

## Conversations Over a Brew

Season 2, Episode 6 – Caroline & Sandy

Transcript

Recorded on 12 November 2021 at the Heart of Glass office after a screening of Running on Fumes at Lucem House.

N – Nat

C – Caroline

S – Sandy

**22:00**

## [INTRO MUSIC]

**Nat** - Hello and welcome to Conversations over a Brew. I'm Nat Hughes from Heart of Glass and we are an Arts Organisation based in St Helens, Merseyside, and broadly speaking we support artists and communities to go on creative journeys together and make art. Conversations over a Brew is a series of intimate recorded conversations exploring the stories of the people we make art with. This podcast is about the power of listening and conversation, and how making art can bring us together and create change. In this episode, we hear from Caroline Smith and Sandy Grierson. Caroline is a filmmaker based in Liverpool. Caroline's films are made with artists and communities, and focus on telling stories that communicate truth. Sandy is a drama student at St Helens college. Last year, she worked with Caroline alongside other students from her college to produce Running On Fumes, a film about St Helens High Street. So sit back, relax and enjoy the conversation.

## [THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BOILING FADES IN, THE CLICK OF THE SWITCH INDICATING IT IS BOILED, WATER BEING POURED AND THE CLINK OF A TEASPOON STIRRING TEA IN A CUP]

**C** - Well, we met in, like, deeper kind of detail this time, but we did meet briefly on an older project didn't we? When you were much younger and I was a bit younger. [LAUGHS] We did, you know, a bit of the Haunted Furnace project together?

**S** - Yes, I remember that.

**C** - Yeah. You were a wee one. You were very, you were very young.

**S** - Yeah, I was on the Diploma on Performing Arts.

**C** - Yeah.

**S** - But now I'm on Theatre and Performance BA. So.

**C** - Yeah.

**S** - Nothing's really changed.

**C** - But on this project, I think we got a lot more time. Even though the other project was longer, this was more in depth with a less amount of people. So we got to discuss things more and get to know each other a bit more. What do you reckon?

**S** - Yeah, I actually [LAUGHS] because it was so long ago, I actually forgot about that Haunted Furnace project.

**C** - Yeah.

**S** - I remember it now. I remember it very vividly. So, my version of it is how we first met, it would have been for my community project. When you came in to do this project with us.

**C** - Oh, OK, OK.

**S** - That's my, that's my earliest memory. I mean, I've got earlier now that I remember the Haunted Furnace.

**C** - Oh so doing this Running on Fumes film was the, is that the community project, did you say? was that part of the community module, or?

**S** - I think so.

**C** - Right, OK, because I knew that we were doing stuff as part of your, like, college module. Which was really helpful of Ian and the college to make it part of obviously your schedule because you've all got other commitments and work and stuff, as well as the fact that, you know, it's, it's great for you guys, you know, just to, you know, tie it in with college work. I think like, the process was hard because it was during COVID. Oh Regina. Sorry, this is little Regina, little puppy, who's normally quite quiet, but is deciding to cry. It's OK, chill. We're having a nice chat. You got an opinion.

**S** - As quietly as possible.

**C** - Don't worry, there's a dog, like, crying in the background. So, Running on Fumes, the short film that we ended up making together. Which was brilliant. [LAUGHS].

**S** - [LAUGHS] It was pretty good.

**C** - It's weird because it came about initially from like, and I'm not sure how much, I think we did obviously tell you this during the project, but I'm not sure how much you know about this, but so Historic England have been doing massive projects about their high streets, and one part of it was to make films in different regions to see how young people feel about their high streets and the future of it. And I do think it came a bit from the impact of COVID. I'm sure this is probably in their mind anyway because it was actually planned ahead. But when Heart of Glass, they went to Heart of Glass to ask about doing it here, when Heart of Glass approached me about it. I think my initial feeling was that it was very needed here. It was about time, it was discussed through any platform and this seemed like a good platform to discuss it. So I did say when I think it was Patrick that actually first called me about it from Heart of Glass. I was like that "I don't exactly know how it's gonna go, because we've gotta go through COVID and the lockdowns and think about how we're going to engage. But whatever it is, it's got to be, you know, 100 percent honest."

**S** - Which is easy to do, especially when you, even if you are on a Zoom call, it is very easy to be very open and honest because people love to complain.

**C** - [LAUGHS] But I think you guys, you were very like, it's not like you were just complaining, you were very articulate and like you'd obviously like, you know, it affects your everyday lives and...

**S** - It definitely needed something. You're right, it did need to be done because I feel like there have been things in the past, projects in the past where we may have touched upon St Helens and how it's been, how it's declining, but I think COVID might have been the breaking point for it.

**C** - Yes, Yeah.

**S** - And I don't know if that was just a coincidence [LAUGHS] when we decided to, to do that project, but I think it was a good time to do it because COVID definitely was the breaking point for it.

**C** - Yeah, for sure. And I feel like I don't speak for Historic England but I expect they had loads of intentions and were open to what will come out of this project. But I think in general, I think the aim was to maybe talk to groups of young people about, like, you know, how much better their high street could be in loads of ways, like better shops or cooler or more stuff to do and to have like a great idea of imagine how that could be. But I thought what was really interesting about what you guys have to say is that St Helens High Street and, and the community around it have been put through the wringer I guess a bit in the sense of physically what's happened to the high street affects the community and therefore you, the stuff you wanted in the future is actually very basic human needs. Do you know, I mean, like which is, you know, it is important like, you know, with like, really insightful that it wasn't like "Oh, we need this building here and we need, you know this there really want like a place we can go and play, like computer games and we want to go." Do you know? I mean, it was more about like, we'd like a bit of brightness and some flowers and some like security, like in a sense of feeling secure around the high street and things like that.

**S** - I would, I would just in general, when you talk about brightness, it really is a matter, in, in my eyes that you look at St Helens and it's grey. It's very...but at the same time, it's I've, I've come to a point now where I've just feel like it's average now. I don't. I do want things to improve in the future and I have high hopes that they do. I definitely do think they will. Absolutely. We just need someone to turn it around. One great mind the money to invest into it and then maybe in people's eyes, it will be brighter and people will be different, a different people.

**C** - What were your hopes like? Because it's good that you're saying now about how you feel about it after it and now seeing the film again, I guess. But what were the hopes for either what you for or what you felt the group thought, hope that the project was like, gonna be or do?

**S** - Well, when, when we were doing the project, I never really before we did the project, I wasn't actually thinking about St Helens that much. Instead, it was just, just where you go for college. And then the project happened and it reminded myself of "Yeah, it is a little bit lifeless, isn't it?" You know, how did those black and white, like in the video says, how are those black and white images more lively than what's in front of our own eyes right now? And then the project ended, I guess I did other things since then, and that was when I started to develop the just average view of St Helens. And then I watched it again, and it really reminded me how much I really do hope it will go better, I do hope it will get better. It reminded me how much we're supposed to care about it too.

**C** - Do you feel any different, like, either now, and even like thinking about it after seeing the film, like, do you feel any different on the high street now compared to how you were feeling when you were recording it? Like, your personal experience on the high street or, you know, in St Helens Town Centre?

**S** - Well, I guess I just for, I didn't forget about the project. I was just doing other projects and just thought of St Helens as normal, regular, my normal, my average, nothing special. And seeing that, seeing that video shows it in its rawness. I feel like there is a raw element to that video.

**C** - Do you think there's an element of people being, because people see resilience as like tend to say it's quite positive when like, it's a positive term when people are resilient. But sometimes I think people can be pushed to the brink and it's labelled as resilient when really people deserve more. Do you know what I mean? So you were just saying it's like your normal.

**S** - Yeah.

**C** - But I wonder.

**S** - It's been conditioned. Yeah, we need to be reconditioned into hoping that it will get better. Yeah, we need to, especially young, I mean, not just young people. Young people, are the people who can push for change, but the older people are the ones who can actually make the change. Those are the ones with the funds, those are the ones with the, the know-how and the everything else. And I was reconditioned when I did your, when I did the project, when I did Running on Fumes, I, it reminded me "Oh yeah, no, yeah I want to, I want to fix this." And there definitely is a chance. We just need someone with the know-how.

## [MUSIC BREAK]

**C** - It's interesting because a project like give me, I don't know if it changed my perception, like because, I think I, you know, I am from a place where, like, sometimes, you know the area's not been given much attention and the community is suffering. But at the same time, I think like what I was kind of interested by is that like, because you guys were all had like, like, say, if they had complaints, but I think you just had like thoughts and feelings on how the town centre, like, affects you every day and how you can, some of you were saying how it's like sometimes hard even walking through at certain times. But like, which is, you know, you have that in all places. But like it's, you know, I think what you were expecting is reasonable to expect, you know? But like I think, you, what I thought was interesting is that you actually really, you felt a lot of care and love for the community, and that sometimes people can come to a place, whether they're visiting and or trying, deciding to move here or whatever and judge a space on like how it looks or what it has to offer. And that's, that's very physical. It's actually not to do with the people. Then on top of that, the people who live there, like it's just like they deserve better. Do you know what I mean?

**S** - Yeah, I know. I know exactly what you mean. And when you were saying that you care for the community but immediately put into my mind, you know, those, those, those skaters, those youths who hang around Clinton's, you know, you probably wouldn't know. I don't actually see them in a derogatory way. I don't I don't see them in a negative light.

**C** - No, a lot of you were saying that. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**S** - Yeah, because that's just that's all they've got, really. I don't want to sound patronising, but they don't really have anything else. What have we got, a 'Maccies'?

**C** - Well I guess young people, yeah, young people, and also like young people just want to hang out don't they and if they're in skating and when they go and do that somewhere.

**S** - Yeah, but there's no there's not really anywhere for them, like a skate park or like a youthful get together area. They have to resort to outside of Clinton's 8pm onwards. And it just seems a bit boring.

**C** - Yeah, because that's something that we, i don't think we got all that in the film like I said because you, you guys talked about loads of amazing stuff and we cut the film, the film could've been much longer with everything you talked about. So we had to, like, edit it down, but you were, all of you were, like, talking about all different, like, types of groups of young people because, you know, everyone kind of has a group that they're in and like, none of you were derogatory about any of them. Even the ones that you would say, maybe is, normally classed as troublemakers because you're like "Well, you know, people just want to hang out" and like, and also, there's not many jobs and it's like a cycle. And, you know, it's just kind of this social economical kind of cycle that, like, because we were saying about, it is St Helens is more than the high street. But at the same time, if that's where, like, you know, all the activity is meant to be, a lot of the jobs and everything like that I suppose it can represent what's going on in the wider community. How do you feel the group felt tonight after watching the film again? Do you felt, like, do you feel like, I mean, obviously in two ways. One, how they feel about the content of the film and what you were all talking about and how you feel about the town centre but also seeing the piece of work that you made on the screen, the big screen as well?

**S** - Well, I know one of the girls who was there, Lori, she was saying to us "Yeah, I stand by what I said, I still believe in what I said." And she's still very passionate about it. I think perhaps the screening reminded her as well. Maybe she, maybe she forgot that she said that, and she was reminded. I know for me personally, it was very emotional. It was very emotional. Because I think, because I think that video is already very raw and it's, it's very fast paced and eye-catching and flashy. It really hits the point home that I think if people who have never been introduced to it before saw it, I really think it would be a wake up call for them to think to themselves "You know what? Yeah, you're right. There isn't much to do in St Helens, and it can get better." Because all of the shots of the closed down shops and all of the empty roads and the empty streets, you put them all together in one short video and not just in a lengthy day of your life, which is regular and normal. It's, it's a bit of a wake up call. I think they might actually realise what it's like. What St Helens is really like and how it can get better because it can get better, it absolutely can get better. And it's Historic England, isn't it? Like a national thing. Which I thought was awesome, really putting a little old St Helens on the map? You know, I mean, there's loads of underdogs in England, but you know, we are on of them because a massive, massive part of it is I don't want to go off topic, but I did want to mention the male suicide rate is the highest. It is one of the highest in the entire northwest in St Helens alone. And St Helens isn't as big as other ones, so that's quite a condensed, quite a big worrying amount, you know? And that's because it's just not a very nice place. It's, it's an underdog, you know, no one cares about it.

**C** - Well, that's not off topic because I guess sometimes, like, opportunity. It's not the only reason everyone has different reasons to have taken their lives, but like.

**S** - Yeah absolutely St Helens wouldn't be just the reason.

**C** - No, but I mean, like opportunity and like, you know, what's available to you in your area and the sense of community, I guess, is like a, and funding and everything ties into that.

**S** - But at the same time, I do want to contradict myself and say that since doing that project, which was an opportunity within itself, I didn't see at the time I was interested in the project, absolutely, but I didn't see it as a massive opportunity. I thought it was just a college project. You know, now I'm actually looking back at it, it was a big opportunity and I really appreciate that. And since that, I've been more aware of what opportunities are, like other projects that I've been in and that's been based in St Helens because Heart of Glass is based in St Helens am I right? Because I was looking at the website last night.

**C** - This is Heart of Glass we're in now.

**S** - Yeah, yeah, the HoGCast. That, this within itself is an opportunity. This podcast. The other projects that I'm in at this current moment in time, the Running on Fumes. That's three projects the have all been fighting for a better future, you know, through art and a better future for St Helens. And that, to me, I think that is an opportunity and that's why it's part of my opinion of St Helens has actually changed. Apart from when I said it was a bit average. I do remind myself that it has changed a little bit for the better as well because of the opportunities and was Running on Fumes, was that, was that part of the Heart of Glass?

**C** - Yeah s. Historic England commissioned, or worked with several organisations around the country and for St Helens it was Heart of Glass.

**S** - Yeah, so that, that's three projects that I've been in with Heart of Glass, a St Helens based, you know, company?

**C** - Yeah, yeah.

**S** - A St Helens based company.

**C** - Arts organisation.

**C** - I suppose what something you just said and rings with what I was going to say about the film in the sense of like, first of all, I think like it was a really successful project despite the challenges of COVID and not being able to be together in real life or engage in a kind of process together like that, which, like I said, is partly why we we set the task of the creative right into you could have a longer to think about it. And you guys very eloquently and beautifully created an amazing piece of work. Which I think you were really considerate of each other and took on each other's feelings and I think probably was representative of a lot of young people in St Helens. I also think like, I guess, I guess, seeing the film again now on the big screen with you guys, I think I'd echo what you were saying about it being like a really condensed piece about the high streets and seeing everything, all in one go as opposed to like living it every day. I suppose the best thing for the film would be to just, for it to get to, to echo that in a sense of it, to get out to as many people as possible to who, who might empathise with it, who feel the same, who need to know who can make change and to do that really quickly while it's still relevant.

**S** - Yeah. I think it will always be relevant.

**C** - Well, hopefully it's not. Hopefully.

**S** - Well, hopefully it will change.

**C** - There'll be less issues, but there'll you know, everyone's always going to feel the way you feel, like, anywhere I guess, like, but there's different levels of that isn't there. And I think the thing that reminded me, well, the thing that it sparked in me that I hadn't quite, it's a really simple thought but I hadn't quite put together is that in any town where, like, it's maybe it's high street is on the decline, you know, hasn't been given much attention, there's a whole community waiting to use it

**S** - And they can relate to it.

**C** - Yeah, and all different, you know, just from my research of just being in the community and listening and getting coffees, to what you guys told us directly. You know, it's amazing. You can visit a place and not be from it and not think, now, any time I'd see that I'd be like "You know, this community is not getting what it deserves."

**S** - And you will probably, even if you are not in St Helens and if you in another place like St Helens, it will still resonate and hopefully give you hope to make your own place better, and that I'd loved this, I'd love the video to go out more publicly because that will resonate with more people. More people will see it even if they're not from St Helens. More people will see the film and relate it to their own town. And then hopefully every town like this in England could get better. And I wholeheartedly think it will absolutely think it will. Definitely.

**N** - Thanks for listening to this episode. Check out the show notes for more information about this project. We'll be back again soon with another Conversation Over a Brew.

**22:00**

**END**