

Queer Roots and Routes — transcript

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Season: 1

Episode: 6

Host: Chase Edwards

CHASE:

This episode contains stories that include racism and homophobia.

COLLECTIVE VOICE:

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This is Queer Roots and Routes

Stories of where we come from, and how we move in the world today.

“We” are a group of people living in London, we’re gay or queer, and we’re mostly men, and some non-binary people who were raised as men.

We’re all either migrants to the UK and/or racialised as being from an “ethnic minority” — urgh, that’s just a crappier way of saying ‘global majority’ ;)

We all have different experiences and perspectives on the world, some of us are racialised as Black or brown, some as white. Many of us have experienced racism and xenophobia.

Some of us are gay, and some queer. Some of us moved to the UK by ourselves, and some are from an ancestral line that includes migrants.

We all, every single one of us, knows what it is like to be seen as ‘other’ — that is what brings us together.

We’re part of a community project run by The Love Tank, a not-for-profit community interest company that promotes health and wellbeing of under-served communities through education, capacity building and research.

We wanted to make this podcast to tell our stories of crossing borders: borders of nation-states, of gender and sexuality — as a collective. We don’t have a boss or a Beyoncé. So, every episode of Queer Roots and Routes has a different host and a different set of voices from our group.

Our promise to you is that our podcast is GORGEOUS, FIERCE, SUPERGAY and...
REVOLUTIONARY !

CHASE:

Yoooo, my name is Chase.

I'm a 28-year-old Black gay brudda from London.

My pronouns are he, him, King.

For my episode of Queer Roots and Routes, I've chosen to focus on one of my favourite things: Love.

In this episode we have stories about the love of queer icons, the love of drag and how it can create community, and navigating love in London.

I hope you get something from it.

So, a bit about me, I'm a North London boy.

I'm a Pisces, we are the romantic fish of the zodiac.

And I am currently single. I'm not on social media but you can drop an email if you would like to make an application.

I grew up in London with my mum and brother.

When I reflect on it my mum was definitely the first source of love in my life.

She was, and still is very affectionate. Both verbally and physically.

Always hyping us up. Always telling us we could.

I definitely went through the teenage phase and found her affection jarring.

But ultimately I'm grateful.

It's informed how I show love. Big up my mum.

My mum didn't always get it right though.

When I was 10, my mum decided to move us to Grenada.

It's our heritage, where our grandparents are from.

We'd been out there most summers, but holiday and living somewhere are soooo different.

I guess my mum's thinking was that she thought it would be good growth experience for us. But I disagreed.

I think we're all encouraged to love where we come from, but truthfully, I hated living in Grenada.

For me London was home. I missed my cousins, I missed my friends.

I felt like I was lacking in the love that raised me.

I went to an all boys Catholic secondary school in Grenada.

On paper, being a gay black boy, surrounded by other black boys, in the sun, all of us getting sweaty, sounds like a dream right? Nah. Far from. (first take)

I feel like I was made to feel different cause I was an English boy.

And I think because I didn't want to be there, I didn't allow myself to fully immerse in the experience.

It didn't help that some of my teachers were openly homophobic, just at the time when I was realising that I was gay.

I knew that if I was home in London there'd be a certain level of protection I didn't have in Grenada.

But I did it. For 7 years. Big up to me.

The older I get I try to take something of value from most experiences. That's how we grow, right?

I feel like my biggest lesson from Grenada was that I should try hard to find something to love about the present.

I spent so much time longing to come home I didn't allow myself to enjoy even the minor aspects of growing up in the Caribbean.

Like, my regular escape while I was out there was one of the most beautiful beaches in the world! That's a blessing. That's love.

I'm really lucky to have had that.

Coming back to London by myself at 17 was hard.

I even had to borrow the money for my flight, but I was so determined.

I feel like I could deffo write the guide book, "How to navigate London as a 17 year gay Black boy on his own"

The first chapter would deffo just be about sex.

Reflecting on growing up queer, I've chosen a story from Roberto.

You might have heard him hosting a previous episode of Queer Roots and Routes.

ROBERTO:

I never heard of the word my pronouns are he him. I'm 36 and I am a fabulous, flamboyant faggot.

CHASE:

Roberto is about to take us to his childhood, and how looking up at a man who shows you a way to be himself, is empowering.

ROBERTO:

Hi, my name is Roberto Tovar. My pronouns are he/him. I'm 36 and I'm a fabulous flamboyant faggot.

Growing up in Mexico City, well, you have to have in mind that Mexico City is very Catholic and quite mature society, even though there is a lot of influence of queer people. And there's sometimes some things celebratory about that. Still very influenced by the church, but there was one character that challenge all of that. And this singer songwriter, and genius, Juan Gabriel.

I am an 80s gay. I was born in 1986. So, yeah, I think my first musical references are like, late 80s, early 90s. Yeah, so one guy in those years were like, was like the peak of of his career.

Every summer we, my brother, my sister, and I will go to my aunt chata and her partner Rosita, sorry just like, I never mentioned my *tia* before, so that was like, so yeah, every summer my Tia Chata will take us to her summer house, withdraws into her partner. Yeah, it's in xxx, which is like a two hour drive from Mexico City. And we will just like hang out there like sing songs. Eat really nice food, we will have freshly squeezed orange juice that actually the oranges were from the tree at the house. So that was really nice, really fresh. And we will have like, I don't know, like picalitas, which is this tortilla, with salsa and we will go swimming. And during the night, like actually, when the sun started coming down, like my aunt and her friends will get the tequila and like get the guitar and start singing all these characters.

Actually, my aunt introduce a lot of musical characters very important characters in my life, which is like including Juan Gabriel, Ana Gabriel, Luis Miguel, and Vicenta Fernandez. The last two are straight and the first the first two are LGBT members. And yeah, just delay obviously the killer made effect and they were like Laughing Crying and like obviously I remember this as like, Whoa, there's some serious effect in the songs you know, they were really feeling it.

So yeah, I think that like stayed in my head that like those feelings and those emotions that they were portraying. And those songs were the context of my lesbian on this one. Makes a lot of sense because it's called Mujeres Divinas of Vicenta Fernandez, which is divine women. Obviously in the beginning like yours yours when I was a kid, I didn't understand like my aunt singing this song with like, such passion and also XXXX which is I wasn't born to love, by Juan Gabriel, which is a really tragic song and really dramatic and over the top you know when people said like, Oh, don't be so extra Well, JuanGa didn't didn't rule by that. Like he will wear like this super sparkly sequins jackets. Standing next to a group of mariachis, like super macho looking but he was just yeah over the top like moving like the shoulders and I don't know almost like a little bit of influence of Liza Minnelli like yeah.

He was extra Yeah, that was his thing like been extra we drama and we happiness. But yes, this song is about I wasn't born to love. And I guess that was another thing that unconsciously I related to, you know, like this feeling of not belonging or like unlovable because of I knew there was something different about me. And also, I knew there was something different about hunger, and that I didn't really understand back then.

Actually, no, tengo dinero is the song that Wonga started his career with in 1971 and it was no tengo dinero de nada Kedesh Loney kaka Tang was more bad Other which is I don't have any money. And the only thing I have is love to give which is a really positive and yeah, that's something like I remember like thinking about it because it was like kind of like oh, it's squeezing into one of us is you know like working class people like I only have which is like kind of like romantic if you want to call it like that but yeah, it's it's not talking about what you own but that you just have love to give you know cheesy but yeah relatable

oh my god if I look at my younger self back then listening to those songs of JuanGa little Roberto looks happy. Very cute. Yeah, I guess protected and comfortable because I was with my aunt

JuanGa's career was doing really good. But in 1985, former member of staff, polish a book called Juan Gabriel y Yo, which is Juan Gabriel and I... revealing intimate details of a relationship between the two of them, which you will think that this will destroy a career and also it was the 80s You know, like there was a AIDS epidemic and like, gaping people were didn't have the best PR back then.

So, yes, you will think that his career was over, but actually, I think there was a lot to destroy if you want to like he wasn't a big figure to destroy, so he stayed

in 2003 when JuanGa was confronted by a reporter, and he asked if he was gay, to what Wonga replied, look as awareness pregunta which the translation is you can you don't ask what you can see. It wasn't breaking news, really, like everyone knew that Kwanko was gay. But even though after after that, you could go to like, I don't know, like really Catholic. Well homophobic households and JuanGa was playing and when Hanga sings You shut up. So that's, that's a rule in Mexico, you know, even though if you're homophobic, Granny

hyung hunger has a lot of moments like that interview, where he managed uncomfortable questions like that. And I connect with hunger because of that iconic JuanGa because of his sense of humor, his ambition and his resilience I also respect the, the way he handled his harassing about like his identity and his sexuality. Also, the way he challenged all these macho industry of ranchero songs, you know, like the genre

in 2016, sadly, JuanGa died. I was very sad about it and also was very frustrated because I was in London, and not in Mexico, so I couldn't join the other 500,000 people that gather outside policy away as artists in Mexico City for his funeral. But the only thing that I could do was to throw tribute at the Queen Adelaide where I played JuanGa's songs all night. Queen Adelaide is a gay bar in Hackney Road in East London. And that night was a night where other Latino Latin American people attended. Other queer Latin American attended. Yeah, I felt connected with my friends and my family in Mexico, but also with Mexico as a country, with my roots and with my queer roots.

I felt connected with my country, united in grief, but also united in joy of having experience the influence of these fabulous flamboyant faggot and 2014 I managed to see JuanGa live. And at the end of the concert, there was a slide like a PowerPoint looking slide with a glitter rose. And you could see the phrase "Never be afraid of being yourself". Which I think, it was a perfect way of ending a JuanGa song, a JuanGa concert. Yeah, just to say thank you JuanGa for for those emotional over-the-top dramatic, yet fabulous songs...

CHASE:

I feel very uncultured when I say this but I didn't actually know about Juan Gabriel before Roberto. But he's a proper queer icon!

Prepping for this episode I researched him to see how he felt about love.

He once said, and I quote "I won't completely fall in love again, because it is so deceptive. It has left me a bad taste."

I relate to that. I wish I could give you a hug. I think we've all been there.

When I think about love in music I think about Beyoncé's album Lemonade.

I think about cheating, and/or being cheated on.

The heartbreak, the anger, sitting with that pain.

I think about allowing yourself to get to a place of forgiveness.

I think about the process of working it out.

And eventually getting back to a place of love. (<from ad lib, im a lover)

And then to make an album about it. Turning lemons into lemonade. That's some powerful stuff.

Some might call it authentic, some might say it's marketing. Who knows?

Anyway, from Queen B to a East London Queen himself

This is drag performer Polka Dot

ROBERT:

My name is Roberts. My pronouns are he him. My age is 32. And the fun fact I'm a drag queen.

CHASE:

Robert has done something pretty amazing with Polka Dot, and their drag collective, so I asked him to tell me the story...

ROBERT:

My drag name is Polka Dot, and she came to life probably around 2017. It all started in East London where I live. I went for a drag show. It was called The Shay Shay Show. And what I loved about that show it was that it was very community based, very queer, unapologetically queer. And there obviously, there were drag queens, which I was mesmerized by, I started to experiment, I started to buy heels, some jumpsuit, some wonky eyeshadow on my eyes. And in contrary to what I was expecting, in that space, people were appreciating and people were celebrating me each time even though I was looking crap. They were saying like, you look amazing. And I know they were saying that not because I looked objectively nice. It was more to do with like, we love the fact that you put the dress on and you're unapologetically yourself.

So that's where I started to, you know, experiment with drag or like maybe gender expression, because I probably wouldn't call it drag in the very beginning, you know. And then fast forward to probably a year after I really wanted to perform. I was inspired on that show. And a close friend of mine said, "Robert, I see that you really want to do it." The best way he's a singer songwriter is if you look at date, and then there is no turning away from that. So we booked a date at Royal Vauxhall Tavern for an open mic. I've asked my friend to

teach me how to do makeup. I bought some weird stuff from Primark and I performed my first mashup was, obviously, Britney Spears and Beyoncé, Toxic and Upgrade You and I was the stewardess, loving that.

I got standing ovation and I loved it. I used to perform in musical theatre so that was something that brought back memories. I guess it was back then five years already that I was living in the UK, I kind of forgotten about my creativity so creating Polka brought that back. Polka not only was my way of expressing my creativity and you know putting a drag show, but also Polka allows me to discover more stuff about myself. I know from the perspective of time, I love that Polka allows Robert to be who he actually is because in drag, for example, I would never even fear to approach the handsomest guy in the club and you know, ask him for his number. But as Robert I would never, you know, but then at some point those lines between Polka and Robert starts to blur and I started to become more and apologetical as Robert or I will be more fierce and you know, approach those guys that I like.

And I realized that you know what, thank you Polka. You know, you made me realize that I can be courageous even without drag because drag is within me anyway, Polka is me I am Polka, you know. So Polka Dot was performing every now and then in London. And then I created Slav4U, a drag Polish collective, we decided, okay, we're going to put one off night at the Glory. Just an easy one, the capacity is 80 people. If we serve 60 tickets, it will be already a success. Little did I know that we sold out completely - people were calling to the Glory asking for more. And that was in 2019. And now we are in 2023. We've had around 10 editions already. We've performed at the Glory where we started, at Clapham Grand. BBC did a documentary about us. We went to Latitude Festival, river stage, you name it, we've been all over the place. And we've got plans, obviously to take over the world.

You may ask why did I even create Slav4U? Initially, it was just me having an outlet to showcase Polish culture, show that I am Polish. And I'm proud of it. And I live in the UK. And there's a big Polish diaspora. But then with time I realized that it's not only about me, it's about the community, you know, a profound moment in my time of slough for you was after one show a girl approached me. She grabbed my hands and she said "Polka, what you did on that stage was so profound and so amazing that for the first time in my life, I felt that I feel like I'm Poland. But with the difference that here I can hold my girlfriend's and no one will punch me in the face, you know."

So for those kinds of moments, and I've got goosebumps each time that I talk about that, for those kinds of moments I created Slav4U is to show that you can be Polish, queer and proud. And it's not only me being on stage, but it's us being a community being a Polish diaspora in London, not forgetting where we are from and showing people because not only Polish people come to the show, but also people that don't speak Polish. They are curious what those Poles are about, you know, I want to know what my cleaner is listening to when she's folding my Egyptian cotton, you know, silk, whatever. I want to know, what are they about? Are they only the cleaners and thieves? You know, no, we're not. We've got vibrant pop culture, which is unfortunately not celebrated from a queer perspective back in Poland. But this is the privilege I have here that for the first time ever, I can step on the stage in drag and sing the biggest ballads of Polish pop culture and be proud of it.

CHASE:

Massive big up to Robert for creating a community, a collective, for drag, and Polish culture. This is a massive act of love and I rate it a lot.

Because I'm a bit of a nutter, my brain isn't always the kindest to myself.

Which is weird because I have so much understanding and love for others, but it's like, when it comes to myself my brain is like, uhhhh sorry friend we're all out.

One time I was really down, and I can't remember who it was or what it was, but someone or something, was like, you need to define your purpose. It will help you stay guided in life.

I sat with it for a few minutes... I opened the notes app in my phone.... and I wrote down my purpose. My purpose in life is: to love and spread love

It's weird as well because it came to me so quickly and clearly.

When I feel like shit, I try to remember my purpose, to love and spread love.
I'm flawed. I get it wrong sometimes. But still, that's my purpose. And it helps. Most of the time.

I think this is also what Robert's done - he's served the community, creating space for people to spend time together, that's love.

Those spaces are vital for us.

One of my favourite queer spaces is UK Black Pride.

UK Black Pride was hands down one of the best days I had in 2022. I was with my boys Tokyo and Kamel, and it was beautiful. I did a bit of volunteering, handing out condoms and lube, mostly using this as a chat-up line. It was great.

There's something so beautiful about being around so many queer people in one space.

I'm really grateful for UK Black Pride.
Especially coming from Grenada where those spaces just don't exist. I feel massively lucky.

And also, just like so many sexy Black bruddas! What a blessing.
You think you're sexy and then you get to Black Pride and it's like damnnn.

And big up to all my sexy Black queer women too.

I feel like as queer people we also have to be intentional about love within our community. We have to take care of each other.
Seeing my exes and past situationships at Black Pride, I was intentional about having good interactions.
I get the same energy back. None of them move mad.
Good taste or luck I guess.

Anyway this brings us to Stanley and José... you heard José hosting episode 1, and Stanley reading his poem in episode 2.

JOSÉ

José, I use he/him pronouns 36 years old. A fact about me is that I was kind of born old. Like I'm an old soul.

STANLEY:

Stanley, he him pronouns 32. And the facts about me. I'm a poet and a writer.

CHASE:

Stanley and José both have deep things to say about the links between mental health and sexual wellbeing, so they got together to have a conversation about it

STANLEY:

Tell me, you said that you worked. You worked in sexual health. And then you worked in mental health? I'm curious why the two? And if there if you think there's kind of like a connection between two of those things?

JOSÉ:

Yeah, I mean, I think the fairest and the easiest answer will be by chance, really, by kind of like, accident, it'll happen. Like I ended up working in sexual health because of my own lived experience. So I live with HIV. And that was kind of what I thought, Oh, maybe I can work in this. I was a student back then here in the UK, needed, like a working visa to be able to stay and like start applying to things and it was all random. Yeah, you've just started you don't know where you want to do or so I was just applying to all these random things like environmental stuff, and these under. And then all of a sudden, on Grindr, I saw an opportunity to volunteer on a sexual health organization. And yeah, and I just contacted them and started volunteering. And that's how it started. And then I ended up like, getting a paid job and working there for many years. And then that thing led me to work in sexual health and during periods reporting sexual health, led me to working in mental health. Yeah, and I definitely think that there is a connection, there might be many connections, different things, but but I think it's very, can be very personal, you know, so it's very hard to talk it out. Because it might be different for you than it is for me. But definitely, I can say for me, there is a lot of things there to unpack.

STANLEY:

Sounds like definitely. And I think is interesting, because you said like, I think it's fantastic that you work in mental health and also what sexual health and mental health but you discuss such a having HIV and and then finding the that kind of resource on Grindr. How has it been navigating those spaces being diagnosed, but then also understanding and realizing that, you know, U equals U and that there is a life outside of a diagnosis of that

JOSÉ:

Navigating those different spaces has changed with time like that. And I think partly, sort of the outcome of doing that, or, I mean, it's hard to explain it, it's just the more comfortable I've been on my skin, the easier those spaces have been to navigate when when I was at hardest times are in difficult places. It was harder to navigate those spaces. I mean, there

has been stigma and shame and like discrimination and a lot of things and but I mean, these things always affect you, right like you and if you think they don't they somehow can affect you. Yeah, like I feel very steady with where I am that to not let these things sort of bring me down. So I might have an impact but I think I can somehow navigate them and I can see my feelings around the situation or what happens online or whatever and they say okay, this is not me, this is just a situation and leave with that.

STANLEY:

How are you able to get to navigate that like how are you able to get this sense of like this peace and this clarity and, and this kind of strength like where did that come from?

JOSÉ:

I mean, I don't know if I even know those. Yeah, exactly. I like that. I don't know. They weren't that I described like, it never feels. It never feels beautiful inside my head. I get like very few to or it does but not all the time. So. So yeah, I think...is it depends on and I'm sort of learning to navigate the wave as it comes on. Yeah, but but but how is it for you? I mean, you? Yeah, I was just mentioning how personal it can be that link between your well being your mental health, your sexual life? How is it for you? How do you find it?

STANLEY:

It's an interesting one, because so with my coming out, it was quite tough. And it was like, I ended up having to meet up properly twice, but fun, not once. But for me, it was tough because I think like my so I, my heritage is Nigerian. And I grew up in a very Christian family, and I still believe in God myself, but to grow up in a very Christian family to grow up with the church. And even, you know, my dad was a pastor at one point in Nigeria, or here, I don't know. But there was a lot of that. And I think there's a lot of guilt and shame. And so especially like when you're kind of getting older, and you've realized that actually your feelings are met, and you realize that, like, what does this mean? And how am I supposed to say it to the people that I love and who mean the world to me, and I know that they might not deal with it? Well, and I think for me, it's like, I had friends in school that I told, and they were fine. They were like, I didn't go, but that's okay, but you're my friend and oh, God, that that was good.

But then, you know, through a series of events when I was 17, basically family found out and I kind of went back in the closet. And so that that was kind of a thing was like, okay, like, those kind of, I guess, a year and a half, two years of being out being semi out to some friends, but, um, go back in, and then I went to university and, and stuff and it was almost like, you know, through praying the gateway or kind of ignoring those things, like if that's not you, and talking to people and having girlfriends of like that. And, and it was an interesting time, because it was a thing where I realized, okay, like, you can have feelings for a physical person, like, but I guess everything changed. I met my first boyfriend, and I think meeting him. And there was a bit older.

And that was when I kind of could visualize those words of actually, like, No, I'm gay. And this is what I'd say to family and then still reconciling. I like, when the conversations did happen. And it was, it wasn't easy, but I can fundamentally say, as tough as it has been, I'm so glad I did come out, I'm glad that I kind of went through that kind of storm. And that kind of really tough time because I think had I not come out, I wouldn't be able to kind of be able to

talk to people about it, or to be comfortable in my skin or to go on this journey. But it has not been easy. And I definitely can see a lot of kind of what you've said as well, that kind of dealing with those kinds of you have those days where you feel really strong or any power and stuff like that. And it's been it's been years since the like the second coming out. But it's, um, but yeah, it's almost as if there's a consequence, I think, I think I think in an ideal world, you don't have to come out you're able to kind of just, you know, you can just exist but I think for for some of us move through a lot of us you there is that thing you need to tell people if they come out and and unless it's that unequivocal I love you, I don't care. It is tough. It is really tough to deal with that.

And, and I'm really fortunate to have an amazing, chosen family and a very lovely Greek boyfriend. And, but it takes time it does. And I for me it was counseling or therapy like undeniably like that that's something that I found really, really useful. Because it's like, how do you deal with all these emotions? I'm sorry, I know I'm talking a lot.

JOSÉ:

Oh, no, that's amazing. I mean, you're making me think of I can... because you were talking about coming out once and coming out twice. And then yeah, how often we do these and how it can become a sort of never ending process. You know, it's like where as queer and as gay as I am as open as I am. I feel that I'm still that there's days in my life that I still have to come out again to, to someone I've just met to. Yeah, to a person to a woman. Very confusingly, ...or things like that, you know? So it's like, Does it ever end? Is there a point where we don't have to come out anymore? And and then what's what's sort of the impact of that? Because you're talking about like, the, the positives, and and the not so easy moment of coming out. I think we learned from both of them. And I think both of them in the long term can be positive, but bad maybe. But maybe this is maybe I shouldn't say this, like, you know what I mean?

STANLEY:

No, I get where you're coming from. I mean, that's sort of the thing I didn't realize, like, cos I, you know, technically came out a bit later. So I'm 32. But I probably was like, in my late 20s. And so, like, I didn't realize it's true, you do have to consciously come out, you'll be like, even when you meet someone, and they say, Oh, how's the Oh, have you got a girlfriend like, Well, no, he's not a girlfriend, and then all like even work colleagues, or, like, even with like, Now, like I said, I've got a boyfriend now. But it's like even just saying pronouns, like, Oh, I'm, I'm with the partner and owe him. In an ideal world, we wouldn't have to, or if we had to, like, you know, give these kinds of constant coming out. People just receive them. And it wouldn't like most people do not care. Most people will have enough things that they like they're dealing with, they're working with that app, or they're going on in their lives that they do not care like what two adults consenting adults do in their in their life. But that, to me is an ideal world, but no one would care, and even just speaking just to your business

JOSÉ:

because there's some spaces in which you'll feel more or less comfortable in your schema.

STANLEY:

And yeah, there are some spaces where I feel more comfortable than others. I wondered, I love being around queer people, I love being around kind of queer. And I use queer

because, you know, to encapsulate non binary or gay or lesbian or trans or anything like that, but I, it's nice being in those kind of really open inclusive spaces. And I think when I am in those spaces, I can just relax and I can kind of like, oh, we can, like, Be playful and insult each other and whatever. But I've noticed and very, I'm finding straight places, I don't hate straight people who must say that. It's an interesting one, I think, especially with PDA, that is definitely something I've realized, because I've had, I mean, this for myself, boyfriends now.

Sounds funny, but that's something that I had to navigate, you know, being so closeted. And, and then finally coming out, and then like, oh, how do I, how do I deal with this? Like, what do I hold his hand? And, you know, and being really aware of kind of people, and are they gonna judge us and they're gonna, so I always, for me, it's like a sense of self protection, like, I just look around like, is a safe space? Yeah, like, I definitely found that. But what about you? Like, how have you found? Like, do you think those that link all that sort of thing about safety and being queer or being out or being a migrant? And all those things like, or do you? Do you know what I mean?

JOSÉ:

Yeah, I mean, the first thing I was gonna say is, you're quite young, you're, you're doing a good collection of boyfriends, boyfriends in the process, but I'm just gonna leave it at the good for you.

And then it's interesting, because I don't, I don't think I ever feel fully safe. And perhaps this has to do with not the safety net of the environment, but my own sort of personal anxieties or stresses or concerns or whatever it is. But yeah, I think I assess those different spaces, as I come into them where I am, I try to figure out if it feels safe, if it is safe. Of course, there are some spaces that are more welcoming than others, and in which I yeah, there's very little sort of risk. But yeah, it I think the most interesting bit is where you were saying and yeah, it's like all of us are in steering this political conversation that which wasn't my intention. And and this has happened with exes and with friends and like, but just saying how I feel about these government or migrants crossing the Channel, or people experiencing food poverty at one of the wealthiest countries in the world, then of course, it becomes political. But I think these are the sort of things that I just care about, and that I'm not gonna sort of stop talking about it because other people find difficult or challenging. And again, I assess the mood of the room and don't bring don't bring these conversations in. Yeah, I don't want to be the party pooper like talking Oh, like food poverty right in the middle of the party.

STANLEY:

It's an interesting one. It's almost like you pick your battles, like from the sounds of it. It's like you want to like isn't like you said, like, you don't want to be a party pooper but it's, it's a it's a sense of, okay, is it safe for me to bring up this topic? Is it safe for me to say how I really feel about something or do I just quietly sit there and just nod I'll just remove myself from the environment. It's an interesting one. It's like, I don't know why, why that is with I don't know, queer people, migrants POCs why there is that kind of need that sometimes you do have to think, okay. Safety is important ammo, okay, like whether it's mentally or kind of in an emotional state, like, can I really be vocally vocal and honest about how I'm feeling about something? And I don't know why it's like that, but I think, but I think things like this are so powerful, because I think at least we are able to kind of talk about these really heavy topics, but they grist the label to kind of fight against, like, whether it's a force or those people who

say like, Oh, don't talk or just kind of like, go back in a box. Basically, it's like, no, no, this is important.

So Jose, tell me, what's it like, as a new local, looking for love in London.

JOSÉ:

I mean, I think the first thing has been coming to a realization that I'm looking for love that that's what I'm looking for. And not just sex. It was it was hard. Initially, I could barely communicate not because I didn't know English, but because there were a lot of cultural sort of references or things that you wouldn't get on the street on dating apps, like, you know, you, you tend to forget the flirting and, and hitting on people comes with all these codes that are cultural and that you develop in the context in which you are. And I think I was moved from a context in which I was very comfortable with my flirting, my picking up my style, and then moved into something else. And I'm sort of learning what that was like, and realizing that people here don't turn around and like, yeah, I don't know, all these things are like heating up picking up online and offline that were very difficult. I don't know, there's been things out sort of, and I've only come to this reflection after after seven years of being here.

But like, of me relating or distancing from from things from my own community. So sort of not trying to date or, or avoiding dating Latin Americans, because what's the point? I don't want to speak in Spanish and things like that. And then soon after realizing like, oh, well, that's quite stupid. And maybe I should do more of them. They gave me and they we have similar cultural codes and references. And so sort of coming to those realizations? I don't know, I think there's something about like, the, the, the kind of people I like and how sort of available or unavailable they are in a city like London, so I know I like older guys on and so there's a lot of like sexualities in London.

So it was like, Yeah, I felt like at some point, I also felt like a kid in a candy shop and like, whoa, and that has come with, like, its own challenges. You know, I think, yeah, I came from an environment. I'm not I'm not telling a city, like Bogotá, which is a big capital, a lot of people doesn't have a massive sex scene. It does. But like, I don't know, I just feel that London is like these, like, super overly sexual city in which sex is available all the time. So I also gone through a process of navigating how much text is too much text and learning to set my own boundaries. And yeah, and to not let sort of all the bright flashing lights of the big city, sort of blind me. Yeah, it's been interesting. And it's been a challenge, and but I'm looking forward to more of it. And yeah, I'm up for it. I'm up for a challenge.

STANLEY:

I'm glad that you're on this journey. And that, I think my words, I think that you're very strong and empowered. And and I know, I definitely hope that you do find that love you looking for in London, because I get it

JOSÉ:

Yeah, I mean, I think I'm just gonna leave today and like, with this idea of hope, and I just think we Yeah, I just have hope that things keep falling into place, and you'll feel more and more comfortable with yourself. That's what I hope for myself, at least for you. Thank you.

CHASE:

What is it that José says at the end there?

"I hope things keep falling into place..." Yeah I hope so too man! Truly.

Something that fell into place for me this year, I got diagnosed with ADHD. And it makes a lot of sense. I'm trying to learn how it affects aspects of my life. I'm learning how it affects my relationships.

I think about how it affected my last relationship. With ADHD there can be time-blindness. Like how I was late for dates a lot when we first got together. I don't want to blame all my mistakes on ADHD, but it makes a lot of sense now

ADHD is also associated with impulsivity. I think about how I have used sex before as an impulsive distraction. I think about how technology supports impulsive sex, with twitter, Grindr, the apps.

I think about how this affects love. Does it create more opportunities for love, or is it all a distraction?

I met my ex on Grindr. And I've made close friends through hooking up. We found love in a hopeless place. Word to Rihanna.

When José and Stanley spoke about staying focused with goals despite the availability in sex in London, I relate. I gave up porn in 2021. Something about trying to increase dopamine. I feel like I lacked decent queer Sex education growing up, and I feel like porn is where a lot of us learn, whether that's good or bad.

But the habit of watching porn just stays. For however long.

I'm not sure if giving up porn is actually helping my ADHD symptoms, but my wanks are significantly more enjoyable. Silver linings.

Sex is better too. And better sex = better love right?

Hearing the stories from Roberto, Robert, Stanley and José reminds me we're all just navigating love at our own pace, trying to make the best of it.

But still, as the romantic sign of the zodiac, I have to champion the importance of love. Make time for it. Self-love, platonic love, community love, or romantic love.

And if you take one thing from my episode, if you see me on Grindr, show me some love.

I'm Chase Edwards.

Thank you for listening to my episode of Queer Roots and Routes.

Stories of where we come from, and how we move in the world today.

If you're a young person experiencing homelessness of any kind, or want to help someone who is, there's a charity called [DEPAUL](#).

DEPAUL offer emergency accommodation through their service called [Nightstop](#).

I used Nightstop when I was 17 coming back from Grenada and I appreciate it a lot.

A link to the charity will be shown in the show notes.

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