

ADVENTURES IN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE - KRISTIAN BRODIE & ADAM SHAKINOVSKY

(Katie Elliott & **Kristian Brodie & Adam Shakinovsky**)

Kristian Brodie and Adam Shakinovsky share a passion for the art of storytelling. Individually, Kristian is an award-winning film producer and Adam is the founder of Bru Productions, a film and TV production company, but together they work on a remarkable storytelling stage show called *One Track Minds*.

Kristian Brodie and Adam Shakinovsky - welcome. Thank you for joining me today.

Thanks for having us.

Can you tell me individually and perhaps collaboratively a little bit about what you're doing together?

Kr: Yes. How shall I put this? Well, for the last four years or so now, as a side project initially, I've been doing this storytelling show called *One Track Minds*, which I always sort of pitch as a cross between *Desert Island Discs*, *TED* talks and *The Moth*. And basically what we do is each night we get a selection of guests on who share a story about a song that's changed their life - and then we play the song. And I started doing this, as I say, back about four years ago and last February asked Adam - we'd been friends for many, many years - to come and tell a story at one of our nights. And since then we've been working together, basically, on the show all together. It's been a lot of fun to have somebody else to help give the side project a little bit more of a boost.

So where did the idea come from originally?

Kr: Well, actually, do you know what, it came out of a six-week trip that I'd taken to Sweden where my wife was working for the summer. We spent a lot of time in the evenings, instead of watching television, because we didn't understand the language - we'd normally watch television at home I guess - but you know, in this new environment we actually just listened to a lot of podcasts and we listened to more or less all of the *Desert Island Discs* back catalogue and a few other podcasts as well. But *Desert Island Discs* particularly stood out because, especially when you listen to episodes back to back to back to back, you see repeated themes coming up, and the thing that kind of struck me was how often people were moved to tears by playing a song or talking specifically about a song. And that kind of planted a seed that - well initially the idea was we would have some people around for dinner (and instead of bringing a bottle of wine - or realistically, as well as bringing a bottle of wine they'd also bring a song) and over the course of the dinner you maybe would introduce that song and play the song while people were eating and then you'd maybe tell people why you chose it, whatever. And the following January I was pitching this idea to a friend of mine who's an actor called Prasanna Puwanarajah, and he

said, that sounds great, but you should do that as a live show. And serendipitously, he put me in touch with Holly Kendrick who runs Wilton's Music Hall in London, which is this wonderful venue just near Tower Bridge. And they had space and they gave us two nights to do it in May. And then that was that really, it all kind of took off. We had an amazing response to the show and it's just been growing in stature every time we do it.

Adam, tell me a bit about how you've been involved in *One Track Minds*.

Ad: Well, as Kristian said, he invited me to come and tell a story and it was such an incredible feeling doing it and it was such a cathartic experience - kind of sharing something deeply personal that also attaches to music - that I really got very focused on it. It took me on so many journeys down life experiences and music, which is a lovely thing to kind of reflect on. And so, since then, we did a couple of shows in various festivals and in other venues in London and then the spin-off show *Hidden Tracks*, which is for people who might not necessarily be performers or in the kind of creative sphere, we did our first one of those. And we ran storytelling workshops for people because obviously a lot of people feel like either they don't have a story but they want to try and have a go at it, or they have a story but they're terrified of standing up on stage in front of people, or they just don't know which story to choose or how to develop it or how to edit it down or how to perform it. And so the workshops - we didn't really have like a colossal plan for it initially - but the response from them and the feeling we had in them and the solidarity that it engendered with everyone who actually came to them and has done since was huge fun and really moving. And we've just had some fantastic stories, every bit as moving and every bit as entertaining as the main stage show.

Kr: The workshops, the very first one we did, we didn't have a venue for it. We ended up going to somebody's office after hours and it all felt kind of thrown together and a little bit hectic. And yet the experience of getting everybody together - at this point, nobody had met each other before, we knew each other, obviously and everyone else was a newcomer. But by the end of the workshop these people were like, "Well, let's meet up ourselves next week. We'll go to a coffee shop." And it was just that instant immediate connection. The act of storytelling, and I think the catalyst of having music to connect that storytelling, had had that effect. It's just incredible. It felt so energising and inspiring for what we think the format of *One Track Minds* can do.

It's a real kind of community building platform, isn't it? It's a way of brokering quite deep relationships with people quite quickly. I know that when I was lucky enough to come and do one, I had people coming up to me afterwards and it felt like we were old friends and it was because I'd shared something really personal and that just went straight into a very unusual kind of connection with a total stranger. There was something really beautiful about it. I'm curious to know what people tell you about that experience of choosing one particular piece of music and then telling their story around it, what that means for them.

Kr: It's a very good question and it is quite an interesting way of looking at the show altogether because that is what we do, is literally the only thing we say to somebody, we say, "Tell a story for about five to 10 minutes about a song that's changed your life." And it's *a* song that's changed your life, not *the* song. So, you know, there can be many songs that changed your life and many ways in which you can interpret that brief. And some

people have the song first - they know it's that song, they don't know why - and then the story comes out of it. And other people have the story first and then there's a song that's sort of connected to it. And in both cases it does seem very organic to get to that point where the two things are reflected on each other.

Ad: I think with my story, I was very present with the emotions of what happened at the time. And so telling that story and living in that moment, you know, was a very powerful experience. But then for me really sitting down and listening to the song on stage afterwards was I think probably as cathartic, like as important an element of it as telling the story itself.

Mmm.

Kr: I was going to say, the chair is quite a new development in the show. The first couple of times we did it, people told their story and then walked off stage, but the audience response to that was quite interesting in that as soon as somebody not on stage anymore, you are not paying attention so much and you chat a bit and people are kind of a little bit more restless. But a guy called Charlie Lyne, who's a filmmaker, his song was very short. It was a track from the musical *Rent* and he just stood on stage while it was playing and somebody came up to me often and said, "You should get everybody to stay on stage because the audience actually then listens to the music". But obviously then you do, as a storyteller, have that chance to reflect on your music itself. That can be a good or a bad thing. On Saturday I told a story about a very awkward and stressful period of my life and the song was a Kelly Clarkson song called *Because of You*, which is not my favourite song anyway. And it was just, it was very awful, but I curtailed the song quite quickly which I'm allowed to do.

The thing I found most interesting when I was preparing to do One Track Minds was, well I was one of those people who didn't decide until the very last moment what the music was going to be, because there were so many things it could have been. But then there was this gradual process of sort of honing down what version of a story I wanted to tell. And the thing that really stood out for me was the fact that I was getting to choose not only the journey that other people went on, but who I wanted to be. There was this extraordinary process of crafting oneself. And I remember trying some sort of earlier versions of the talk and thinking, "No, that's not quite right. That feels too sad or too pessimistic or too victimy" or whatever it was, you know, and there was this kind of searching for what felt like an authentic version of myself and a version of myself that I wanted to move towards rather than getting stuck in a kind of past story. Does that make sense?

Kr: Absolutely. Yeah. And really well put as well. It is an interesting process when you're telling a story for an audience like that who are looking you in the face, you know, the way in which you shape that story is different to how you might write it or record it. I guess it's that bit more vulnerable for you as a storyteller. But I guess for the audience too, because you're there looking at somebody telling something personal in some way. Some storytellers are more open in that regard, but I think, yeah, there is a personal element to everybody's story there at the show.

And Adam, have you wanted to tell that story in that way again or was there kind of moving on that happened in the process of telling it?

Ad: I did want to tell it again. I mean there was definitely a moving on. It's funny, the day after telling that, actually the few days after telling that story, I found myself quite regularly bursting into tears. The story involves the day that I was diagnosed with diabetes, two weeks before my daughter was born. And I think I, you know, I got a little teary that day, nearly seven years ago, but not kind of ever again or really kind of thought about it in any terms other than kind of practically getting on with it. But it was really funny, the next few days I really felt like I processed... The story had helped me to be present with those feelings without feeling owned by them or kind of held prisoner by them. So that was really something. And then I really did want to tell the story again because, apart from anything, just from a really selfish point of view, the real buzz of connection with the audience was just crazily exciting and, and really very addictive. So as soon as you texted me to say, do you want to come and do a best of the last three years?

Kr: That's right. Yeah, we did that.

Ad: Yeah. I'm there, of course. Happily, in a moment. But what was interesting - so I then told the story twice more I think, at two festivals - and the two things I noticed were I always connected with the emotion of the story each time I always connected with the material, which is a really lovely feeling because obviously then it doesn't feel like a performance. But interestingly after the last time, I don't feel that same hunger to tell that same story anymore. And so to your point about moving on, I feel, yes. That I would like to.

Mm, because I, well that's what I've been noticing with the stories that I've told over the last year. And I've actually said out loud about one of those stories that I won't tell it again - it would have to be different - because I have a wariness about getting stuck in a version of the story. And I suppose I've talked with quite a lot of people who've talked about their stories and sometimes you can hear a fixed quality to the storytelling and sometimes people have built a life or a career around a particular story. And so it's like your greatest hits, isn't it? Everyone wants you to play that because that's what they know you for. But I became conscious quite early on that for me, personally, it wouldn't be very healthy to do that because I want there to be lots of other stories that follow that I can tell, that perhaps won't be quite as dramatic, but that kind of serve me better. You know, I would like a creative, ongoing process of storytelling that can allude to things that have been told before, but that's just part of the sort of backdrop now, so... Like you, I felt a lot of emotion coming up. It was like the most incredible free therapy actually. I would definitely recommend it if somebody is wanting to come to terms with something, going back and trying to think how you would tell that story to someone else is profound, isn't it?

Kr: Totally

Ad: Massively.

Kr: I mean, funnily, like the story I ended up telling on Saturday was a version of a joke story that I'd always prepared just in case somebody pulled out. Like the first time I wrote that was for the very first show, just in case (you know, four years ago), just in case that

happened. And obviously we've had, goodness, probably nearly a hundred stories told on *One Track Minds* including *Hidden Tracks* and stuff since then. And the way in which people have told stories and the way in which they responded to that brief really informed how I went about this story - and it's basically about my first job - and the process of rewriting that story made me rethink what it was about that job... It allowed me to go back into that and unpack it a bit and I took a lot out of that process even though it was ultimately a kind of jokey story designed for entertainment as much as anything. I found that actually writing it, going into it, talking it through, and then of course performing it, I really took out a lot of the things that I've been thinking about with regards to what matters in my life, especially when it comes to work. You know it's something you spend all your days doing. You need to do something that matters to you that has purpose, and that story allowed me to unwrap another layer of that process.

Ad: One of the things that's particularly interesting about that story is something we hear kind of time time again in workshops. People say, "Oh, you know, I've got some ideas but there's no real structure and it's not really a story". And then they tell us their story. And not only is there a great structure and wonderful meaning and real heart but it's deeply profound and it actually carries much more significance than they had attached to it when it was just running around inside their heads. And we had this conversation this week about your story and the conversation we had was, is there too much levity, is it kind of life-changing enough? And I think the conclusion we came to was that what's more life changing than finding your calling and the route to your calling, but it really did come out of this, like you say, initially more frivolous, jokey, entertaining story, which is kind of fantastic.

Yeah, and also, different people will respond to different things and we all need to explore those kind of different tones, don't we, I suppose? I'm always keen to find really practical things that people can be trying. I'm just wondering if if somebody wanted to do their own version of *One Track Minds* or they wanted to go through a similar process of crafting a story, what would be the basic guidelines? If somebody wants to have a go at doing this and maybe they can try it on someone at home or perhaps they could even come to London and take part in a *Hidden Tracks* event, what are the guidelines that you give people?

Kr: That's a very good way of thinking about it and of course, yes, absolutely, anyone that's interested must come and take part in the workshops or get in touch in some way because we'd love to help in that sense, but if you wanted to do this yourself, I wonder what would be the starting point, Adam?

Ad: I think one of the first things for people thinking about this is the block that many people have to even beginning something like this, which is, "I don't have an interesting life. I don't have any profound stories. No one will be interested in anything I have to say. There's nothing particularly dramatic that's happened to me, particularly relating to music". So the first piece of advice would be to say, just ask yourself the following questions and then this might spark imagination. So have you ever felt out of place or wanting to belong to something or bad at something or good at something or made a friend or lost a friend, fallen in love, fallen out of love, felt lost, felt supported, had a wonderful adventure, had crazy nights, any of those things? And, actually, if it's yes to any

of those, you have something that - when you have the personal details - something that will resonate deeply with people and people will feel grateful and privileged for having heard it. And that, I think, is as good a place to start as any. We have lots of exercises for ways that you can explore your musical back catalogue and emotional back catalogue. But I think as a starting point that's not terrible.

Kr: No, I mean we have got a document that Adam's put together that is like a sort of a workbook for people who are about to take part in the workshops and it does ask those questions. It also has an exercise where you think about songs that specifically relate to certain questions. So what is the song that you can't stop yourself from dancing to? What is the song that you sing in the shower? What is the song that you feel in some way ownership over because you were the first person to hear it, more than any of your friends you discovered that song or that band or whatever? And I think that starting out point, from both starting with your personal life and then starting with your music, from both of those angles, you will find a story that can sort of unpack things in your life that need unpacking I think.

And then there's this idea of you want to take yourself and other people on a little journey that lasts no more than 10 minutes through telling that story.

Kr: I think the thing that people maybe have found a struggle with is that on one level we like that it's a short request, so 10 minutes, ideally, no more than that. It's not like you're saying, "Go and write me a novel", you know? But it seems that on one level, like an easy thing to achieve, and actually trying to pack a lot into that 10 minutes, it has been the struggle that a lot of our storytellers have faced the most.

It takes a lot of time to be brief.

Kr: That's right. Yeah.

So if you could come up with a *Little Challenge* that has some relationship with the idea of writing things, what would your *Little Challenge* be?

Kr: Well, I've been doing a version of this myself for several years - well, when I have the time. I've got a very small baby at home now, so that has made it even more of a challenge, maybe a 'big challenge'. But generally the *Little Challenge* that I set myself is to do this exercise that I read about in a book called *The Artist's Way*, and it's called *Morning Pages* and literally the very, very first thing you do in the morning before you've had breakfast before you've kind of woken up, is to take yourself off somewhere quiet and sit with a notebook and write. Three pages is what *The Artist's Way* requests, but for the purposes of *Little Challenges*, a page or just 10 minutes of whatever it is that is in your head. It doesn't have to be good. It's not meant to be re-read or seen by anybody else. It's just to get things out of your sleepy brain and into the world. And I've found that to be hugely, hugely helpful and I think yeah, the challenge to do that and see if that kind of leads to something - I think that's the most certainly creatively sparking thing I've done in recent years for sure.

Fantastic. Thank you. Kristian. Adam, do you have a version of a *Little Challenge* too?

Ad: Yeah, actually I just thought of one while we were talking. Something that I found really, really helpful at a certain point was part of Tony Robbins' 'Hour of Power' walk. So you start off the first five minutes walking and breathing in, four breaths through the nose and then breathing out four breaths through the mouth and you do that for five minutes and then you spend the next five minutes just counting things that you're grateful for. Like that morning you've had a lovely warm cup of tea or you can hear the wind or that you're grateful to have, you know, a friend. And kind of just starting with gratitude on a 'what's present with you' level and then spreading that out further to friends and family and experiences. That's something that I think has been really helpful for me.

Well, they both sound like a lovely way to start off the day. Thank you for those. So if people would like to either come and listen or find out more about what you're doing online or even take part in some way, where are they going to be able to find you?

I guess the best place to go to start with is our website, which is OneTrackMinds.uk. And yeah, we run regular workshops now for the *Hidden Tracks* shows, and you can come along to those if you want to tell your story or if you're just curious, you can come and listen or just watch as other people are telling their stories and maybe contribute some thoughts that people will find helpful and useful, or just sit there and watch and see how it all works.

Thanks so much, guys.

Pleasure. Yeah. Thank you Katie.