

Active Hope - A podcast collaboration Episode 4, Part 2 Transcript

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: My name is Marc Bamuthi Joseph. I am a poet. I'm a dad. I'm an educator.

Kamilah Forbes: I am Kamilah Forbes. I am a storyteller, a director, a producer, a wife, a mother, a daughter, and executive producer of the Apollo Theater.

Paola Prestini: This is Active Hope.

Kamilah Forbes: This is Active Hope.

Kamilah Forbes: Welcome back to our futurism episode. I'm here with Paola Prestini and

Paola Prestini: Cal communicates in so many ways. And I want to get back to this question of how he communicates because you had a major, I feel like a major epiphany that you shared with me over Christmas, but let's watch the clip and see Cal in this work.

Brenda Shaughnessy: Yep. So this is Paola.

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: What are you saying? Saying happy to meet you?

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: Saying glad to meet you?

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: Can you say Paola, Can you say Paola. Can you? [Whispers] Paola. Maybe later. Okay.

Paola Prestini: Maybe I could play, do we want to play some music for Cal?

Brenda Shaughnessy: Totally.

Paola Prestini: Since, let's, I feel like I've been listening to Cal for a long time.

Brenda Shaughnessy: Do you want to hear some music? Do you want to hear it?

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: Okay.

Paola Prestini: Yeah? Okay. So Cal, your Mommy sent me some beautiful recordings of your voice. And—

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: Remember, I told you we were recording them? You've already heard them.

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: It was a while ago.

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: Maybe when you hear them, you'll remember.

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

Brenda Shaughnessy: I think it's going to sound, I think it sounds really beautiful.

Paola Prestini: Do you want to see what it looks like? So what I've done here is taken different sounds of your everyday life and your voice.

[recording of Cal's vocalizations along with music plays]

Paola Prestini: I'm going to play you something else, one second.

Man in Background: That's pretty wild, huh?

Paola Prestini: [laughs] I'll play another thing.

[recording of gentle "who" sound plays]

Paola Prestini: So that's me asking 'Who is human?' which are your Mommy's words.

Cal: [Cal vocalizes]

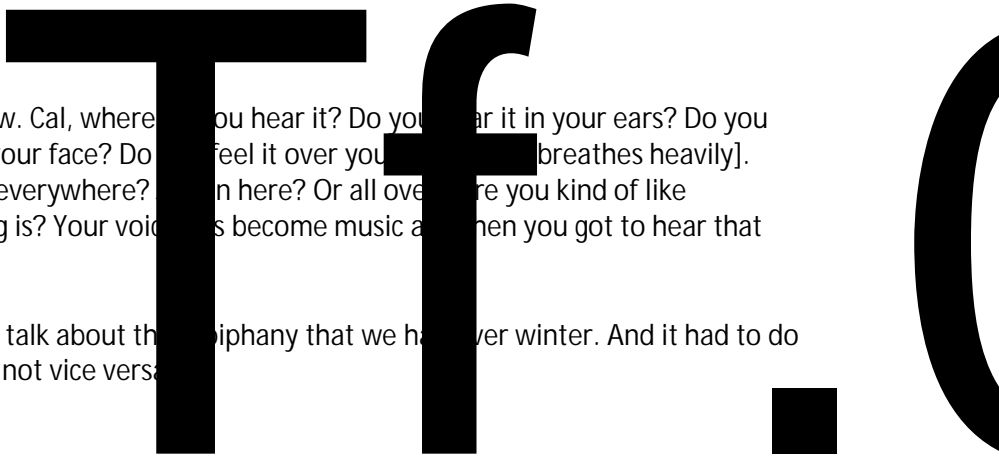
Paola Prestini: And there's owls in there and cicadas, and you, and me, and your Mommy and Dana's drawings. Jeff's cello.

[Cal vocalizes along with cello music]

Brenda Shaughnessy: [Clapping] Wow. Cal, where do you hear it? Do you hear it in your ears? Do you hear it here? Do you hear it all over your face? Do you feel it over your face? [Cal breathes heavily]. Where do you hear it? Does it come everywhere? Is it in here? Or all over? Are you kind of like overwhelmed by how cool everything is? Your voice becomes music and when you got to hear that music?

Paola Prestini: ... So I guess I want to talk about the symphony that we have over winter. And it had to do with you accessing his language, and not vice versa.

Brenda Shaughnessy:



Paola Prestini: So it's an ongoing journey, but I'm just so happy to be able to share it with the two of you and I...

Kamilah Forbes: We don't need words to make meaning. And this idea of music as a communication vector. I mean, a big part of, I feel like our jobs as arts leaders and communicators is there's always this need to advocate for the meaning within the work. But simply that statement and watching the

development of bones and limbs. She developed a technique for violin, which involves holding the bow like a baseball bat, with the body of the instrument placed in front of her like a cello.

Gaelynn Lea: [Singing] Our love's a complex vintage wine All rotted leaves and lemon rind I'd spit you out but now you're mine We bit the fruit, it seemed a lie I'll never know which way was right Now side by side we face the night And I love you And I love you We walked the pier and back again It was the most scared I've ever been You held my hand until the end And I love you And I love you

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Man that was absolutely gorgeous. It's such a great example of like, if we're going to have an equitable future, we have to figure out how to not only activate but operationalize listening. Operationalizing listening first as empathy and then as change or transformation feels like the future of communication. And the current tool that we have with the current set of tools that we have aren't necessarily fostering that trajectory.

Kamilah Forbes: Mmhm, Mmhm. Active listening, huh. Mm. Yeah, I think you're right because I think one of the questions is, how our structures and systems, how do they give voice? Communication requires both individuals to be equitable and in equity and dialogue against one another. And she asked Cal, where do you hear it? Do you hear it in your ears? Do you hear it in your body? So it's clear that you can't communicate the way I need. So I need to understand you better, maybe that's the route.

Paola Prestini: I critically don't want to lose this moment in time. I really don't because I feel like if we go back to the way things were in our field, with the power structures as they are, it's not good for anybody. Not good for the people in power either because it's failing.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. It's a waste of an inflection point.

Paola Prestini: It's a waste inflection point.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: We can emerge in a more culturally healthy way.

Paola Prestini: That's right.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: One of the godmothers of this moment, it felt like there was a whole set of folks that were pulling out George Orwell at the beginning of the pandemic and said, "Here we are. 1984." And there was another set of folks that were pulling out Octavia Butler, and said, "Actually, no, HERE we are." The Parable of the Sower. And it's Parable of the Sower as a kind of seminal Afrofuturist text is maybe the third prong of this conversation today. Not so much that book and obviously that woman, but the idea of an Afrofuture. Well, here's a kind of school of Black folk, who even against the tide of genocide, are imagining Black people in the future, are saying there are Black people in the future. And we were privileged through Kamilah's brilliant insight, and expansive understanding to be able to connect to Tim Fielder, who's an Afrofuturist, graphic novelist. His latest work is called Infinitum. And I think we want to share the interview that I did with Tim with the people.

Paola Prestini: Exciting.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: So let's go there. Tim Fielder, how you doin' today brother?

Tim Fielder:

magnitude and the importance of African-based spirituality. My job is to be a vehicle. I may not be able to tell you all of the procedures of a practice, but I can show you what it looks like and that is the job of the visual futurists. That's the job of a futurist, job of a futurist is to project forward, the job of an Afrofuturist, because so much of our past has been disappeared, destroyed, burned down, we have to reconcile our positions, our jobs as futurists by looking forward and behind. This is why a lot of typical futurists got kind of caught out there a little bit because people pay them all of this money, about projecting what trends, whether it be in entertainment, politics, social structures, and Black Panther comes out and makes \$1.5 billion.

Tim Fielder: And everybody's like, "Yo, where did this come from?" They didn't know, because that's not part of their mandate, it's part of my mandate, it's part of your mandate as a futurist. And so to do that means taking a real, honest look at spirituality and how it interplays with our experience.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Tying the capital aspect into that, part of where that takes me is that there is a past, and arguably, or not so arguably a present, that diminishes the value of the Black body, let alone

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I love this idea of in order to be able to project a future, I presently must get better, which speaks to evolution. It speaks to growth, because in order to get to a future it can't look like now.

Tim Fielder: And the fact is, I hate to be a Debbie Downer, but we all are going to die. We're all here a finite amount of time. Infinitum is fake, it's make-believe, the only avenue we have towards immortality is through our children and through those things we leave behind. That's it. Our lifespans only extend a certain point. So we have it, our mandate is to leave something useful behind. And sometimes that usefulness can be painful, sometimes it can be pleasurable, but we should leave something that expands things forward.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I'm going to ask you two more questions to close. And you've alluded to this a little bit but I am curious and this question is a little tongue in cheek. But I just want you to speak based on your experience, based on your pedigree, based on your understanding, given all that you know, given-- let's not say all that you know. Given all that you've done, your experience, your study, what are three things about the future that you know for sure?

Tim Fielder: I know that the planet Earth will be here. That's the first thing, for sure. I believe that human beings have within them that ear that was given to us by the creative force, the gene of self-preservation, which has within it the capacity to overcome all evil and all negativity. Because if it gets down to, it's like, I always think about Chernobyl. Chernobyl was this horrible accident. But when it happened, what did the Soviet Union do? They took care of that problem. Why? It's about self-preservation. I believe those first two things that self-preservation and the fact that the Earth will be here gives me hope. And that's the third thing. I believe that it is our job to act within those three points I mentioned. Earth will be here, self-preservation and hope. Our job is to work within those parameters to do our job to make sure that that comes together, that happens.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Well, then, finally, how to art and creativity then remind us that the future is worth it?

Tim Fielder: I have two sons. I have a daughter. That's it. Our children, I have parents who are fortunate enough to see my book release, see my other books released. The human experience makes it worth it.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. I agree. Tim Fielder, one incredible man, one incredible artist. Thank you for your insight. And I can't wait to be face-to-face with you in the future.

Tim Fielder: Absolutely. I will say this final thing. Thank you guys for having me. And I have to put this in here because it's necessary. Infinitum can be purchased where all fine books are sold, Barnes and Noble's, Amazon, Bookshop.org, HarperCollins' website. Buy it because I got to earn it.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Brother, thank you so much fam.

Tim Fielder: Thank you.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: All right, we'll catch you on the other side, catch you in the future, peace.

Paola Prestini: What a beautiful man. [All laugh]

Kamilah Forbes: Tim Fielder. Amazing.

Paola Prestini: Oh I loved him. Wow.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: I didn't peep that he gave the Vulcan joint at the end [laughs]

Kamilah Forbes: Was that what that was? [laughs]

Marc Bamuthi Joseph: Yeah. So good.

Paola Prestini: Yeah.

Kamilah Forbes: Like it's in his blood, man, it's in his blood!

Paola Prestini: There was a lot of hope in there. I feel like there's something that keeps coming back,