutral bathroom or allow her to go into the girls’ bathroom. They can’t not, and that’s brilliant. There’s another example of the compost changing, if that makes sense, and my friends have gone about it brilliantly. They looked up the law and then they went into the school and went, “Here’s the law. We need a gender neutral loo.” And that’s great progress by the government. That’s just wonderful.

**Yes, it’s absolutely fantastic.**

You know? So there are brilliant changes happening.

**Even as recently as 10 or 15 years ago we were debating whether gay people could get married or have civil partnerships. Now it seems like something from 100 years ago, even now.**

Well yes, and you look at #MeToo and you look at all these things.

**Blair, when he was prime minister, people were saying, “Well, if you’re going to bring civil partnerships in, Prime Minister, won’t that lead inevitably to gay marriage?” And he had to... well yes, why not?**

Well, that’s been a great thing you know, and we are at a great stage for so many things. The great thing about embracing difference is you just embrace the world more, and you kind of embrace yourself more because we are all different. We all, particularly at school, I think, we want to be the same. You know, it’s like, I’ve got the latest Nike. Yes no, I want the latest Nike. You might not want it, but you feel you have to, to fit in.

**I still want the latest Nike.**

Yes, me too.

**I still want the latest everything.**

Oh, me too!

**I get the latest phone just because I’m like, well why not? I want the latest phone.**

Yes. Well.

**It’s pathetic I agree, but I still want it.**

Yes, well, if you can afford it, have it.

**Don’t you think...**

But you see, it’s based on survival, because kids, you survive by not standing out. But actually...

**Also there's a shame in poverty, isn't there? Because when I couldn't afford... because I was raised in social housing in York, and sometimes we couldn't afford things. I remember when I was 12, Filofaxes were all the rage, you know.**  
Yes.

**The kids of upper middle class families all came into school with Filofaxes, Loadsamoney and all that. I couldn't afford one. I had a knockoff one. I was teased straight up. "That's not a real Filofax." People were like looking for the identifying marks, and when they weren't there, "You got that off the market, Paul. You're poor."**  
Yes, that's hard, that. I haven't experienced that, so I empathise with that... my sister's kids have experienced that because two of them went to a private school for the first... up to 11 I think, and I know there were some parents, because my sister doesn't drive around in a Land Rover in Gloucestershire wearing Hunter wellies, you know? They said, "We don't want you going round that house." Can you believe it?

**We have some clients in New York that have immense wealth. One of my clients' friends has five kids, and each one of them has their own nanny, driver and chef. There's serious wealth that is just in a different league that I can't even comprehend. It's just absolutely insane.**

Mine was Reebok pumps. The people that had Reebok pumps.

**LA Gear was mine.**

Oh, LA Gear.

**Remember they had the huge lip or whatever it is.**

Yes, I do.

**Amazing.**

But what I'm saying is everyone is different. I might like liver, you might not like liver. So, by looking and noticing how different everyone is, you basically start loving yourself more as kids because you suddenly think, "Oh shit, I don't have to like that music. I might like that." So it's brilliant because you start following your own individual path from a young age, you know? So, just slowly introducing the idea of the fact that everyone's different, it makes for a much better society. It totally does, so it's kind of win-win.

**Doesn't religion poison everything though? Because like you're gay, and if my god says that you being gay is wrong then you can't question that. Who are you to tell me what I can't think, because it comes from Jesus. That type of thing.**

Well, I think that's the thing, and actually no, I can't question it because if that's your belief, I'm not going to... who am I? My brother told me once, and it was very, very wise of him, he said, "These people are basing their lives in these beliefs. They're never going to change them. They'll have a breakdown." And that's how you get to bigotry because people just...

**It's a double think.**

It's blowing their mind and terrifying them. So it's not for me to change it, but don't you dare start attacking me.

**Richard Dawkins once said to me, he said, "You can't reason someone out of a position that they've not reasoned themselves into."**

Yes. I love Richard Dawkins.

**He's my hero. He's my all-time favourite hero of all time.**

How many times have you watched all his debates on YouTube?



**Oh, Christopher Hitchens is brilliant.**

Oh, Christopher Hitchens!

**I genuinely cried when he died.**

You know what?

**What a ledge.**

I get sad...

**He smoke and drank as well. He's the only exception for me.**

I get sad, particularly that Paxman interview he did at the end. He's astonishing, that man, and it's so interesting that his brother's in such a different area of politics and everything. Different thinking.

**They reconciled at the end, though, which is good.**

Yes they did, yes.

**Love always conquers hate. It must do.**

Well, that's great, and also, why can't someone have... it's just so interesting there's such a dichotomy. But yes, you can't. You can't reason with them and I'm not going to waste my time. I might as well bang my head against a brick wall.

**What are you doing next, then? Because this is a media podcast. This has been so interesting that I should legitimise the word media in the podcast by asking you a token media question at the end.**

Oh God, I love talking about media.

**So you've gone back into music then, aren't you, in a big way?**

Yes, I stopped after leaving Strictly, actually. I'd had enough and I was very ill, and so I needed to stop, for one. And I didn't want to do it anymore.

**Why should you then?**

Yes. I still did that sort of classic pop thing of going, "I shall not sing." And then I didn't really... genuinely didn't think I was going to do it. Then I was doing this show and I was singing all the music in this show I and slowly... I knew this would happen. I slowly got frustrated because I was like, I would do the arrangement like that. And I had to sing with the band every night but the band could never play anything different, whereas when I sing with my band, you know, it's a moveable feast every night. So, they might play a different chord, and I really promote that and it makes my heart sing. I love hearing them be fluid in their playing.

**You're going to end up a jazz singer, aren't you? I can see it.**

Oh, I do love jazz.

**My friend Matt Goss has basically gone all jazzy.**

Really? Yes?

**Every week in the Mirage at Vegas.**

What a star!

**Yes, he's doing really well.**

Well, I wrote a song, so I thought, "Well, I'll go back on tour." I did a live gig during this West End show. I did a live gig with my band and I thought, "Well, that's quite fun. Maybe I'll just go on tour again." And then I wrote a song which ended up being the single, which is crazy

because I didn't even want to write music any more, which maybe that's always the way. And I don't have management, and that's made it a lot easier. I'm not anti the people that did manage me, it just works better for me. I have someone that manages my music, but I don't have a management, but there is a difference. So I felt no pressure. I only write with two people which are my friends down in Wales, and I worked with Richard X producing the record again. He was brilliant, but produced my best record anyway, I think, two records ago, and it's been amazing. It's been *amazing*, and I only work a four-day week.

**What do you do on the fifth day? Jeremy Corbyn also only works...**

Gardening.

**Because you once said aloud, didn't you, you were thinking aloud that you'd give it all up and just do gardening full-time?**

Oh yes, I'd love that. Well, my family are gardeners. My sister's a gardener, my mum's a garden designer.

**This is not a kind of adversarial, hostile podcast, but can I put it to you directly that gardening is boring?**

Oh yes, of course you can.

**It is.**

Well yes, if you don't like it, it's dull as dishwater, isn't it?

**No, I don't.**

It's like me and cricket. People love cricket.

**Well, cricket's also boring.**

Christ, cricket's boring.

**I don't actually understand cricket either, and I want to go to my grave having never understood it.**

Yes, I'm slightly the same with snooker, although actually I'd take snooker over cricket because I quite like the characters.

**I used to play a lot of snooker when I was a kid, and it was a way for me to get to know my dad because he was a big snooker player.**

Oh, that's sweet.

**So I'd play a game of snooker with him, but it's not about snooker, it's about me and my dad.**

I like that. Well, I suppose I just come from a family of it and I just find it... I get so much joy out of it. It's really weird.

**It's just a lot of muck and then you're putting in a bulb and then you go and make a cup a tea.**

I know, it's funny, isn't it? Literally I've just taken an order of six bags of compost before coming here, and I am beyond excited about... which would be my day off tomorrow, Friday, about spreading that compost on my flower bed.

**That's why you didn't judge my dirty nails, because of course as a gardener you'll constantly have that.**

Oh, they're filthy, but I just love it. I love it *so much*, and also it's very creative. Garden designing is an art. Garden designers are artists. there's an amazing garden designer called Dan Pearson. He's just incredible. But no, when I was 20 I didn't... well, I was a gardener

when I was 20, so I suppose maybe I did enjoy it then. I've grown up with it, though. Literally, we spent all our weekends outside. That was just our childhood. Incidentally, my family are not Swiss Family Robinson, so be under no illusion. But you know, it was lovely to do that and help my dad in the garden. That was my thing. As you played snooker with your dad, I would garden with my dad and do a bonfire, you know?

**There you are. I'm going to reduce my hostility to it now and then.**

No don't, I mean god, it is boring. If you don't enjoy it, it's shit boring. It's like listening to The Archers. I love The Archers, but people think I'm absolutely mental.

**Yes, I too would.**

Would agree with that.

**Well, I wasn't going to say I would kill anyone who listens to The Archers, but I think Father Time is doing that, really. It's a generational thing. You must be their token young listener.**

No!

**Really?**

No.

**I should know this. I present a media podcast. When you say you work four days a week, what is that work then? Is it music and then the podcast? What is a typical day?**

It's full on. Well, there isn't a typical day, and that's wonderful. Sometimes I slightly crave it, but I try and keep to a 10am-6pm thing now, and I won't look at my emails after 6pm. That's my new thing. I can only say, let's say... what did I do on Monday? I did the podcast.

Tuesday I had a shoot with Rankin for a mental health thing, and then I had to go have a meeting with Spotify. Then I had to go back to Camden to finish off the shoot, and then I had to back into town to have another meeting. So always a lot of meetings. Then today, speaking to yourself, and then I've got another interview.

**This will be the best one.**

Well, I'll let you know after the next one! And then I go home, and then tomorrow is... unfortunately I have to do a couple of things which really I couldn't put off.

**Was tomorrow the day off?**

Tomorrow's the day off.

**I see.**

I've got to do just one phoner. Before you go on shows you have to often do a pre-research call. So a lot of it is seriously dull, basically is what I'm saying. I spoke to my friend yesterday. I love him. I love him to bits, and we literally giggled the whole time. I was like, "I spend most of my time driving, or moving between meetings and meetings in London."

**Then you can have your 60 fags, can't you, between meetings?**

Well yes, but that really tires me out. That's not good for my anxiety. I mean, the smoking isn't good...

**I was going to say.**

But the traveling...

**Unless they were herbal chamomile cigarettes, if there's such a thing.**

Or some sort of diazepam. But I find that stressful. The traveling really stresses me, and I need to be outside in the countryside having freedom. That's what tires me. The meetings

don't. You know, I had four hours of work yesterday and four hours of travelling, do you know what I mean?

**I lived in London for nine or ten years and we sold our car the day before we moved to London and then the day we moved out, we bought one. I love driving, but I would never drive around London.**

Even getting the tube, it's like, it'll be a 15-minute walk to the tube station, have to change tube twice. Again, that's what really tires me. So, when I get the Friday off I don't travel anywhere. I mess around with my dogs. I do, dependent on how my anxiety is that day, I have to work on that because that's a constant thing in my life. I'll go to the gym. I've got this trainer now. I'm seeing this trainer – not romantically, although he's very handsome – he's an MMA fighter.

**Jesus. Rather them than me. I don't want to get punched in the face.**

Yes, no way. No. I did some kickboxing once and I went with my brother to Thailand to do this Mai Thai kickboxing, and they made us spar against each other. I was 37 then. And he punched me in the face, and I cried.

**To be fair, he did punch you in the face.**

I said, "That really hurt."

**Of course it did.**

I said, "No, that's really unfair." He was like, "That's what we're doing here." I said, "Well, I don't want to do it."

**Yes, I'm on your side. I wouldn't have got into the ring.**

But I do these brilliant exercises with him. A lot of stuff on the rings, like the gymnastic rings. It's amazing. It can build up my strength, and that's very good for my anxiety, as well.

**I was going to say, exercise and cardio really helps with that.**

Really helps.

**But isn't appearing on stage to thousands of people and it being televised to millions of people, that would give many people a panic attack. Is that the same bodily feeling but in a good way?**

Yes, it's a really, really, good question because it is actually an adrenaline rush. I've spent a lot of time thinking, "Am I doing something that just doesn't work for me?" Because I have a very dodgy nervous system? Am I doing something that's just crazy? Weirdly, I think a lot of performers get very bad anxiety, so why are you going to step up... TV shows I'm fine because you don't see them, it's just the camera and what, like 200 people in the audience. That's fine. I grew up on TV. I was on a talent show, so we were trained how to do it. So that's literally just like walk in the park. I want to sing it well, obviously, so that's a bit nerve wracking. Yes, most nerve-wracking – I've never said this to anyone – the most nerve wracking thing about singing on TV is whether they get the sound right, because you rely on a sound engineer, and if they don't have the sound right...

**You sound terrible.**

... it is so traumatic.

**Because people don't think that. They just think you're terrible.**

You just turn up... yes. I still have this now, but I'm much better at it. If I'm wanting to get the sound right but I don't want to sound like I'm difficult, and that used to stress me out so much. Because literally, if I can't hear myself, I won't be able to sing in tune. That is the only stressful thing about doing TV.

**But also, I had vocal training many, many years ago when I first started to give a lot of presentations, and it's all about breath control and so on. One of the things, when I used to get very nervous giving talks 20 years ago, was the nerves manifest themselves in poor quality vocal delivery, because of breathlessness and all these kind of things. Just the importance of mindfully taking a breath in before you start speaking, because nervous people have shallower breaths and therefore they run out of breath. That must be an extra stressor, because say if you've got shaky hands, you can just put them in your trouser pocket, but your voice you can't fake, and that's what you're selling.**

Yes. I think I'm lucky because I think it actually weirdly opens up my diaphragm, naturally. So I normally tend to feel better after I've sung. But certainly when I was very ill, there were times when I was meant to be on stage at 8:30 and I was on the floor. Once my manager found me and I was in the foetal position on the floor in my bathroom.

**Jesus.**

At 8:30. So that's why I took a break. But now I'm better.

**You sound like you're a better person because of what you've gone through.**

Yes.

**That even though it was deeply unpleasant and debilitating and horrendous, it's almost worth having done it because it's made you the person you are.**

It was. Yes, I wouldn't go back. It's really hard work, and I suppose I always had it but I was doing lots of behaviour to mask it, you know, or to try and avoid it, like relying on highs and lows in work and all that stuff.

**M. Scott Peck wrote a book called The Road Less Travelled.**

I know it well, yes.

**The opening chapter, the opening line is, "Life is difficult." And in fact, that you need to accept that and embrace it because everyone had problems, and the way to go about solving your problems in life is to go about solving your problems and not run away from them, either through drugs or drink or just denial. That's only ever going to make it worse.**

But my god, easier said than done. I was talking to my neighbour, weirdly, just before, Caroline. She's so lovely. I was saying... there's a great phrase that my wonderful therapist, who was so camp, told me. She also told me, "If I was your boyfriend I'd dump you," and I thought that was a nice thing to say.

**It's a bit harsh.**

She was harsh, but full on brilliant.

**Firm but fair.**

Absolutely. And she said...

**Radical candour, is the new phrase in management speak.**

Oh, I love that! Radical candour.

**Yes, I love it.**

Radical candour would be my drag name. And she said, "Don't expect from people what they're not willing or capable of giving." I was in treatment with a lot of people, and we were a family, and we all got to where we could get to. Someone that I was with, my roommate, he killed himself. He hung himself.

**Jesus.**

And I love him, and I think of him often, and the reason I'm talking about it, I hope is not to be sensational or try and elevate myself in some way, to show, or look for sympathy, you know, "Look how bad it was for me." I think I'm using it to say that he just wasn't capable of doing it, you know? And that's fine.

**Poor bloke.**

Poor bloke, and that's fine, and he went. And I actually was like, fair enough.

**I was raised, like many people were, even in my generation... my parents didn't do this deliberately or because they were horrible. It was a generational view, but I was raised to think that suicide was selfish and was weak, and in fact it's one of the biggest things I learned and I've changed as a human being, is killing yourself is not weakness.**

Oh my god, no.

**If you're going to kill yourself, things must be pretty bad.**

You know, I had respect for him. I was like, fair game. And I know a couple of people that killed themselves. Sometimes it makes me sad, because as someone that has felt suicidal quite often, and still can. My anxiety is a trauma hijack, if it takes over my brain, I have to watch myself. But I know what to do. Literally, if it's really bad I'll call people. I know what's going on. I know I don't want to kill myself. I've called the Samaritans. They were brilliant.

**Zero shame in that.**

Oh, they were fantastic.

**They do a great job.**

I did keep on forgetting the lady's name, but I thought, "I'm suicidal. Let me get away with it."

**She'll let you off.**

I was like, "Listen, Debbie." She was like, "My name's Martha." And I would say, "Anyway, Brenda..." And my sadness is that I think sometimes, as someone that has been in that state and then comes out of it again, I think, "Oh god, just imagine if you could have just got out of it. Was it a takeover for you, or were you really compos mentis?" That can be my sadness. But I don't think it's selfish at all, and I respect where they ended up. I'm like, "Okay, that's where you ended up." The results on a family are horrific.

**Of course.**

And I don't know if you ever get over that.

**It cuts to the heart of the stigma of mental illness as well though. If you've got motor neurone disease of something like that and you go to Dignitas, most people say, "Well, you're trying your best because it's a physical problem and can't be helped." Whereas if you're kind of "merely depressed" and you decide to throw yourself off the Golden Gate bridge, "Oh, that's selfish, he would have snapped out of it."**

Yes, that's interesting.

**Whereas the pain can be just as real.**

That's an interesting way of looking at it. Yes, I hadn't thought about that. You're right.

**Well, it's like mental illness is not a legitimate reason to kill yourself, whereas if you had your legs blown off, that is.**

Is it because things like... let's say it's motor neurone disease and people go to Dignitas, is it because it's not obviously seen, and so there's not a guilt attached to it either, because it's no one's fault that someone would have got cancer of motor neuron disease? People I think can think it's their fault that someone... "If only I'd just asked how they were. If only they'd just spoken to me."

**You could have cured them.**

Do you know what I mean?

**Or you could certainly have alleviated their suffering and listened and potentially been there. You'll never know, will you?**

No, but I think you're right. There's been times when it's been so painful, and I remember saying to friends, I said, "This is not a way to live. This is no way to live because this is not living. There is no life quality here because I'm not involved in life." I was so anxious I could not take joy from anything, my dogs, anything. So I get it. I'm like...

**I suffered from debilitating panic attacks in my early 20s, and it was really weird; in stressful situations my hands would shake. If I was drinking a cup of coffee in a business meeting, I'd be worried about them seeing that. For about a year, the thought of me drinking coffee in a business meeting would itself give me a panic attack. One of the ways I got out of it, and obviously I can drink coffee in business meetings now and I haven't been able to for years. But in that awkward year, I had to promise myself before I went into a business meeting that I would refuse the coffee because then I wouldn't fear the meeting. Because I'd think, "Well, I'm not going to have a coffee anyway." And that's how I kind of built it up. I was deeply ashamed at the time and told very few people. Now I think well, everyone's going through these things. It happens.**

You know, hearing you say about the coffee and the meetings and your hands shaking, I have a friend that was... he got so nervous about going to parties because his hands would shake. So when someone poured them a drink...

**A lot of alcoholics are really worried about that they can't... They think, "What would you have? If I have a Diet Coke or something they're going to know." So the trick is that you have a tonic water because people assume it's got a gin in it and no one even asks.**

Yes, that's interesting.

**Sorry, I interrupted. So your friend...**

Well no, no, it was just he had some CBT for it because he was getting so panicky about it and he was just very conscious of his hands shaking. So he had some CBT. And he had the same in shops.

**But also, if his hands shook, so what?**

Well, that's the thing, isn't it?

**And I mean that positively. I'm not going to judge him because he's got shaky hands. Some people's hands shake because they have low blood sugar or because they're old or they've got diabetes, whatever. If someone has a shaky hand I don't think, "Oh, look at that person with his shaky hands." I've got empathy.**

That's the thing.

**I don't know what they're going through.**

That's the thing, you know. I sweat a lot. We were talking about it, and I did have Botox for it, but the guy said, "You're the only person I know in Europe to sweat through Botox." And I

said, "Well, that's a nice title to have." So, often I point it out. I'm like, "Sorry, I've sweated into my grey sweatshirt."

**It's called hyperhidrosis.**

Hyperhidrosis.

**Yes.**

There you go. Not many people know that.

**I get Botox in my armpits twice a year.**

Do you? And does it work?

**It largely does, because you can't switch it off. It's your autonomic, I think it's called, nervous system, where I can't control that. So if I wear certain clothes like a suit, because I think I'll sweat into it, I then do.**

Yes, oh god.

**And deodorant won't stop it. So what Botox does is it literally kills the nerve or it numbs it for six months so that even your subconscious brain can't tell your sweat gland to activate.**

Oh well, that didn't work with me. But I think it's probably a sign of my auto... what is it?

Autonomic...

**Autonomic nervous system. Well actually, if you look at films and TV and everything, the type A alpha male leader often has sweaty armpits.**

Yes, but I tell you what, for me it was debilitating, actually, because I would get terrified about TV because sweating...

**Well, look how they humiliated Tony Blair when he gave that speech, and he was just under the hot lights at Blackpool, wasn't he?**

Oh yes, yes.

**And he didn't have a vest on and he sweated.**

But my god, it is, it's funny, isn't it, that it's sort of shameful. But I had, in this shoot yesterday, it doesn't happen very often but I hadn't slept well, and I was getting panicky and sweaty, and it was Rankin taking it. I'd done a video with him, and he's a very well-known photographer. And I think, "Oh god, he's there." Even though I knew him. I was like, "Oh god, everyone's going to be waiting and now I'm sweating." And I just said, "I'm just going to step out because I'm sweating." I said, "I'm having hot flushes and I need to sort it out." Because I'd said that, because I couldn't stay in front of the camera because it was getting worse. In my head I was like, "Oh god, it's getting worse, it's getting worse."

**The worry drives more worry.**

Exactly. And the person, the first AD, which is the person that runs basically any video shoot, she got me a wet towel and put it on my... I took my shoes off because they didn't have to shoot my legs, and she put a wet towel on my feet. I wasn't ashamed of it at all, but years ago I would never have done that and I would have just got more and more stressed about it. So, it's a good example again of just... I had to force myself to do it because I still get ashamed.

**I don't think you should feel ashamed for that. I think you should feel pride because now you've discovered the strength to persevere through it, like everyone does.**

And precisely, who gives a shit?



**Exactly.**

And the other thing is, people are too busy thinking about themselves.

**They are.**

They're all thinking about themselves, they don't give a shit about us.

**I went bankrupt about 12 years ago, and my dad said to me at the time, he said, "No one will actually care because they're more worried about their own bills to worry about shaming you."**

Yes.

**And also, if someone wants to shame you for bankruptcy, you know, shame on them.**

Yes.

**For being so judgmental. You didn't rip anyone off. You were honest. You made a few financial mistakes. You paid the price. Get on with it. And now I view things like that as like a parking ticket, where if I get a parking ticket, I'm not proud of it, but I'm not ashamed of it either. It's just a thing. I have to pay it and you move on.**

I'm about to get a parking ticket.

**Yes, you are, in fact.**

Totally.

**Well, it's been an incredibly interesting conversation. Probably one of the best I've ever had on the entire podcast, and I don't say that lightly.**

Oh, my god. No, so no... flipping hell. Thank you.

**It's been great. Thank you ever so much for your time.**

Thank you.

**ENDS**