

[00:00:00] **Jarek Zaba:** Right. Uh, this is Jarek Zaba for the AMP Kingston Project from Creative Youth exploring art, music and pop fashion heritage in the Kingston borough and beyond. Today is the 5th of October, 2022, and I am with Professor Will Brooker at his office on Kingston University's Penrhyn Road Campus. Um, Professor Brooker is Professor of Film and Cultural Studies at Kingston University.

[00:00:23] **Jarek Zaba:** Is that correct? That is correct. Yep. Um, and something of a David Bowie expert, having written two books about him and having immersed himself into living as Bowie for a year. Um, Professor Brooker, do you mind just stating your name for the tape as well as your date and place of birth?

[00:00:39] **Will Brooker:** My name is Will Brooker.

[00:00:40] **Will Brooker:** I was born in Coventry, August the first, 1970.

[00:00:44] **Jarek Zaba:** Great. Um, yeah, I wonder if we could just start with some of your early years. We don't need to go into a huge amount of detail, but I just wanna, I'm curious about the role that music and I guess pop culture played in your, in your upbringing. Were you brought up in Coventry?

[00:00:57] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, was that your, um, yeah. [00:01:00] Where you brought up?

[00:01:01] **Will Brooker:** No, by. My parents and I moved around a lot in my first three years. Various small flats and rooms and so on. I think, um, working their way down to London and by the age of three I was in Southeast London where I spent most of my childhood, Charlton, a road called Kin Viche Gardens, a road of, uh, um, 70 detached houses where I used to play in the parks and play out in the street with my friends.

[00:01:27] **Will Brooker:** The music that I grew up with, um, was my parents' music really on vinyl mostly, a bit of tape, but mostly vinyl. So a lot of Beatles, um, Dylan, Neil Young, things like that stuff mostly from the sixties, not so much early seventies. Actually, I think it was mostly what they'd been into from the 1960s. Cause I remember being really upset when I found out the Beatles had split up.

[00:01:48] **Will Brooker:** So I was kind of in a bit of a time capsule, you know, because I thought they were contemporary group and they'd only split up relatively recently. But still, you know, it was something which had gone. So I

was listening to music from the past. [00:02:00] Uh, yeah, cassettes did come into play later on in the 1970s.

[00:02:04] **Will Brooker:** The first single I had for myself was, *You Are The One That I Want* from Grease. That was big favorite of mine at the time when it came out. That and *Summer Nights*, I remember really being into that. Didn't know the musical, but heard it on jukeboxes. I suppose in family restaurants. So I asked for that. My first LP on cassette was, um, The Who, My Generation.

[00:02:26] **Will Brooker:** Funny that, because I wanted it on tape cuz my parents had it on vinyl, so I wanted my own one. But that's a real kind of old man's thing for a seven, eight year old to have on cassette. But I really that the, the, the songs on The Who, um, and my first album after that, which I think was more of a kind of young person's album, was Adam & The Ants, *The Kings of The Wild Frontier*.

[00:02:47] **Will Brooker:** That was about age 10. And, and Adam Ant was the first artist I think I got into, which had nothing to do with my parents, actually. Age 10.

[00:02:56] **Jarek Zaba:** All right. That's interesting. And do you have, um, many early [00:03:00] memories of live music, going to venues? Did, uh, do, do you recall when you first saw band live?

[00:03:06] **Will Brooker:** I don't think that was till about the age of 15, 16.

[00:03:10] **Will Brooker:** And I think that was Go West somewhere like Wembley. , Ali Pali, kind of quite a big gig, I believe. That was my, I mean, that was my first kind of proper gig I had. I'd certainly seen music play live because you just, you know, you tend to, I've been a family type folky festivals with my parents, certainly. Um, and I'd sometimes been, been along, tagged along when my dad was watching music in a pub and I'd been sitting there with lemonade and I'd heard bands certainly, but, um, go West.

[00:03:40] **Will Brooker:** Again, that was a band I was genuinely into. Nothing to do with the rest of my family. I discovered them on my own. Asked for the double vinyl LP *Bangs and Crashes*, which was the second album of remixes and extended play for Christmas, probably about 85, and went to see them probably May, June with my brother.

[00:03:58] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, and that was a pretty, [00:04:00] you know, traditional pop gig for the time. It was quite lavish. Uh, a lot of lights pretty long. That wasn't a small scale thing. . Yeah.

[00:04:08] **Jarek Zaba:** And uh, and in that part of Southeast London, Charlton, were there, like, were there venues there, you know, pub venues or anything like that?

[00:04:15] **Will Brooker:** There was music in pubs.

[00:04:16] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. I remember them being banned in pubs. It was The Tram Shed, which was a local theater, community theater. So there was, I mean, I certainly went to see kind of, you know, plays which are aimed mostly at kids and families, like adaptations of children's books, things like that. There was a fair degree of community theater.

[00:04:32] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Back in the day, there was a good community spirit. And my parents were involved in that. It was a sort of, you know, left wing, kind of slightly post hippy sort of community aspect to it. Um, a sort of 1970s, early eighties labor party sort of aspect to it in the, in the Foot and Kinnock years, I suppose.

[00:04:49] **Will Brooker:** Um, based around C N D and anti Thatcher and things like that, and anti cuts. So yeah, there was, there was a fairly strong sense of a community among. [00:05:00] youngish parents in their thirties and their children. Yeah. But, um, I wasn't really part of it. I wasn't really part of that. I didn't go to that kind of thing myself.

[00:05:09] **Will Brooker:** When I became a teenager, I didn't go to any kind of local clubs. There were nightclubs. There was one called Flamingos I didn't go to. Um, it was, I was more of a kind of, to be honest, I was more into computer games and reading books than that kind of going out at the time. The, the more sociable kids in my year did that sort of thing and older kids did it, and that kind of culture was very much what I would say in the eighties was casuals, casuals, pastel, Farah jumpers and Farah, um, gray trousers, that kind of neat thing that maybe evolved a little bit from mods. It was all about labels and neatness and pristine, V-neck, pink jumper, a bit Miami Vice kind of stuff.

[00:05:55] **Will Brooker:** It was casuals who did that kind of thing.

[00:05:57] **Jarek Zaba:** Right. And what, what, what, what, what were you wearing [00:06:00] fashion, wise at this time?

[00:06:01] **Will Brooker:** That's a good point. , ironically, um, I wa I was dressed like, I was dressed like a casual because casual was pretty much high street, um, Topshop and Next sort of thing. I think, uh, I mean that was all that was available unless you were indie and went to Black Heath or Camden or Soho and were part of a sort of indie scene and had indie friends and those kind of people would be a bit post-punk.

[00:06:27] **Will Brooker:** Smiths and The Cure kind of tend to a gothic, not quite fully gothic, but kind of indie meant really dyeing your clothes, black, black jeans, um, a kind of band t-shirt with The Clash or something on The Smiths or The Cure, or Sister Mercy or the Cult or something. So it was indie, um, goth oriented, and that was complete, basically it was, are you casual or indie?

[00:06:50] **Will Brooker:** I think that was the main social divisions at the time. And I wasn't really one or the other. I was more indie in my sentiments, but I wasn't bold enough and didn't have enough indie friends to [00:07:00] become part of that group. And so I just in a kind of cowardly way, you know, fell into the easiest possible option and wore high street clothes. Inside I was more indie, I think.

[00:07:09] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure, sure. Um, and in terms of the music, um, you mentioned a couple of artists that, that, that you got into Go West, Adam Ant. Um, how, what would your route into these artists have been? Would it have been the radio or would it have been wandering into record stores? .

[00:07:22] **Will Brooker:** Um, I think with, okay with my first ones, Grease.

[00:07:26] **Will Brooker:** That was, I remember hearing the songs all the time. Basically. They were on all the time. I remember really being into, um, *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* as well from *Evita*. Cause I just heard all the time. Didn't buy that Adam and The Ants. That's a tough one. Probably Top of The Pops. Mm. Probably Top of The Pops because Adam Man had such fun videos.

[00:07:42] **Will Brooker:** Um, lots of dressing up. It was, it was, I mean, I think it was great music, but he was having a lot of fun. It was like, um, dressing up, playing with, with toys. , different personas, a bit Bowie like actually, but more accessible kind of music. So that was fun stuff. Yeah, that was probably top of the pops. Um, Go [00:08:00] West.

[00:08:00] **Will Brooker:** I got into that because I saw their videos again on Max Headroom's show mid 1980s. So it was through videos actually.

[00:08:08] **Jarek Zaba:** What what, so what was the Max Headroom?

[00:08:09] **Will Brooker:** Max Headroom, yeah. What's the, yeah. Oh, well, for my generations this was big and Max Headroom was supposedly the first computer generated, um, TV host.

[00:08:18] **Will Brooker:** He was played by an actor called Matt Frewer, who was actually wearing a lot of latex makeup and some digital effects. But he was supposed to be a CGI character, but actually it was an actor. So it was a very kind of mid eighties computer age kind of thing. He was a, like a VJ, a video jockey who was supposed to be computer and generated his speech would stutter, um, and he would kind of flick around on the screen.

[00:08:39] **Jarek Zaba:** But what did he appear on?

[00:08:40] **Will Brooker:** Well, he had, okay, there was an origin program for Max Headroom called 20 Minutes Into The Future, which was a kind of science fiction adventure explaining where he came from. And then there was the Max Headroom Video Show, I think, called The Max Headroom Show, which was him doing the introductions and then showing the best videos of [00:09:00] the time.

[00:09:00] **Jarek Zaba:** Right?

[00:09:01] **Will Brooker:** And it wasn't just pop, it wasn't top 10. It was these are, interesting, innovative videos. And I really like videos. So basically the bands I got into were cuz of their videos actually thinking about it.

[00:09:11] **Jarek Zaba:** Was this on BBC or was...

[00:09:13] **Will Brooker:** ...on Channel Four I think

[00:09:14] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, Channel Four. Okay.

[00:09:15] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. But Max Headroom remained as a character for some time. It was kind of one of those iconic, you know, um, eighties.

[00:09:24] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure.

[00:09:24] **Will Brooker:** Images.

[00:09:25] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure.

[00:09:26] **Will Brooker:** Which obviously has now died.

[00:09:27] **Jarek Zaba:** Well, I should, I should certainly look into him.

[00:09:29] **Will Brooker:** Well, I'll tell you one thing though. It's a little bit at trivia in *Back to The Future 2*. When Marty McFly goes to the cafe eighties, there are two talking heads of Reagan and Gorbachov who look like Max Headroom.

[00:09:38] **Will Brooker:** So that was the reference they were making there. There's his animated talking heads arguing with each other in the Max Headroom visual style.

[00:09:45] **Jarek Zaba:** Well that, that leads on nicely to what I was gonna ask about next, which is, you know, academically speaking and also through, through the the Bowie project, which we'll come onto. Um, clearly you've got a, you know, a strong passion for cultural studies and pop culture in particular.

[00:10:00] Um, do you remember when you sort of really started developing that interest or passion?

[00:10:06] **Will Brooker:** I mean, academically would be different from personally probably cuz like academically there's sort of a formal point.

[00:10:10] **Will Brooker:** When do you roll on a certain course? I mean, on a personal level, I remember in the 1970s taping things off the radio and pressing pause to write down the lyrics and getting two tape recorders and trying to mix songs together, things like that. Um, and then in the 1980s I was like programming video games and, you know, studying videos.

[00:10:28] **Will Brooker:** As soon as we had a video recorder, I would like be really into like, pausing things and, um, you know, freeze framing and rewinding and studying things. So, You know, and when I watched *Star Wars* as a *Star Wars* fan, I had a notebook in the cinema writing down lines of dialogue and stuff. Cause it was only on there once.

[00:10:45] **Will Brooker:** We didn't have a video of it. Um, so, you know, I would write notes in films as a, as a really young fan. And once I sneaked a tape recorder into a screening of *Star Wars*, because I knew I wouldn't see it for another three years. So I wanted an audio recording of it so I could learn the

dialogue. So in a [00:11:00] way, I think I've been into, I mean, I've been into popular culture in quite a serious way since as long as I can remember.

[00:11:05] **Will Brooker:** Um, when I was at school, things were more kind of conservative and, and traditional than they are now. I had quite a young English teacher who introduced like three lessons of film studies. That was the first film studies I did. He's like, we're gonna try something different here. Right? Brought in some BFI stuff at A Level.

[00:11:23] **Will Brooker:** I think a level film studies did exist, but I was persuaded strongly away from it by everyone in my sixth form. Maybe also my parents to do French and German instead. More safer subjects. Um, university age 18, I went to University of East Anglia. And I did the most film studies course you could, which was 50%, and it was 50% film, 50% English literature.

[00:11:43] **Will Brooker:** So as soon as I had the chance, I did the most film you could. And even then, only one module on that, as we now call it one class was television. So television at that point was even more beyond the pale than film, which was quite radical in itself. Video games, comics, completely [00:12:00] not, I mean, there wasn't really much to study in terms of video games, but comics were completely off the chart, you had to propose? I mean, I remember writing a couple of essays about comics and my tutors didn't even know what I was talking about. So the study of pop culture was at an earlier stage. So the first time I became a kind of film scholar was age 18 when I studied it formally. But I think I'd been doing it since the first thought.

[00:12:24] **Will Brooker:** I mean, Star Wars was the second film I saw. So, since a very young age. I've been studying film, if you like.

[00:12:29] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah. Cause I guess, you know, most teenagers have an, have an interest in film or music. Uh, but you were sort of not just consuming them, you were kind of analyzing them at the, at the same time.

[00:12:39] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, but I think probably that is true of a lot of people. If you asked them, I mean, the only way you get lyrics back then was if it wasn't published on the back page of *Looking*, which I also used to get *Looking*, had song words on the back. You would have to tape it off the radio. And go through and pause and try and work out what the lyrics were. So I imagine there's probably a generation.

[00:12:56] **Jarek Zaba:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:56] **Will Brooker:** Who did that. And there's probably a generation of girls, more girls who would study [00:13:00] the dance moves choreography in their bedrooms. And there's probably a lot of people who would study what someone's wearing on top of the pops and go out and try and buy it.

[00:13:06] **Will Brooker:** So I reckon there's probably a culture of it, but maybe I had a particularly kind of, you know, obsessive approach to it.

[00:13:14] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, and when did David Bowie first enter your realm, your, your radar?

[00:13:19] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, I think it was, um, okay. I don't know exactly when, but I know that my dad had bought the single *Jean Genie* and *Ziggy Stardust*, so he probably bought that when it came out.

[00:13:31] **Will Brooker:** And he told me afterwards he bought it sort of because in a way I can understand in a way I would do now. He bought it because he thought this was important. He didn't like it, but he thought this guy is culturally important, this is historical or something. I better have it. So, um, I would sometimes play that on my parents' vinyl and I liked it well enough, I suppose it's kind of rock.

[00:13:49] **Will Brooker:** It was fairly accessible. Um, so that was my first experience and I regarded it as like, you know, my parents single, just like all their other singles and there was a huge variety of singles. So it was [00:14:00] one of those quite liked it. Um, yeah, *Jean Genie*, I remember pretty well probably taped it and put it in one of my own tapes.

[00:14:05] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Uh, and I, you know, brought up images in my head about what *Jean Genie* was, I suppose, and who the characters were. I remember *Ashes to Ashes* was number one for a while on Top of The Pops, and I did not like it. And I don't think it was supposed to be liked by kids. It was deliberately kind of unnerving and spooky, um, like vaguely sexual, sort of nightmarish, surreal.

[00:14:28] **Will Brooker:** And that wasn't my taste at all. So at that point I thought Bowie is not really. I don't like this guy, you know, I'd rather watch *Super Trouper* by ABBA or something.

[00:14:36] **Jarek Zaba:** What, uh, what year was *Ashes to Ashes*?

[00:14:37] **Will Brooker:** Around 80.

[00:14:38] **Jarek Zaba:** 80, right.

[00:14:39] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. So I was 10. Yeah.

[00:14:40] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:14:40] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, 10.

[00:14:41] **Jarek Zaba:** So were you aware of Ziggy Stardust at this stage?

[00:14:45] **Will Brooker:** Well, I know the song was called Ziggy Stardust, and that was it. I think.

[00:14:48] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:14:48] **Will Brooker:** I didn't, I think, I suppose I, I thought it was in some confusing way. David Bowie doing a song called Ziggy Stardust. Yeah. So I imagine, I suppose he was writing songs about characters and Jean Jeanie was another. I didn't think he was [00:15:00] called Ziggy Stardust or anything like that.

[00:15:01] **Jarek Zaba:** So what was the point where it clicked and you were suddenly a Bowie fan?

[00:15:05] **Will Brooker:** Yeah.

[00:15:06] **Will Brooker:** Oh, well, I was only a Bowie fan of Let's Dance Bowie. I still didn't like, um, Ashes to Ashes, but When Let's Dance came out in 83', I became a fan of that album and that period of Bowie. And again, as soon as I saw the videos for Let's Dance and, um, Loving the Alien from around that period, you know, I got a crush really.

[00:15:23] **Will Brooker:** I mean, I was like fascinated and had a. You know, one of those ambiguous things where you sort of want to be 'em, you know, and you know, you have sort of confusing feelings, perhaps not sexual, but sort of like, I wish I was Bowie. Mm-hmm. Bowie's such a cool guy. I wish I knew him. I wish he was my friend.

[00:15:39] **Will Brooker:** I'm not quite sure what, but I used to definitely watch Bowie videos, like really, really closely studying them. Um, and I just found 'em a really fascinating, captivating. figure. Not that he was so traditionally

good looking, but he'd have something very quirky and, um, charismatic about him in a slightly strange and unusual way.

[00:15:56] **Will Brooker:** And I think as someone who felt a bit persecuted at school and [00:16:00] didn't, you know, didn't 100% fit in just like a lot of people didn't. But I mean, um, I think I felt a sense of the outsider about him in those videos as well, that, you know, a bit like the loner, that you could be cool and be a loner in *Let's Dance*.

[00:16:14] **Will Brooker:** I distinctly remember. He's in a kind of quite laddish, um, pub in the outback of Australia and he's standing against a wall wearing a suit and maybe even a white glove looking a bit outta place and people are laughing at him. And I think I kind of, that communicated the message to me about this guy is a bit on the outside and he's aloof and he's cool, you know, so that appealed to who I felt I was a little bit at the.

[00:16:38] **Will Brooker:** I

[00:16:38] **Jarek Zaba:** think they still, that's a, a, a, um, just a random village in Australia, isn't it? That he, he genuinely went into the bar and filmed, and I think they still celebrate each year. They celebrate the Lets Dance video that...

[00:16:49] **Will Brooker:** ...well, I heard that. I mean, at the time it was, it was two way. Um, they thought he was really snobbish and rude.

[00:16:55] **Jarek Zaba:** Really?

[00:16:56] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Um, which I can imagine. Which I can imagine. So what I [00:17:00] saw there was truth to it, but it was partly his fault. Yeah. He was partly prompting this reaction. Um, so, okay. But the first time I became a fan of his other music was around 86. 86. I had a friend who worked in Woolworths, I think, and I, once I went and talked to him, he to slip me the cassette of, um, *Changes* Bowie, we'd have to find out when *Changes* Bowie came out. Double cassette. Uh, and he got sacked from that job for being too generous shortly afterward. But I really asked him, him to thank a boy called Martin Hutton, um, who was at my school. He was a, he was a cool, popular boy who, uh, nice of him to be friends with me. Yeah. He gave me this, um, cassette and that's when I first, I guess, connected *Jean Jeanie* and everything with the David Bowie and got a sense of Bowie's history and back catalog.

[00:17:43] **Will Brooker:** And I pretty much liked all of that. So I suppose it was around 86, 87, I became a fan of Bowie's work and career.

[00:17:49] **Jarek Zaba:** And you talk about that, those early confusing feelings as you described them, of wanting to be Bowie. Um, then what's, um, 20 something years later, you find yourself

[00:17:59] **Will Brooker:** [00:18:00] Was it 20? 20. 30. 30 later.

[00:18:03] **Jarek Zaba:** 30 years later. Sorry. Um.

[00:18:04] **Will Brooker:** I achieved my aim.

[00:18:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, yes. Yes. You, uh, well, you've probably come as close to being Bowie as anyone that isn't David Bowie.

[00:18:11] **Will Brooker:** Yeah.

[00:18:12] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, where did the genesis of that project come from?

[00:18:16] **Will Brooker:** I suppose? I mean, look, I mean, you've just pointed out maybe it was there always, right? I mean, maybe it just needed an excuse to, to trigger it.

[00:18:24] **Will Brooker:** Because I think in a lot of people, the same circumstances would not have prompted someone to do that. So perhaps it was just like I sort of wanted to and needed an excuse. Um, I mean, that would be a kind of repressed version of the story. The, the more conscious version of the story for me is, and I mean this is the truth as I see it, Lou Reed had died and.

[00:18:45] **Will Brooker:** Lou Reed just died. Lou Reed was five years older than Bowie, and I suddenly thought, look, Bowie's not gonna be around forever. Which I think a lot of bow fans genuinely thought Bowie will be around forever. And suddenly I realized, you know, Bowie is like of an age where um, we have to come to terms with his mortality.

[00:18:59] **Will Brooker:** And I'd been deliberately [00:19:00] not writing anything about him academically, even though I've written about a lot of other things, which, which I like. Um, because I didn't wanna sort of ruin the pleasure and um, you know, mix up work with, with, with, with hobby, you know, mix up love and work or whatever. I didn't want to, I didn't want to, um, sorry.

[00:19:18] **Will Brooker:** I'm my, I realized my phone's phone is going off because, uh, because it's, because it seems to be listening to my voice and, um...

[00:19:28] **Jarek Zaba:** oh, it, thanks for talking to it?

[00:19:29] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. It's doing all sorts of things. Um, so I didn't write about Bowie because um. I didn't wanna mix up work and pleasure, but realizing that there was kind of limited period within which I could write about and publish that by while he was still alive.

[00:19:44] **Will Brooker:** I, I, I felt that time limit and I felt like I should do it while he's alive, just in a vague sense, you know, not really expecting him to read anything I wrote, but so, , you know, just to do it. Not in memoriam, but while he was still extant, while he's still active. [00:20:00] So then I thought, okay, you know, I should write a book about Bowie, cause that's my way, that's my main way of expression, that's my main form of artistic expression, to write, to write books at that point.

[00:20:09] **Will Brooker:** Um, went through the process of getting a contract and everything. So I had, you know, I was tied into writing a book, and then I had to think about what kind of book it was. Is that all right?

[00:20:17] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, yeah. It's becoming less alright.

[00:20:19] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, yeah. Sure, sure, sure. We can't do a lot about it.

[00:20:22] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, let me,

[00:20:32] **Jarek Zaba:** Uh, do you remember where you were?

[00:20:34] **Will Brooker:** I do, yeah. So I was contracted to write a book about David Bowie, but I didn't really know how to get into it. And as I started researching, I realized for the first time just how many books there are already on Bowie. I'd only read a few. And so I was faced with this situation where I had to write a book and I, I kind of started feeling well.

[00:20:52] **Will Brooker:** The market is full. Everything's kind of been done. I, I still wanted to do it, but I had to kind of find a way into it, and I tried various approaches [00:21:00] which I couldn't quite engage with and didn't take off for me. And then the start of this immersive process was, I, I thought, well, look, as

a start, why don't I listen to the music that Bowie would listen to in the sixties and watch the films and just try and get myself in the right mood, you know?

[00:21:14] **Will Brooker:** So I started drawing up, you know, a playlist and going through all the biographies I had and list of films he'd seen and books he'd read. I thought if I can try and recreate the cultural context right, then I can put myself in the right place to do it. And around that time, um, I decided to, I don't know, some sort of symbol of commitment to it to get my hair cut and colored like Bowie in the man f l to Earth, and on the cover of the low album.

[00:21:38] **Will Brooker:** Which again, I think I'd probably always wanted to do on one level. I mean, you know, it wasn't necessary. And that is my favorite Bowie haircut cuz I sort of felt, well if I can see it whenever I look in the mirror, then I'll be probably locked into the project tonight. It'll be like a symbol of ritual commitment somehow.

[00:21:55] **Will Brooker:** Um, and then I started buying like sixties clothes, vintage, [00:22:00] things like that, committing to it more. I was thinking like, what would Bowie do? You know, I went to some of the cafes that Bowie used to sit in. I was just trying to get myself in the mood. I think just trying to kind of get the vibe and get a feeling of, you know, who he'd been and to get a sense of, um, what was going into his head in terms of understanding what came out of his head.

[00:22:17] **Will Brooker:** I think that was it, to understand the cultural input into Bowie. To try and recreate the cultural context in order to better understand Bowie, because otherwise how did you put yourself back into the head of someone in Bromley in the 1960s? And I think it was also tempting, cause I'm not even far from Bromley really.

[00:22:32] **Will Brooker:** I mean, where I grew up, Charan and Woolwich isn't so far. Um, you know, we both had like, um, Lewisham in common. We both used to go shopping in Lewisham. It was a bus ride away from both of us. I didn't feel he is that ironically considering it's Bowie, alien to me in terms of his upbringing. Whereas if I'd like grown up in Paris or something on New Orleans, I think it might feel too ambitious, but I kind of felt, you know, we'd, we'd sort of had neighboring [00:23:00] experiences.

[00:23:01] **Will Brooker:** Well, that's where it began. And I think then what happened is I was on Twitter a lot of the time and I was going to a conference in, in, um, in Melbourne where I was gonna talk about Bowie. In fact, I was a keynote speaker, so I had to have something good. So I put together a kind of

video. Of me transforming into Bowie or something and my research so far. Um, and you know, on Twitter in June, newspapers, like look at people's Twitter and try and find a sort of fun story. So one academic journalist phoned me up and said, look, what's this about you being Bowie? So I talked about it and then like The Mirror picked it up or something, and then The Sun or something. And then the world picked up really is what happened in July and August. It just, it was a nice quiet season. It's a fun story. I used to see myself everywhere. You know, I saw myself Rolling Stone, loads of places I didn't talk to. The Mail cause I didn't wanna talk to The Mail, saw myself slagged off in The Mail.

[00:23:54] **Will Brooker:** If I can say slagged off, I saw myself criticized in The Mail. Um, and there was some good stuff. I did [00:24:00] lots of radio. I did, uh, This Morning and then there was lots of international media interested in me. So I was flown to various places for like interviews and talk. And this was all in costume. And so this was contributing to my sense of commitment and immersion because I was doing it in, in, in costume and makeup, and I was being treated not like David Bowie, but certainly like a kind of, you know, a public figure, like a kind of avatar of Bowie.

[00:24:27] **Will Brooker:** People were certainly coming up to me as if they could speak to Bowie through me in a way, and people were certainly reacting to me very differently and I could not like to sit down on my own. People would come and sit next to me and talk to me as if I belonged to the public. And so it just became a cycle whereby, you know, because I was doing so many interviews and being treated as if I was sort of, you know, semi, semi-famous, um, it just consolidated that self, that sense of kind of quasi Bowie self.

[00:24:54] **Will Brooker:** So, and I kept on saying yes to things. Cause I thought, I mean, I knew, I think I was right. It would help the [00:25:00] process. It would help me to understand David Bowie in the early 1970s when he really took. to be constantly in demand and to to have your photo appearing all sorts of places, and to have people talking about you and to have to repeat the same story over and over again and to see what happens.

[00:25:15] **Will Brooker:** Like, don't you just make up your own stories, what you do just for variation and to see what they'll print. So I knew what Bowie did with journalists and so I started doing it as well. And it just became this strange, but I think quite useful cycle where my experience, um, combined with what I knew of Bowie's experience and it just consolidated itself and it kind of confirmed it this sense of like Brooker/Bowie.

[00:25:42] **Will Brooker:** And that went on for a few months before it calmed down.

[00:25:45] **Jarek Zaba:** And Bowie sang fame of course. And, and, and perhaps, you know, you talk about the fact that you almost felt like public property people keep, people came up and spoke to you, um, uh, without giving you time to yourself. I mean, I guess that might be a glimpse.[00:26:00]

[00:26:00] **Jarek Zaba:** You know, the, the fame that Bowie would've, would've had.

[00:26:03] **Will Brooker:** Well, that's exactly why I kept on doing it, even though, I mean, I sometimes wondered was this why? And it was certainly very, very tiring psychologically and, and physically. And I mean, I was spending time away from home. I was traveling a lot, traveling a great deal, and lots of long distance flights and stuck at airports and all sorts of things like that.

[00:26:19] **Will Brooker:** Um, yeah, the reason I did it was, I mean, I suppose partly I thought this is gonna be my one opportunity to have this experience in my entire life. And it started so, do it. I should say yes to things, but also I thought this is unique experience to write about and this is given me what I wanted in the first place, which was a sense of what things were like for Bowie.

[00:26:38] **Will Brooker:** A small sense.

[00:26:40] **Jarek Zaba:** And I wonder if you could just detail some of the, uh, personas that you adopted. Um, and with specific reference, I mean, we, on this project are really interested in Bowie's legacy in terms of pop fashion. Um, so, um, I wonder if you could talk specifically about outfits, um, you've kindly agreed to, to, to [00:27:00] loan an outfit for, for our exhibition.

[00:27:01] **Jarek Zaba:** So with, with specific reference to that one. Um, but yeah, if we could just talk about Yeah. The personas and the outfits mm-hmm. and, and what and which you enjoyed the most.

[00:27:10] **Will Brooker:** Sure. , uh, I think the first step with the early bow was getting a good wig, and there's a lot of bad wigs. I got a, a pretty good, um, wig from Japan, ironically, uh, like some cat from Japan as Bowie, he says himself.

[00:27:23] **Will Brooker:** And Bowie was a big fan of Japanese fashion as well. So...

[00:27:25] **Will Brooker:** I was

[00:27:25] **Jarek Zaba:** gonna say, wasn't Ziggy, uh, in, in a large part inspired by Japanese culture?

[00:27:29] **Will Brooker:** Yeah, yeah. A kind of, you know, a version of Japanese culture. Yeah. So that's appropriate as well. There were a lot of coincidences like that. I had, uh, the red wig and the kind of kimono, a lot of it was obviously makeup.

[00:27:39] **Will Brooker:** I, I'd done a fair bit of photography before and filmmaking, as a photographer and a filmmaker rather than any kind of model. So I knew a lot of makeup artists and I got some really good ones. I worked with a few and they, um, got into the spirit of things and only used cosmetics from the early 1970s sometimes.

[00:27:55] **Will Brooker:** So real kind of pancake stuff, thick stuff, and the right colors. So I kind of knew [00:28:00] some models and, and makeup artists and stylists, which was useful. So I drew on them and some photographers as well. Cause I needed people to photograph me. I needed people to come and pap me outside of places. So I, you know, I caught up a lot of contacts that I already knew, um, with Ziggy and Aladdin Sane, makeup is a huge one, obviously, and that took a long, long time.

[00:28:19] **Will Brooker:** I had various people recreate that look. Uh, with one of the outfits that I re-invested in the most, it was, um, I went to a dress designer in Esher called Jo Irvine, who had designed for Strictly and, uh, a Little Mix and, um, asked her to make me a copy of, I think it's Bowie's outfit on Top Pop on German television.

[00:28:41] **Will Brooker:** It's well known. It's, it's associated, um, mostly with *Rebel Rebel*, I think. Some people call it Halloween Jack. I'm not sure if it's really Halloween Jack. Anyway, it's got an eye patch and it's kind of scarlet dungarees and what seems like two shirts or blouses, um, cut and pasted together [00:29:00] and, and the red hair.

[00:29:01] **Will Brooker:** So, and, and some kind of pirate jewelry. So what I did with her, I got two. Vintage shirts of the right colour and pattern off of eBay, and she literally sewed them in half or cut 'em in half and sewed them together. We got some women's dungarees, which she in a, in a large size, which she kind of tailored for me and found exactly the right kind of pillar box red.

[00:29:21] **Will Brooker:** That's very good. And put zips on them in the right places. Um, Most of the stuff I got off eBay, uh, had bangles, which were very much like the, um, bracelets that I think Bowie and Angie exchanged at their wedding. He wore, he wore a gold bangle, an eye patch, obviously a big hoop earring, and then the makeup and the wig.

[00:29:40] **Will Brooker:** Oh, and um, boots with six inch heels, big leather. Leather, leather? PVC boots, and that was the most elaborate outfit. Very, very hard to walk in. That was a really kind of striking outfit. Cause it made me huge. I mean, it made me really tall, like I was on stilts and that's what I wore for two gigs at Kingston University.

[00:29:59] **Will Brooker:** I [00:30:00] think I did two gigs here with The Thin White Duke. And so the other outfits with both those gigs, I changed at halftime during the interval. Um, the other outfit I had was, went to a tailor up in London and got a version of the, um, *Life on Mars* powder blue suit, which has got a specific kind of color and specific kind of covered blue button that's a really nice kind of ice blue color.

[00:30:22] **Will Brooker:** Yellow suit. Again, I bought it online. I got it kind of tailored to fit me. The yellow suit is from Bowie's 1980s more *Let's Dance* stage, that's what he wore on stage in the 1980s. A Thin White Duke is quite easy to manufacture. A certain, I had a seventies style shirt made with the right kind of collar, and that's just a white shirt and a waistcoat.

[00:30:42] **Will Brooker:** It's kind of like, you know, an Italian waiter or something, or a German expressionist, um, master of ceremonies that's based on amongst other things. Yeah, German expressionist film and film. And the, uh, the MC from, from Cabaret, the musical, they all come with different hair, of course. Um, [00:31:00] Uh, my favorite though was none of these, actually, there was a lot of eighties clothes as well, which I, I did enjoy the eh-eh.

[00:31:06] **Will Brooker:** No, no. There were two that I liked the bu- the best and they weren't seventies. Funnily enough, seventies wasn't so fun. Seventies, I think, Bowie's 1970s was, was very, very manic. Certainly his early seventies, the most exciting part. Very, very manic. Very, very urgent, very unsettled, very impatient. Um, the periods I liked the most were, yeah, the eighties.

[00:31:27] **Will Brooker:** And I think one reason for that is actually because it enabled me to become the cool guy that I wished I'd been when I was 13 to 15, the Bowie that I'd admired in the mid 1980s. And it's very casual. It's like, you

know, the Miami Vice kind of big jackets with padded shoulders and rolled up sleeves. Um, I went for a spray tan.

[00:31:46] **Will Brooker:** They didn't have spray tans in the eighties. I think, you know, he would've actually gone to Monaco or somewhere for his spray tan. Um, kind of big quiff. Very, very sprayed blonde hair. And I bought kind of eighties products like L'Oreal. I bought the aftershave that Bowie [00:32:00] was wearing around the time called Minator.

[00:32:02] **Will Brooker:** Um, had the teeth whitened and so on. Uh, you know, and I was really just becoming this kind of Miami Vice type, Max Headroom type figure, actually kind of tanned and blonde and very kind of very, very confident and shiny with the swinging shoulders. And, you know, I did things like, um, tip black cab drivers is very, very big to just drive me round the block so people could film me getting out at a posh hotel like the Ritz or something, and Claridges papping me and I would tip the, um, the doorman a lot just to like, you know, to let me in and be part of the shot.

[00:32:34] **Will Brooker:** So I was getting out my twenties. I spent a lot of money just like I was throwing around the twenties buying people cocktails in the, in the, in the bar of the hotel. And, you know, it was, it was stupid really. I mean, it was an expensive-

[00:32:45] **Jarek Zaba:** You were acting like Bowie without Bowie's bank account.

[00:32:47] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

[00:32:48] **Will Brooker:** I didn't have it at the start, and I certainly didn't have it at the end, but I had to, I had to commit to this. I spent money on this stuff. Uh, on this expensive hobby. I mean, it was fun. I'm glad I've got a record of it. You know, I've got photos of it and film of it, [00:33:00] so I was just acting the kind of big eighties pop star.

[00:33:02] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Not in the eighties. Not as a pop star. I mean, I was kind of doing a bit of fronting of bands and not with Bowie's money either. Um, but it was just a super living out of a fancy of what I think I wish I'd been in the 1980s. And the other one I liked the most actually. I suspect Bowie really liked this from Bowie's *Earthling*, period.

[00:33:21] **Will Brooker:** 97', he'd just turned 50, um, drum and bass. He, his, his venture into jungle music, which a lot of people think was really unwise and

clumsy. I think he was, he was just having fun, you know, he'd just turned 50. Grew a little goatee beard, dyed his hair kind of spiky orange. Um, Alexander McQueen coat with a union flag on the back, which I had a copy of that made.

[00:33:42] **Will Brooker:** And it's really kind of like a pantomime villains sort of figure. And I did a gig, um, dressed as him at um, Vauxhall Tavern, which I performed at a few times. One of London's oldest queer clubs, pubs, cabaret clubs. Had a really, really good time doing that. [00:34:00] I actually hired two dancers to choreograph me a, um, you know, an art, an act, uh, backing dancers.

[00:34:06] **Will Brooker:** I made their costumes for them. It was just sort of super fun hobby stuff, really like playing at theater. But, um, why not? And Bowie was also playing at theater at the same time I think. So, you know, was I having a midlife crisis? Maybe. Maybe Bowie did as well. It doesn't, in a way, it doesn't really matter. I think it's just good to be creative and have fun, and I was letting myself do things that I hadn't done for many years as an academic.

[00:34:29] **Will Brooker:** Just things like painting and making stuff, and making clothes and printing stuff and all sorts of things, making clay, playing around with film, different cameras. I dug out my old cine camera. I had to send it to Germany to get it developed because you can't get cine film developed anywhere. So I was kind of rediscovering stuff.

[00:34:47] **Will Brooker:** I'd given up as a kid.

[00:34:49] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure. And, um, yeah, you've spoken there, um, very well about, uh, what you enjoyed about it. What were some of the challenges perhaps, uh, involved with, with, with that project?

[00:34:59] **Will Brooker:** [00:35:00] I mean, it wasn't good to see yourself being mocked in the world Media really. I kind of avoided it, but I, I, I knew it was going on.

[00:35:07] **Will Brooker:** That's a, that's a bit uncomfortable. Uh, I knew that some people thought I was being very self indulgent. And maybe they had some idea that, you know, academics shouldn't be doing it. Maybe no one should be doing it. That I was wasting someone's money, well I was wasting my money. Um, there was a certain, I think there was a certain strand of purest bow fans who felt this is, um, this is inappropriate.

[00:35:29] **Will Brooker:** You know, this is, uh, and this was before he died, you know, this is, you know, arrogant. You don't have a right to do this. And I, I

actually feel that some of Bowie's collaborators. Former band mates felt that way. And I do know, I respect that. I don't blame them because, you know, he's much, much more talented than me and they knew him.

[00:35:47] **Will Brooker:** And to hear about some Johnny come lately, like being Bowie, that would, you know, that would annoy me as well, to be honest. So I did meet a number of people who'd kind of played and, and worked with him and um, you know, they were kind of [00:36:00] nice, but I do think their attitude. We're not, we're not, we're certainly not gonna endorse this.

[00:36:04] **Will Brooker:** We're not gonna give you any kind of positive quotation because it's not really, when I distance myself from this, I can, I can get that. I'd feel the same way in their position. Um, on the street I had a bit of hostility. You know, you do, you know, a man wearing funny clothes and makeup you do, Bowie had it as well.

[00:36:19] **Will Brooker:** And so I had to, you know, embrace that because as sort of part of the project that people are gonna react in a hostile way to a man who's dressed in a, um, a sort of non-conformist. Nonconformance man. And most people were pretty friendly about it, but there was a bit of, there was a bit of aggression. Um, and I think the other thing was really psychologically, like I say, physically, it was tiring.

[00:36:41] **Will Brooker:** There was a lot of long haul flights. There was a lot of times I got zero sleep. There was a lot of demands of my attention. It was very, very physically draining. I mean, I wasn't as young as Bowie was when he did that stuff in the seventies. And it was, you know, it was pushing my, it was pushing me physically, I think. Psychologically, I would [00:37:00] say the most obvious thing is trying to get into The Thin White Duke character. And I thought, well, I've gotta read like the sort of stuff Bowie was reading, which was, um, Aleister Crowley magic stuff and, um, Nietzsche about the Superman. And I just decided to hole myself up in a hotel room with the blinds drawn, um, and just immerse myself in this sort of literature and invite people who I knew were a bit extreme to come and like, interview me and talk to me and I could feel myself.

[00:37:27] **Will Brooker:** I could feel myself sort of not starting to, starting to indulge, um, beliefs that were bigoted because I was trying to get into Bowie's mindset and I knew that I didn't really believe it, but I was trying to kind of play with his ideas and I could feel how easy it would be. In a certain mood think, yeah, we are the sort of superiors and other people should, you know, should serve us.

[00:37:52] **Will Brooker:** And that is something I wanted to distance myself. That was something disturbing to me how easy it would be to isolate [00:38:00] yourself and read a certain kind of thing and believe a certain kind of thing, and get yourself in this arrogant spirit of, of, of believing things which are, which are narrow minded and very unhealthy.

[00:38:10] **Will Brooker:** And so, um, everything that I recorded, every kind of monologue I recorded during that period, I deleted it straight away. Cause I thought, I don't like it. You know, this is ugly stuff. Um, so that was disturbing to realize that you could get yourself in that mindset. But I, I felt I had to toy you with that mindset to understand how Bowie could have done.

[00:38:28] **Jarek Zaba:** Sure. Sure.

[00:38:29] **Jarek Zaba:** And you never got a sense of whether he heard of your, uh, project?

[00:38:33] **Will Brooker:** I, I, I did kind of, because one of the journalists contacted him and they said, no comment, so.

[00:38:38] **Jarek Zaba:** Right. Okay. So-

[00:38:39] **Will Brooker:** Which I, I felt that was a response. I mean-

[00:38:41] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:38:42] **Will Brooker:** Yeah.

[00:38:42] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:38:42] **Will Brooker:** I, I, I felt he was aware of it.

[00:38:44] **Jarek Zaba:** Yes. At the very least his agent was, or his management team or whoever. Yeah.

[00:38:47] **Will Brooker:** Do you know if I was Bowie, I, he was very, very culturally aware. I mean, even though he was ill during the time I was doing it, It would've come up on his radar. It couldn't not. Yeah. And I mean, you know, he might have hated it. [00:39:00] I would, if I was him, I think I would've been mildly amused by it.

[00:39:02] **Jarek Zaba:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. . And, um, yeah, we don't have a huge amount of time, so I'd sort of like to hit some of the, the key points here. I mean, we are. You know, big impetus for this entire project is the fact that David Bowie took to the stage in 1972 in the Toby Jug in Tolworth. Um, and uh-

[00:39:20] **Will Brooker:** It's that way.

[00:39:20] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, right. I see.

[00:39:22] **Jarek Zaba:** It's not that way.

[00:39:24] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, yes. Uh, and yeah, I mean, with. The start of that tour. With the start of that album, Bowie sort of helped transform, uh, pop culture and fashion. Um, how do you reflect on Bowie's legacy in terms of not just music, uh, but fashion and art as well?

[00:39:44] **Jarek Zaba:** I think, you know, any kind of androgynous pop star, any kind of theatrical pop star owe something to Bowie. New Romance, which I was really into actually.

[00:39:54] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, didn't mention that, but I was really into New Romance. Into the 1990s when [00:40:00] Numan was, uh, long over. Duran Duran. I was a huge Duran Duran fan. I mean, they're very much influenced by, by Bowie, uh, Spandau Ballet, um, Billy Idol um, Gary Numan, all these people, Annie Lennox, obvious debt, um, leading to people like Lady Gaga and, and through that.

[00:40:20] **Jarek Zaba:** Anyone who's kind of like, um, Sam Smith, anyone who's kind of theatrical and androgynous today, I think. I think probably wouldn't have done it in exactly the same way with, without David Bowie. So I, I think he opened a lot of door, even though his relationship with gay identity is kind of ambiguous and he's been criticized for saying he was gay and bisexual and then in the eighties saying that was the worst mistake he ever made to say this, which I think could be quoted a little bit out of context.

[00:40:47] **Jarek Zaba:** He was, I think what he was really saying was people started to define him by, , um, and they misunderstood what he meant by it. But Bowie's relationship with, with gay fans has been quite, um, checkered and some people feel let [00:41:00] down by him, but nevertheless, despite the fact that. You know, he was married to two women during his lifetime.

[00:41:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Most of his relationships seemed to have been with women. I think he was very, very important to, in terms of gender expression, in terms of fluid, gender expression. Like he never identified as transgender or anything. But I mean, I think, I think his influence was big in that area in terms of people being.

[00:41:21] **Jarek Zaba:** Androgynous and gender fluid and feeling more open to express themselves in terms of their sexuality during the conformist 1970s and 1980s, up to the present day. So in that respect, I think that's a huge strand. Um, huge influence in terms of fluidity and openness and experiment with gender I think, particularly. However he meant it at the time, I still think that has an influence now.

[00:41:49] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, , that's the most important thing actually. I mean music, it's just so much has been influenced by David Bowie really. Um, if you just look at how many times his [00:42:00] work has been covered, I think there's so many artists who wouldn't exist in the same way without, without Bowie. And fashion. He's still influencing fashion I think, you still see, you still see fashion stories and the style of Aladdin Sane, I mean, that iconic lightning bolt and red hair is. , it's still just iconic people don't always associate it with by, but I think it still influences fashion. Some of my students barely even know who he is, um, but I think they would sort of vaguely recognize that style. They might say, you know, that Ziggy Stardust or something. Yeah.

[00:42:31] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah. Um, we are just about hitting three o'clock now. Are you right to do another five? Do another five?

[00:42:36] **Will Brooker:** Yeah. Sure.

[00:42:36] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah. Um, just because, um, because of the Toby Jug link and because, um, this is a, um, a local heritage project first and foremost. I'd like to just talk about Kingston a little bit.

[00:42:47] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, and the fact that Bowie launched Ziggy Starrdust in the Toby Jug, he came back, um, to the Poly, uh, in this very building, I assume. Um, uh, four months, four months later. I think?

[00:42:58] **Will Brooker:** He came, it wasn't this building. It was, I think it [00:43:00] was Knights Park.

[00:43:00] **Jarek Zaba:** Oh, was it?

[00:43:01] **Will Brooker:** Oh, I might be wrong. No, I might be wrong. I might be confused there. We did

[00:43:04] **Jarek Zaba:** I think it was Main Hall.

[00:43:05] **Will Brooker:** Right.

[00:43:05] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:43:05] **Will Brooker:** You're absolutely correct. I did my two gigs at Knight's Park.

[00:43:07] **Jarek Zaba:** There you go. You're, you're confusing Bowie with yourself!

[00:43:09] **Will Brooker:** I am, very arrogant. Yeah, I am. That's right. He did.

[00:43:14] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, and Kingston Poly has historically been, um, uh, quite a, um, esteemed place to study fashion. Uh, still is. Um,

[00:43:21] **Will Brooker:** Still is.

[00:43:21] **Jarek Zaba:** Still is, yeah.

[00:43:22] **Will Brooker:** Still is.

[00:43:23] **Jarek Zaba:** Um, so I'd just like to get your reflections on Kingston, um, culturally, um, in the, I, I'll actually, first of all, when did you first come to Kingston?

[00:43:32] **Will Brooker:** I didn't know Kingston at all before 2005 when I had a job interview here.

[00:43:36] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:43:36] **Will Brooker:** I moved here in 2007.

[00:43:38] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:43:38] **Will Brooker:** Before that I was commuting from Southeast, from Brockley.

[00:43:40] **Jarek Zaba:** So in your time here, um, what have you learned about the town, um, and the uni, uh, culturally? Um, and, and I wonder if you can reflect on the loss of, um, music venue specifically. Um, in, in the town, um, the Toby Jug no longer exists and, uh, nor do many of the places that [00:44:00] we are talking about in this project. Would a Bowie of today, find somewhere to express himself like the real David Bowie did in 1972 at the Toby Jug?

[00:44:11] **Will Brooker:** I, I didn't know about Kingston's existence really until about 2005 when I came here for interview, and then I came up a couple of times to visit the town center and see what it was like, and then moved here in 2007 and uh, I was really impressed by it.

[00:44:23] **Will Brooker:** I mean, I'm from Woolwich, which is, I think it might have improved, but you know, last I saw it, it was dead. Just dead place. Um, forgotten on the outskirts of London. New Cross has got its kind of culture, but I never felt, I never felt very comfortable in New Cross. So Kingston, um, Kingston, I was really impressed by it.

[00:44:43] **Will Brooker:** I thought this would be a great place to live actually. It seemed very lively, bustling, great shops, really good like brands. The kind of brands we never saw in Woolwich, the kind of, you know, big shops, John Lewis and Bentalls and stuff. This was, this would've been a dream to me growing up. We never saw that kind of thing.

[00:44:58] **Will Brooker:** Really good kind of riverfront [00:45:00] culture, cafes, bars, um, and I think it's seemed brilliant. And so I felt I was going up in the world when I moved here. And over the last it'd be 15 years, I think. I think the changes have mostly been negative in that too many things have shut down. Kingston High Street, a lot of shuttered- up shops.

[00:45:16] **Will Brooker:** Um, They have been reopening, which is an interesting thing. I mean, COVID obviously did Kingston, a lot of damage. Covid did Kingston foot traffic a lot of damage, and so did online shopping. So a lot of clothes shops are closed. What's reopening now is, is things like cafes, uh, cheaper boutiques and cafes.

[00:45:34] **Will Brooker:** So perhaps Kingston will come alive again with a different kind of, services cuz perhaps people just buy clothes online now and, but want different places to, to meet and eat and drink. So I'm really hoping that Kingston sort of finds more life, um, and energy. Cause I think it's got a great deal of potential.

[00:45:52] **Will Brooker:** Music venues. Yeah. They've shut down. We had The Works, which was then The Hippodrome when I first moved here. And, um, Oceana, which was then Pryzm. And [00:46:00] of course we've still got Pryzm as far as I know. I haven't been there for a while. Bacchus

[00:46:04] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, Banquet Records do a lot of stuff at Pryzm.

[00:46:06] **Will Brooker:** Yes. I mean, Banquet Records is in, is invaluable.

[00:46:09] **Will Brooker:** You know, that's a really, really good, like heart of music in, in Kingston. Um, the Fighting Cocks, um, the, uh, ooh, you'll have to remind me, a, what's it called? Up the. Up the Kingston Road, near the big Sainsbury's, near Richer Sounds.

[00:46:22] **Will Brooker:** Uh, Grey Horse?

[00:46:24] **Will Brooker:** Grey Horse. Yeah. Yeah, The Grey Horse. Grey Horse is brilliant for, um, for jazz Ram Jam at the back of the, um, Grey Horse.

[00:46:29] **Will Brooker:** So we have got some good music venues, even though some shut down, you know, I'm like 52 and I've got a little boy, so I'm not gonna be going out to gigs quite so much anymore. But for, you know, for young people particularly, right. I think it's, it's, it is invaluable. It's so important and significant to have music culture. What would Bowie have done now? Bowie would be on YouTube. Bowie would be on TikTok, wouldn't it now. I mean, I dunno if any kind of young up and coming artist would look first for a pub in Tolworth, even if that pub existed rather than signal point blocks of flats.

[00:46:59] **Jarek Zaba:** I mean, do [00:47:00] you get a sense of why he picked the Toby Jug for his, the start of his Ziggy Stardust tour?

[00:47:05] **Will Brooker:** Actually, do you know what? I don't. Maybe. I think it must have been big on the circuit. I think it must have been the circuit where small bands go. Um, I, I do, you know, I could look up biographies and try and find out, but I remember, um, the fact that he was debuted in the Toby Jug seemed to be really unnoticed until quite recently.

[00:47:24] **Will Brooker:** I remember reading biography in like, you know, 20. 2015 and being really smart. Oh, the Toby Jug in Tolworth and like thinking is that, I've never heard Tolworth celebrated for this. And then I think interest in Tolworth and that venue and that gig seemed to take off after that because when I first read about it in a biography, I was like, I'm amazed.

[00:47:43] **Will Brooker:** How is this just mentioned in a sentence? And this is actually my area just up the road. So I think it's being recognized for. I imagine it was just where people did gigs actually. I mean, I think the Toby Jug was pretty big for gigs already, and it was where someone of his status would try and book-

[00:47:57] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah.

[00:47:58] **Will Brooker:** -a concert. Yeah.

[00:47:59] **Jarek Zaba:** No, I mean, [00:48:00] it, it, yeah, that makes complete sense because we look at the list of bands that played at the Toby Jug, and we have Fleetwood Mac, we have Led Zeppelin, um, and, um, these, I, these are gigs that happened before. Really hit the big time. I think so. I think you're right. Um.

[00:48:13] **Will Brooker:** When there's still open mic venues and so on, uh, Ram Jam has open mic.

[00:48:17] **Will Brooker:** There are lots of pubs which have, pubs I've been to myself and even played at and sung at, where they just let people come with a guitar and, you know, sing for five minutes. So there is still aspects of live music culture here, certainly, and there are festivals, Surbiton Festival's where you see live music.

[00:48:32] **Will Brooker:** So I, I don't think it's, uh, dead in the water. I, I think Covid has delivered a big hit to outdoor community, in-person culture. But the Kingston, I hope it can come back from that.

[00:48:43] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah. Yep.

[00:48:44] **Jarek Zaba:** And, uh, just finally, this is just the question we're asking all of our interviewees. It's just the, I'm just gonna say the words that form the title of our project and just ask you for sort of the first things that you associate in your mind with the words art, music, pop fashion.[00:49:00]

[00:49:00] **Will Brooker:** Okay. Art first thing I think of in that context, my mind goes straight to Andy Warhol actually, because you also. Music, pop fashion. You know, I like Warhol. Um, so those kind of silkscreen canvases of, um, cultural icons. Music, you know, we're doing word association. My mind goes first to songs which have music in the title. Madonna had one, uh, a song with music and a title. There's a, there's a Kraftwerk song that says 'music non-

stop, techno pop'. So my mind went first to music, which has music in, in the lyric. Um, was it, uh, 'pop music, bop bop pop music'?

[00:49:41] **Will Brooker:** Who, who did that song? Whoever did that?

[00:49:43] **Jarek Zaba:** I dunno.

[00:49:43] **Will Brooker:** Uh,

[00:49:44] **Jarek Zaba:** I know there's one that I got the music in me as well. Once. It's a great dance sort of disco dance tune, I forget who the artist is-

[00:49:49] **Will Brooker:** There's, there's, there's one from the seventies or eighties just called pop, *Pop Music*, but I can't remember quite who, who did it now.

[00:49:54] **Will Brooker:** Yeah.

[00:49:55] **Jarek Zaba:** Pop fashion. Pop fashion. Yeah. Pop fashion. .

[00:50:00] Do you know, I think of Lady Gaga there. Actually, my mind goes to her rather than Bowie. I mean, I think, I think she's, um, I mean she's no longer a new figure on the music scene at all. I mean, she's kind of a veteran who's now moved into acting to extent. But I think she was really doing things in the Bowie spirit with very, very provocative kind of sculptured works of art as costumes, you know, meat dress and telephone hat and so on.

[00:50:25] **Will Brooker:** Um, so pop fashion I think of as something which. warm art like a sculpture, which is warm, which I think is something which, a tradition which goes back decades if not centuries, you know, like wearing a work of art in order to provoke.

[00:50:42] **Jarek Zaba:** Professor Booker. Unless you've got anything else you think you haven't, uh, covered, um, that you'd, that you'd like to talk about in, in reference to this. Uh, thank you for your time.

[00:50:51] **Will Brooker:** I could say much more, but I won't.

[00:50:52] **Jarek Zaba:** Yeah, yeah. Well, well hopefully we'll get you in for a talk and, uh, yeah, we can say more then. Cheers.