



Berklee Institute for
Accessible Arts Education

ABLE Voices Podcast Episode 38: Cherylee Houston

[Introduction music by Kai Levin plays]

[Dr. Bernard] Hello, everyone, and welcome to the ABLE Voices Podcast. I'm Dr. Rhoda Bernard, founding managing director of the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education, and I'm proud to present this podcast featuring disabled artists and arts educators. We are inviting artists with disabilities to be guest hosts for the ABLE Voices Podcast.

Today's guest host is Laurence Clark. Laurence Clark is an award-winning stand-up comedian, actor, performer, screenwriter, and playwright based in the UK. He was selected for the BBC Writer's Room Writer's Access Group and Four Screenwriting 2021. Laurence's spec script, "Wheeling and Dealing," has just been optioned by Chapter One film. He won the Triforce UK TV Writer's Slam 2021 out of 1,600 submissions, and consequently, his comedy pilot, "Perfect," was broadcast. Laurence has written several other scripts and screenplays, many of which have been made and performed. He is also the chair of Triple C, a community interest company led by disabled artists. Triple C aims to drive up the role of disabled people in the performing arts and the role of the performing arts in the lives of disabled people. Triple C also runs the Disabled Artists Networking Community, or DANC Project, which provides an extensive program of networking events, mentoring, and masterclasses for disabled rightists and other artists.

[Laurence Clark] Hello, and welcome to the ABLE Voices Podcast. My name is Laurence Clark, and I'm a playwright, screenwriter, and stand-up comedian. Today, we are honored to be joined by actress, activist campaigner, and all-around very lovely person Cherylee Houston. Hi, Cherylee!

[Cherylee Houston] Hello, Laurence! Oh, thank you! I like that intro. I say that cheekily because Laurence is a good friend of mine, as well.

[Laurence Clark] Let's start at the beginning, cheers. How did you get started as an actor?

[Cherylee Houston] Very blooming slowly, Laurence, because I was disabled.

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] Well, no, actually, I was non-disabled when I got my equity card at 18. I was one of those annoying kids who always stood at the front of the class writing plays that I made my mates listen to, my classmates, which means I was quite a geek at school. Then, I went to youth theater then, and I got my equity card at the age of 18 because in the UK back then, you had to do certain jobs to get an equity card, the union card, and that was the front end of the pantomime horse, Cinderella's double, and a wolf. I was very proud of myself. I was quite poorly, and I had sleep between every single show and- Yeah, it was quite painful, but then I became a wheelchair user during the time at drama school- I was about to become a wheelchair user while I was at drama school. And then, I didn't get employed in the same ways my non-disabled peers, so really- actually, I think quite early on I became a very accidental activist in that way that I then- I was always making my own work and I also started to make- I formed my own company to sort of challenge the blocks that we face as deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent creatives, even back then. So, yeah!

[Laurence Clark] Can we go back to- since your leaving drama school and everyone's trying to get an agent to get noticed? How was that for you?

[Cherylee Houston] It was one of those things like, everybody had a mentor when they left drama school, but they didn't get me one because they didn't know of any disabled ones. It was in the late 90s, and I think there'd only been Julie Fernandez on TV as we'd seen it in the UK. So, there weren't any role models, and every single agent I wrote to said, "Sorry, we don't know how to represent you." So then, I accidentally- my mom came across Graeae because the old theater director from Graeae- which is the main disabled theater company in the UK- had become the artistic director at our local theater, Ewan Marshall. So I went and met him, and he was very kind, gave me some advice, and I started writing to all the disabled lead drama theater companies, etc., and then started working there.

I worked pretty much non-stop for- I didn't get any job at all for about three years trying the mainstream. Then, I worked pretty much non-stop in the disabled world, and for every single job I had, I wrote to almost every single casting director and director agent in the country. They all kept not employing me, saying they couldn't represent me, or just didn't reply- quite a lot of them didn't reply. Then, I made a decision not to work in disability arts anymore and just try for the mainstream because I was just going around and around in circles, and I wasn't career progressing.

[Laurence Clark] Roughly, when was that?

[Cherylee Houston] Probably about 2003- I think- but things had slightly changed a little bit as in they'd started to employ- well as in you'd probably get two auditions, 2 to 3 auditions a year as a disabled actor. Ridiculous situations like, I was auditioning in Leicester Square because I couldn't get in the Spotlight Building, I was auditioning in corridors- but what I think is really useful I figured out from that was I stuck in people's minds because they're a bit embarrassed.

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] If you're quite friendly and polite about it, they go, "At least she wasn't." - I realized, looking back, that it wasn't a bad thing, but at the time, I only ever auditioned for wheelchair users. It was interesting because I think my career- because I've been in my current job for 14 years as an actor- has changed an awful lot in the last decade. I'd say- I didn't get an agent until I had 12 tele credits, which sort of shows how ridiculous it was, and I got every single job myself that they're continually writing off all the time and sticking-

[Laurence Clark] How did you get those 12 jobs?

[Cherylee Houston] I wrote to everybody. Every casting director in the country, every single time I had a job, or every few months if I hadn't, I just said new things. I think it's much easier now because you can create your own work, so I'd probably be making a lot of YouTube videos or whatever, but just back then, it was even writing with stamps and envelopes and things. But, then, it meant that whenever they occasionally got a character that was a wheelchair user, I'd stay in their mind. I'd go and audition, and then I got my jobs that way. Then I had- I think out of most of the things on my CV, I only had one job that wasn't about being a wheelchair user, and that was "Little Britain" being in the "Computer says 'No'" scene, and it was because I got an audition for a wheelchair using part in "Little Britain." They went, "While you're here, do you want to read for something else?" So I did.

I had lots of jobs that were about different medications, different- making people feel better because they're a wheelchair user and "life's still worth living." That sort of thing. Yeah, and because then- I think in the early 2000s, they didn't audition you as a disabled actor unless there was a disabled actor mentioned, and it was specifically wheelchair users back then.

[Laurence Clark] Jamie, my younger son, still asks me if they still put on those "Little Britain" sketches.

[Laurence Clark laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] Awe, bless him!

[Laurence Clark] He watches them over and over again. I think it's because he knows you, and you're in them, and he loves you anyway.

[Cherylee Houston] Awe! Well, I was- because I- I was in this one called "Lou & Andy" where he always goes, "I don't want that one," and he bought me, as his girlfriend, he went "I don't want that one!" and he pushed her down the hill, and I thought I was going to get pushed down this hill, and I was so excited about doing this stunt. Then, I saw a man in a wig in a wheelchair and realized I wasn't going to get to do that and somebody else was going to do it.

[Cherylee Houston laughs and then makes an angry grunt]

[Laurence Clark] From there, what was the next step? What was the next big thing? I'm guessing it was "I'm a Stupid"? Or was it later?

[Cherylee Houston] No, I think "I'm With Stupid" was earlier. "I'm With Stupid" was one of the-, I think it still is the only blooming disabled lead full-length sitcom that had been on television. I got a regular part in that, and that was pretty amazing; that was so empowering, and that feeling of going to work for-, I think it was about seven weeks worth? We did it and- you were in it, weren't you?- and seeing it in the base camp having these four trailers with very makeshift long ramps built up to them. Yeah, it was so empowering to be in there because you could- I learned an awful lot about television, but also about being in something- when you're just a day player, you don't learn that much because you've got so much information to take in, whereas being in something regularly you learn about the infrastructure and how it all works and you have more time to learn off the other actors around you.

[Laurence Clark] My overriding memory was the cold!

[Laurence Clark laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] Yes! It was bloody freezing!

[Laurence Clark] It was in February or January, and it was derelict. Adele was at home; she had no heating, just these little electric heaters that we had together. It was almost like ice in there, I'm thinking.

[Laurence Clark laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] Yeah! But it was so cold and that pain- I'm a chronic pain sufferer and it makes my pain get so much worse, whereas now- I mean I'm the opposite where I work at "Coronation Street" they give me heated leggings, I've got a heated seat pad for my wheelchair, I've got a heated jacket, all the things they put into my clothes, and they bring me lots of little hot water bottles to stuff around my person and stuff. The world's very different, and that was nothing against that job, but I think people understand us much more because that job was kind of like the forefront of change in a way, wasn't it? Because-

[Laurence Clark] It was.

[Cherylee Houston] I remember doing a television job- oh gosh- just before that with Paul Henshaw, who is the lead of that and- oh no, it might have been after that- but the head of the BBC came down to the read through because they'd never seen a disabled person- hadn't been on the nine o'clock slot on BBC One ever, so the main television channel, they hadn't had any disabled actors after "The Watershed." It was quite- it was called "A Thing Called Love," and it was this massive thing for the BBC, and you just think- I mean, we have come an awful long way from that- you know what I mean? From- I used to go into jobs, and the lack of understanding and the blatant ableism people didn't even realize they were displaying, in just the way you were talked to. I think the attitudinal shift is massive, really, but things like having a disabled toilet as your own green room and they put a mat down in there in case you fancy a lie down in the toilet or-

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] "We've put a tent sort of area outside the makeup because the green room and all the social spaces are up two flights of stairs, so we thought you'd want to sit outside makeup in the car park in the rain, on your own," it has massively shifted, but the whole time, I've run companies to try and make the change myself as well because I think you realize you need to-. I think we all need to- alongside- I think so many of us in the creative industries who are deaf, disabled, or neurodivergent realize you have to do some form of activism, some form of helping towards that social change to enable you and those behind you to have the career that you want to have. I think it's interesting because I think our generation, in a way, we've sort of missed the boat on some of these things because we're still paving- but those before us paved the way so we could be educated, those before them paved the way so that we didn't have to live in care homes, you know, there's so many- each generation of disabled people are paving the way for the next one towards equality which, it's getting closer and closer, and I truly believe our industry is the way to create social change but it's also been the one that creates

the prejudice and the bias and all that other because it currently tells our stories in very negative ways.

[Laurence Clark] I guess the next big thing was “Coronation Street,” and because this is an international podcast, can you tell us what “Coronation Street” is?

[Cherylee Houston] Yeah! I think- “Coronation Street” came for me in 2010. I graduated from drama school in 1997, so I had 13 years of perfecting my craft, and then “Coronation Street” is the main continuing drama or soap opera in the UK. It was the first, and it’s been going for 63 years now, I think? Which is phenomenal for a television program, and it’s watched by several million people, I think five or seven million people, currently, but in its heyday, thirty million people used to tune in when there were only three channels in the UK. It’s just- sort of like- it’s a drama based in the north, around a street and the people who live there, and I am very, very fortunate to be working with them. I’m in my 14th year now, and I learned so much from everybody I work with. And it’s so warm and friendly, and it’s just a brilliant place to work.

[Laurence Clark] And you were the first disabled actress when you were there?

[Cherylee Houston] I was, and I wasn’t because it was Ali Briggs, who’s a deaf actor who’d gone before me. There was a non-disabled woman who played a disabled wheelchair user years before that-

[Laurence Clark] Maud Grimes

[Cherylee Houston] Yes, Maud Grimes.

[Laurence Clark] And you know why I remember that?

[Cherylee Houston] Why?

[Laurence Clark] I had the same wheelchair.

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Laurence Clark] It used to annoy me because she goes to the bottom of the stairs, and it would cut away to another scene, and they’d cut back, and she’d be at the top of the stairs.

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Laurence Clark] I know that wheelchair; you can't do that!

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] I think most wheelchairs can't do that, but that's the difference. I think that's why it's so important to have lived experience on television because it's actually telling the truth and showing our stories in the correct way. I was really fortunate because for years and years- I presume this has been everywhere in television- they had conferences about inclusion and disability inclusion. I remember being at a conference probably- oh god- 2007?- so three years before this, where the producer of "Coronation Street" said, "We will have a disabled character! We will have a disabled character for six months." Then, when the audition came, I ensured I got an audition, and they did a couple of days of auditions where- to see whether people could improvise, etcetera, etcetera. I think they were just trying to acclimatize themselves to the fact of employing us because then it took another year and a half before they sent out a script, and you had 24 hours to learn it, and you were doing a screen test, and they screen tested ten men, ten women. If it was a man, they were going to- their character would be working in the taxi firm. If it was a woman, she'd be working in a factory- which is interesting even now because that sort of shows how long ago it was. Today that wouldn't- I don't think it'd be as sex driven as a job role in that respect. I was lucky enough to get the job and have my contract renewed before I went on screen, so they extended it to a year before I even went on screen, which was brilliant, and then extended it again. Now-yeah- every year, I get that nail-biting worry, but luckily, I keep being renewed, and now I'm in my fourteenth year.

[Laurence Clark] I guess- it's incredibly popular, isn't it? Having disabled characters that are so prominent in something that's watched and loved by millions of people. What do you think some of the effects would be of that?

[Cherylee Houston] It has been phenomenal, and I'm just grinning because I just had one very recently where there's a new wheelchair-using presenter on "Blue Peter," a children's program. I had the fortune to bump into her in a major city, and we were both like, "Oh! It's you!" You always get chuffed to meet another wheelchair user, don't you? She said she tuned in and watched my storylines every time there was one because A, I shared my disability, and B, there was nobody really on television like her, and she said that inspired her to trust that she could go and do her job. So many young people have come to me and said- even Steph Lacy, who's in our company Triple C said, that it made her family understand her disability from watching my storylines. That's what I think's been- in fact quite a lot of- you know- it feels that people have

had time to have a reference point, and it's that- not a role model per se- it's that reference point to the fact that disabled people do these things.

I used to be an ambassador, a stand-in ambassador, and for lots of different places, but for a local disabled school, I used to go in and do drama with these young people. Then they changed the class name to my surname because- and the teacher kept saying she realized how the parents had altered their opinions just by watching my character on "Coronation Street" because they realized their young person could achieve whatever they wanted to achieve. I think that's really interesting because it's twofold. Through drama, you're talking about the lived experiences so people can see you as- not less than and all those other things that people sillily do to us, but also what it does is make people realize you can live your full potential into your dreams and that's one of the things that I think that we fight for a lot, don't we? To enable people to see disabled people as equal to know that they have full potential to do whatever anybody else does. It's been a massive honor, and it's lovely to know that by doing your job, you've impacted other people to live their lives in a different way. That's a massive honor, isn't it?

[Laurence Clark] You made some mention of Triple C, in which you started, and both of us work for, along with lots of other disabled artists now. So tell us about where it came from.

[Cherylee Houston] I used to run a- a few years out of drama school, I set up a different company called Big House Theater Company, and we did plays, we did things like went into youth theater- created accessible youth theaters, and it was that recognition you'll have to make a change in this society for it to make a difference. I've always worked with young people. Also, I think during my career, having figured out what the blocks were and being told things like, "You're the only person. We didn't know where to find you, etcetera, etcetera." And, people treating you like you're the only one and I, for a long time, thought about- we needed to come together as a community and also, that we need to do this sort of thing out for young people to make that change so people can go to youth theater and so on, which I already tried to change. I've done lots of different things in my career to try and make these changes. I've been doing a lot of things through ITV, the broadcaster who I work for at "Coronation Street" where we've done things like a day's workshop for disabled actors to get audition tapes, to try and educate and give people training about how to apply, how's their audition technique, how to get themselves out there more, so it was that thing of more empowering different people.

We did that again; we did it at Emmerdale. That's where Melissa- I met my colleague- she came on that opportunity- our colleague at Triple C. Then- I'd been working- we both have the very same anecdote about this, Laurence, which is actually what kicked off Triple C for, which, for

me- for a long time it worked, but between acting jobs in doing drama for deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent young people either in SCN schools or in Holiday clubs, etcetera, etcetera because I always believed- I'd loved it. It was such an empowering job for both sides, and also the fact that when you do drama with disabled young people. You see this massive change of confidence that's never going to go away again, you know, people talk or communicate in different ways just after a weekend of drama. I was always doing that, and then this young woman got in touch and said- I've been told she didn't die. Still, she's told, "I'm going to die because of this operation they won't give me because I'm disabled," on her back. She said she just wanted to thank me for all those workshops I did with her that changed the way she had her confidence, and I know she contacted you to say something very similar to what you've done with her. I was driving to work the next day, and I was like, "Every time I do these things externally, things change through management, and the momentum gets lost." So I was like, "Why don't we do it? Why don't we start off by creating youth theater? Build all these things I want to do, do something that pulls the community together."

What I did was then- I contacted some young disabled people I'd worked with in the past that I knew wanted to go into the arts who never did, like Monique, who still works with us now at Triple C. When I worked with her as a young person- I think she was 14- she always wanted to go into the arts. When I contacted her back in her early twenties, she hadn't listened to what school and her mum had told her, and the system we live in that said you had to go into business management and all this sort of stuff, and she left with both hands at the idea of starting this company. I asked my colleague, Jed, with whom I went to drama school, and I knew I would be brilliant with young people; his wife then said, "Oh, I could help with admin." And so it was a lot of- me and Lydia, who also worked as my support worker, and thank goodness- I mostly employed my support worker to help me set up a company for a good couple of years and-

[Cherylee Houston starts laughing]

[Cherylee Houston] She did a lot of hours for free and a lot of running around. Then I met Melissa- we've been going good- almost a year- I met Melissa, and Melissa had that same drive, and she joined- she moved to Manchester and joined, and then we formed DANC together as a team, the five of us. We'd set up, we'd done funding, we got a name- there's a lot of legwork to a company. I was doing a lot of hours for free and because I could. I already had a job, and the job wasn't full-time; I could do a lot of the admin hours where everybody else had to go and get paid to do those sorts of things. Then, I think I was about two years in, we got some funding. Then Melissa could give up her job as a teaching assistant and came and helped me with- she was supposed to take over the admin, but then actually the admin just doubled, so she carried

on, and it grew, and it grew. But then it- then we started DANC, the Disabled Artist Network Community. It was this idea of pulling the community together. We didn't know what it was; we just knew there was a way of pulling the community together so people knew where to find you. Also, to empower you as a community member so you had a community because we all felt like lots of individuals- and I always remember being dead excited and empowered when I met people in an audition situation or a workshop situation. So it was about creating something like that that connected us all and also to this idea of having a talent finder so people knew where to find us.

What we five guys did was come up with this idea of a networking event, a conversation event to go, "Okay, let's look at what the blocks are in the industry and look at the solutions, and then we'll create the solutions to those blocks." I think you came to the first one, didn't you? And, we did not know what was going to happen because we put this out there, and then suddenly 60 odd, 70 odd deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent came from all over the country to this theater, and we started! It was so empowering and it was so wonderful.

And then, a few- we did a few other arts organizations, and what was exciting was- because the concept was twofold- the arts organization would understand what it was like to have a large number of disabled people in its venue to see where the creaking points were because those places design it so that if there's only two of us who ever want to come into the building at one time. That was really useful, but it was about listening to what everybody else's thoughts were because we all knew we had our experiences, what the blocks were, and our solutions, but together as a community, those blocks and solutions conversations meant that the industry- we always brought change makers to these meetings to have the conversations about what the blocks were- so then they went away. What was really empowering was people coming to those meetings- sometimes thinking they knew everything about- and that the employee does enough- and then they'd go away really empowered to go, "No! This really does need to make a change."

That started, and then, lockdown happened- I think one just before lockdown, we had one hundred and seventeen members of the community and seventeen industry guests, and that's when one of the main broadcasters said, "No longer will we employ non-disabled people to play disabled roles." That was- but these key changes kept happening from our conversations. Then, lockdown happened, and luckily, I'd just been at a BAFTA event on Zoom. I had never heard of Zoom at the time when we're on Zoom now, and I sort of spent lock- the night of the announcement of the lockdown going, "How do you change the changes tonight?" I got one of those- I realize now it's a neurodivergent brain- then everybody used to say I just thought too quickly and too much and figured out how it transposes it over. I think within a week, me and

Melissa put out and hosted our first webinar, and since then, we have held over three hundred odd webinars- most classes. Oh! Very key point, Laurence Clark was probably a year or so in-; somebody called Laurence Clark came up and went, "I think you need a bit of help to form this, and I'd quite like to come in and help. Share your board, set your board up." I thought that was so- because I'd always heard about- I knew you, and I'd invited you because- just to say- when we started the community, what I did was I would go on Twitter and put 'Wheelchair' 'Comedian' 'Deaf Comedian,' go through every job type, every disability type I could think of. I'd get that and then send a video invite, and I'd spend days and days doing this, which is great on a pain day because you're still achieving some by clicking and pasting. You came up after having come to a few and just said, "Are you up for helping?" Then, you helped us put together a funding bid to get somebody official to come in-

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherlyee Houston] And help us run the company; at that point, we were still a bit hand-to-mouth. Loads of us- everybody was doing so many hours for free. A few people were getting paid here and there, but not the correct amount or the hours they were doing. It's just grown, and grown, and grown, and now there's nearly one thousand seven hundred of us, and we are partnered with all the main broadcasters and streamers, and we're having key conversations. I think it's the same principle; we don't want the disabled person to go into the job of being the educator, and what we want to try and do is set the stuff up around it. It's phenomenal- the differences we're making. So many people are being employed and being a part of that community- it means that we're paying. We just had another in-house conversation about how we ensure the community is community-led. Again, keep reminding ourselves it's community-led because it's ensuring that it's never- it's always got to feel open, and everybody's got to feel whenever they join it that they can still have a voice. It's about those people with more experience sharing their experiences- throwing the ladder behind you as much as you possibly can, whether it's about elements of work, finding employment for people, or sharing your knowledge of access because it'll take- any time any of us start a job, there's a lot to learn about how you implement your access and things like that. The more we can share those and- you do this brilliant thing called "Lived Experience Webinars," which you started the idea with. I mean, that's what's so brilliant- I mean, there are millions of things you've done, but that, for example, means that we now have key deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people in our industry sharing their lived experiences with their community and that is so empowering! Each person brings new elements to it- I mean, there's so many different things we've all done and-

[Cherylee Houston whispers]

[Cherylee Houston] Am I allowed to mention the AC?

[Laurence Clark] Yeah!

[Cherylee Houston] That she said in a whisper- So yes! So-

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] Not that you can't really tell that was a whisper on a podcast, but you've pushed that we go to run the Access Coordinator training and ensure that we've done that partnered with other disabled-led organizations so it ensures that it's- these key changes in our industry are disabled led and not elitists down to one organization and that knowledge is shared. It's more that the community owns these things, and those are really, really important things that I think we pushed through because the more we share our knowledge and share how to employ us, isn't it? Takes it and does it in a really nice, warm, responsive way- That's always been my ethos behind Triple C and DANC, was take this warm, friendly approach that stops it being a conflict and takes the confrontation about it out of change. It sort of worked, didn't it? Because we won a BAFTA last year as well, so- it's gone alright!

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Laurence Clark] Yeah! I'm glad it's doing well. Currently and not lastly, what we're doing at the end-we should probably say- if people want to find Triple C, where do they go?

[Cherylee Houston] We're on social media at @DANC_UK. I think we're also under- DANC is D-A-N-C, which is the Disabled Artist Network Community. I think the same is on Instagram. You can go to our website, which is Triple C- T-R-I-P-L-E-C dot org dot uk, and sign up for our newsletter, and become a part of the community because we have regular meetings. We also have a weekly newsletter of opportunities and an in-house newsletter; we're always running webinars, master classes, and get-togethers. It's just about keeping everything a two-way conversation and an ongoing conversation of skill-sharing within our community because we've always been ignored or left out of opportunities. It's about ensuring those opportunities come directly to the community but also creating them within ourselves.

[Laurence Clark] Finally, if you could talk to yourself at eighteen and talk to a younger Cherylee, what advice would you give her?

[Cherylee Houston] Get a wheelchair quicker! Don't listen to the doctors! I know it bloody hurts!

[Laurence Clark and Cherylee Houston laugh]

[Cherylee Houston] It's okay. You get used to this level of pain. It will actually become normal, and you'll be fine. Don't worry so much because the world's- weirdly, don't you think the world's a very different place to when we were eighteen, in the way that they treat us?

[Laurence Clark] Oh yeah, definitely!

[Cherylee Houston] I think if I'm even talking to my eighteen-year-old self who existed now, by the time you're in your mid-forties, the world is very different, but have confidence, trust yourself. It will be okay! You will still be able to do what you want to do. Don't listen to those people who were telling you you're not capable of anything now you've got a disability because they're wrong. Trust yourself, do whatever you want, I did! It's not always going to feel like it hurts this much; you just get used to it thirty years later. Agony is fine!

[Cherylee Houston laughs]

[Cherylee Houston] I supposed weirdly because it is! You know what I mean? There are things when you're starting out, or you're getting used to disability- is actually you're taking on other people's opinions of what that is and how terrible and tragic that is. It's actually none of those things. Actually, it's really empowering, and being disabled has given me some of the best encounters that I would have never had without it. I think it shaped me to be a very- I mean, I don't know- I might sort of hopefully had the same personality, but what I think it's done is it's taught me a lot of generosity and kindness of spirit. It's taught me how to navigate difficult situations. I've learned a lot quickly because of my disability.

All the rubbish that the non-disabled world says about disability is wrong! Actually, disability is getting cooler and cooler, isn't it? It's not- I was with- I was in a convoy with five wheelchair users the other night, and one of my friends went, "I've always felt really empowered being out with other wheelchair users, and we're actually getting quite cool nowadays, aren't we?" Which- yeah! Trust it's okay, I suppose, is what I would say to myself.

[Laurence Clark] Cherylee, thank you so much for this! Thanks!

[Cherylee Houston] No, it's a pleasure! Nice chatting with you, Laurence!

[Laurence Clark] This is my last podcast as a host. It's been great! It's been such fun! Thank you to Rhoda and Daniel for facilitating this. As you see, this podcast is an amazing way of finding out about other disabled artists all over the world and learning from their experiences.

[Outro music by Sebastian Batista starts]

[Laurence Clark] Thank you for making me a part of this.

[Outro music continues]

[Dr. Bernard] ABLE Voices is a production of the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education, led by me, Dr. Rhoda Bernard, the founding managing director. It was produced by Daniel Martinez del Campo.

The introduction music is by Kai Levin, and our closing song is by Sebastian Batista. Kai and Sebastian are students in the arts education programs at the Berklee Institute for Accessible Arts Education.

If you would like to learn more about our work, you can find us online at [berkee.edu slash B-I-A-A-E](http://berkee.edu/slash/B-I-A-A-E) or email us at [B-I-A-A-E at Berklee, that's L-E-E.edu](mailto:B-I-A-A-E@Berklee.edu).