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### **Interview with Brendan Jury**

Emphasis in *italics*.

Michael Drewett [MD]: So, Brendan – just talk a little bit about how you first came across Shifty – when did you first hear about Shifty, and then leading up to the point where you actually signed with Shifty, with Urban Creep?

Brendan [BJ]: I did my musicological studies – my main focus was on South African popular music; but quite early on, I think by my second year, I realised I thought that the most significant thing at the time was what they called the Voëlvry movement; as well as the other artists that Shifty were connecting with, and being really significant in nurturing. Like ‘The Genuines’, like ‘Tananas’ – they seemed to be the acts that I was really enjoying seeing. So, I think it was by the time I was in third year BMus studies at University of Natal, I was actually interviewing people like James [Phillips]; and André [le Toit]; and then my fourth year at university, that’s what I wrote about. So for me it was a very – it was actually kind of a, quite an active seeking out; and then this really happy accident, that we happened to get... I think it was James who said to Lloyd, ‘you’ve got to check out this band’. And they drove all the way to – to Splashy Fen. So that was a – serendipity; that was a lucky thing. And then... ’cause Chris and I had been been – we met erm – kind of just trying to get by; we were doing some – like a theatre pantomime thing, like a day job. And then we started playing music together and we started as a little duo in the Aliwal – all-night coffee bar...

MD: OK...

BJ: ...So when we got the band going, we were just really lucky enough to be noticed by – by James and then by Lloyd. And I think the most important thing was that Shifty were doing – not only were they doing politically radical projects at the time, but if you think of a band like us, we were rejected – 'cause we'd tried, with every single record company that there was. Which weren't many; but I mean I can remember it was EMI – a few names – Sony, um – and I think it's outside of Jay Savage, who as a *publisher* really nurtured us, and um... outside of that there was really nobody else that even really cared about the music. So I think it's a testament to Lloyd's, um... well hopefully it's a testament to his – I know it sounds a little bit arrogant – to, like, his acumen. But it showed that they were reaching out to places that other people were really *bold* about overlooking; y'know, quite – quite strong about overlooking.

MD: Had you – so you hadn't actually approached Shifty – they kind of approached you?

BJ: Very – as – look, it was a long time ago; I mean it's a 20-year... but as I remember... I definitely remember James Phillips actually got Lloyd to drive down with James, to Splashy Fen, and said 'you've got to see this band.' And he liked it, so – it kind of came about from that. But no, we didn't go to them with anything as far as I remember. Although – you know what? No, we were also nurtured by another person who also had a whole lot to do with Shifty, and that was Hannalie Coetzee. And she was also very important, so I would imagine that she was probably also pivotal in that relationship.

MD: That was at Jam & Sons, eh?

BJ: Yes, yeah, yeah. I can't leave that out; yes, she was very nurturing, and very kind of – very focussed on us, and part of a really exciting thing that was happening in Durban. I think she was really – undervalued as a contributor to what was happening in Durban; I mean when I look back now, it's amazing what was going on. And er... So I'm not quite certain about the details, but it was really – we were really a product of Shifty's work, Shifty's nurturing, Shifty's production.

MD: I mean you joined up with Shifty in the mid-90s, but what do you think the significance of Shifty was in the 80s, just briefly?

BJ: Well... scratching back into the memory... the Voëlvry movement and all of that – which Shifty was in – I mean they were the steering force of that. That was in the late 80s, right?

MD: Yeah

[Timecode – 00:05:58]

BJ: So as I said, it was the most significant music... Not the only source of music, but it was certainly the kind of – the most significant... well, music that was coming of the 80s in South Africa, full stop. I mean they seemed to have not only great courage in actively seeking out all of the stuff that was – definitely anti-apartheid, definitely anti-nationalist government at the time – but they also found massive heroes; like Vusi Mahlasela, and – um – André le Toit. I mean people like that are enormous forces in South African popular culture. So I think – you know, I think the energy was amazing. The energy and the – when I think of it, you know, Lloyd was actually very young.

MD: Yeah, and if you think about your experiences with Shifty, I mean they were this indie company operating in quite a difficult situation. D'you think they did all they could for you, given their resources?

BJ: Far – they went *far beyond* the call of duty. I mean Lloyd would... you know, I mean in the simplest of ways, I mean he would give us money if we needed to pay the rent, he – the – erm – the kind of – recording deals that people sign now, those 360 degree draconian kind of everything-that-you-do-is-ours. Um. He was *absolutely* not like that at *all*. So they were *extremely* nurturing and um... And just also very *good* ...I think. I mean I listened to all of the recordings that we did now for the first time in a *very* long time. I didn't have them – I had to get Chris to send them to me on a dropbox, and er – I was really kind of – happy to hear them, you know, they – the um – the kind of quality he was getting I think was very strong. And the *output* of work – I mean *amount* of work. His energy, and his commitment was *extreme*.

MD: Yeah. And I mean if – if you think back, I mean prior to when you were there; it's good to get a sense there's a camaraderie in Shifty, with people playing on each others' albums, I mean you'll see James on André's album and things like that; and it seemed to carry on when you were there as well, there was a bit of that spirit.

BJ: Yeah, Chris and I definitely... I remember playing on other people like Jennifer Ferguson's albums, um...

MD: Matthew.

[Timecode – 00:09:13]

BJ: Matthew van der Want... And then of course, I met – Warrick there, and that was hugely significant for me. I mean I ended up living underneath the – the floorboards of the studio, in that – literally in their basement. And – and then working with Warrick there, so... and we ended up doing a *whole* lot of work together, loads and loads of work.

Yeah, so for me it was profoundly significant, I mean it was the most significant, you know, of my *whole* musical *thing* in South Africa, comes from there.

MD: So – your memory of Shifty was one of quite a lot of camaraderie between the Shifty artists who were part of like a stable almost....?

BJ: Yes, absolutely, I mean I remember – I remember playing with Vusi and Louis on tour in France.

Once again it was a key Shifty person, Janneke Strijdonk, who was then working for us. And um – we had – yeah, a lot of – there was a lot of cross-pollination of just everything – ideas, and actual work, and... and they worked hard, I mean Lloyd worked extremely hard; I can see that now.

MD: And I mean what do you think that the most important difficulties, or the largest difficulties were for Shifty's indie company when you were with them. You know, what were they up against?

BJ Look, I mean, I was quite naïve, and I was young; so I didn't really know. But I mean the obvious things back then was that – there was no state intervention, um... which I would have *imagined* in most – in many countries there would be like sort of heritage foundations and stuff. Um, I think that they did get money from abroad sometimes. But, I mean they were actively hunted own by the state, and ...I mean I know for a while Warwick was a banned artist. So... that – must have been difficult, and – but furthermore there was no big capitalist parent company – there was no bailout money. I mean he must have been very frugal to make it work.

MD: OK, and just one last question is: what do think are the most important aspects of Shifty's legacy, looking back now at them?

BJ: Most important aspects of their legacy...

MD: Well what is their legacy?

[Timecode – 00:12:18]

BJ: [long pause] Um, it's difficult for me to get out of my own frame. I mean the personal legacy for me was – massive. I came from like a suburb in Durban. I couldn't believe it when I came here. I came here to work with Shifty, it was the first reason I came to Johannesburg – very early 20s. I think I was 21, and living in Yeoville – I mean it that was – so that was... For me they were like the artistic voice, in music, of the revolution.

You know, they might not have had the early kwaito artists; but they certainly were in terms of poets. Um. I mean like people like Lesego Rampolokeng – that was an amazing experience to actually meet him, to work with him, to be alongside him, to – to experience that. And that was a day-to-day kind of experience there. So in a greater sense I don't know how people would – celebrate that, but it was certainly enormous if you were a musician.

And I think... I mean even now, there were so many songs that I thought I would be embarrassed to listen to, from those times. I mean some of the things that we did, and – I realise it now – just getting songs like that played on radio, with lyrics like that – in this climate, is almost unthinkable. And so certainly for us, they gave us all sorts of possibilities and encouragement.

In a greater sense in South Africa I would *hope* that people would celebrate the fact that there was – that there *was* a really substantial alternative Afrikaans music movement... that seemed to get all over the world, and really – and I *think* was real. And – and obviously there was a great struggle movement that Shifty had a – an enormous amount to do with. But I think for me the greatest legacy was the fact that it bridged – it bridged culture groupings and things; 'cause y'know like I said somebody like me was just a guy from a suburb. And all of a sudden all of these things were encouraged, opened up, um... the kind of festivals we got to play, the things that were – were amazing, they were extraordinary.

MD: OK that's great.

BJ: Cool.

MD: Thanks.

[/ends]

