

## A Peace of Us: Episode 1 - Arts in a post-conflict society

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Guests: Leesa Harker, Charlotte Dryden

Jordan:

Hello, and welcome to A Peace of Us, a four part series from the Open University in Ireland, in which voices beyond political institutions explore the impact of The Good Friday Agreement on arts, sports, the community, and their hopes for the future of Northern Ireland. I'm Jordan Kenny, and in this episode we discuss the arts in a post-conflict society with guests: award-winning writer and producer, Leesa Harker and Chief Executive of the Oh Yeah Music Centre, Charlotte Dryden.

Jordan:

Okay. So we've got two very exciting guests sitting in front of me. Now, let's start with you, Leesa. If you want to introduce yourself and tell me a bit about what you do.

Leesa:

So, I'm Leesa Harker. I am from Belfast, North Belfast, and I'm a writer. I've written books, plays, I've written for TV. I've written a radio pilot, and I'm currently writing a film.

Jordan:

Nice one. And on my left I have Charlotte. Tell me a bit about what you do.

Charlotte:

My name's Charlotte and I run the Oh Yeah Music Centre, which is a dedicated music hub, in the Cathedral Quarter in Belfast. Originally from Derry. But I've lived in Belfast now just over 20 years, so I guess I can safely say I'm now a member of the Belfast community. <laugh>

Jordan:

So let's start with an easy enough one. Leesa, what is the most exciting thing that you have done in your career?

Leesa:

Ooh, I've just actually written and produced a short film. I wrote the idea for the short film a couple years ago, and with working on BBC's Hope Street last year, I was able to meet some people that I could recruit. So I've opened my own TV and film production company and I produced my own short. and it's going to be going around the film festivals this year, so I'm massively excited about that.

Jordan:

And you've created a lot of characters that some people, if they're listening from Northern Ireland, might know. Tell us who Maggie Muff is?

Leesa:

The Notorious Maggie Muff, yeah! <laugh>. Basically, years and years ago, I was studying with Open University and we were having an online chat with all the rest of the students about this new book that came out, 50 Shades of Gray. This was kind of before it became really famous, so I thought, I must get this book. Everyone's talking about it. So I got the book and read the first couple of chapters, and was pretty shocked that people were fancying this guy Christian Gray, because he was telling this girl, you know, she wasn't allowed to eat certain foods...

Leesa:

Unless he agreed it, she wasn't allowed to go and see her own mother unless he agreed it. But that was all to do with this sexual, you know, thing. And I thought, no, hang on, that's going somewhere dark, that's crossing the line, that's coercive control.

Leesa:

But nobody else seemed to be able, was saying the same thing. And I was like, is it just me? So I thought, do you know what? I want to put something on Facebook, a joke with a jag. You know, I'm going to use comedy to get my point across, but I am definitely going to get my point across. So I thought, you know what? No way Belfast woman would put up with that. Nobody's going to tell me I can't have a pastie bap <laugh>. So I created this character, I'm going to call her Maggie. She's going to be from the Shankill Road. She's not going to take no nonsense. And literally I just typed it on to Facebook and within two weeks, 14,000 people we're on the Facebook page.

Jordan:

14,000.

Leesa:

Yeah. And I was on the front page of the Sunday World and Blackstaff Press, the book publisher, rang me and were like, do you want to write a book? I was like, dream come true.

Jordan:

Always good to be on the front page of the Sunday world for something positive. <laugh>. Yeah. Charlotte, to come to you, tell me the most exciting thing that you have done in your career.

Charlotte:

Oh my God. There've been quite a few since I started working for the Oh Yeah Centre. I'd probably say my proudest moment is probably, taking over the reins of the Oh Yeah Centre, because I started as the part-time development officer back in 2008, and then worked my way up to full-time. And then when our, founding chief executive moved on in 2016, I threw my hat in the ring, and got the gig. And thankfully the doors are still open. Very proud to, run the Oh Yeah Centre. And I think, you know, one of my big achievements from it, I can't say I've written a book or anything like that, you see, but I, I'm very proud to be what I consider the engine room of a building that creates opportunities for, other people.

Charlotte:

So it's been amazing, and very proud to watch the music community start to emerge and flourish and remain in Northern Ireland over the years.

Jordan:

Want to do some name dropping for us, Charlotte. Who have you worked with from Northern Ireland that we might know?

Charlotte:

I suppose a really exciting moment for me was, we run the Northern Ireland Music Prize. And, it, was a big moment for me to present the Band Ash with the Legend Award, as a fan of Ash when I was living in London back in the nineties. Yeah. We went to festivals and they were playing, they were a little bit younger than me. And then to think that 20 years later, the place that I work for is named after one of their songs, and I get to present them, with an award. I'd say that. And whenever we also presented Snow Patrol with the same award a few years later at a completely sold out Ulster Hall.

Charlotte:

And it was just a really proud moment for me. I was like...

Jordan:

What are you thinking in your head when you're on stage? Ash or Snow Patrol...! Are you really pinching yourself?

Charlotte:

Yeah. I really thought, like I say, 20 years ago, I never thought I would get to work with these people. And here I am working with them, and I'm kind of proud to even call them my friends, you know, to an extent. So they've just been brilliant to work with. So yeah, those are very proud moments for me. And I suppose if - you see, they're all starting to come to me now, <laugh>. but...

Jordan:

Plenty of time, we've plenty of time!

Charlotte:

One of the proud moments for me has to be, I established a festival called Women's Work. Which is about, increasing visibility of women and music, because I think Northern Ireland was, you know, traditionally pretty male dominated in the music industry. And we have a music exhibition at the oea and the walls are adorned with all the great men, and they are great men and that's just the way it was. But I thought, we need to change the landscape here. We need to start creating opportunities for women. So we set up Women's Work 5, 6, 7 years ago.

Charlotte:

We've seen the changes in the people that are creating music. It's gone from like 15% to 45, 50%. So we've kind of helped influence and shape and changed the landscape. And now Women's Work is evolving into a quarterly event as well. So it remains part of our commitment. But that was a big moment. And I think we helped influence change in how things are moving forward for women in music and for diversity overall.

Jordan:

So you two are both working in different parts of the creative sectors, but both in the creative sector, I suppose, in Northern Ireland. Leesa, to come back to you, explain to me a bit about what the creative scene is like in Northern Ireland at the minute for you and for people like you.

Leesa:

Well, I guess it's thriving in the film and TV industry. We've got Hope Street, which is the new kind of crime drama. And there's another one, Blue Lights, which is another place drama that's starting and

Jordan:

Written by Declan Lawn, I think.

Leesa:

Yes, that's right. And you know, there's, there's Soft Border Patrol, which was like a comedy sketch show, and there's so many films being made here now, so even for the creatives like me, the writers, there's opportunities, but also for the crew. There's so many opportunities now to work with like A-list Hollywood stars that are coming over here and making films, and it's just getting bigger and bigger.

Jordan:

And when it comes to the music side of things, Charlotte, what is it like in Northern Ireland at the minute?

Charlotte:

I think we've got world class talent based right here in Northern Ireland. And, it's probably the most diverse pool of talent we've ever had. And it's brilliant. It's great to see, there's probably a wider spectrum of genres now. I think people have more opportunities through things like funding and probably better awareness because of places like the Nerve Centre in Derry and the Oh Yeah Centre and the talent development programs that exist now. So the, the music scene is emerging and blossoming. I think, you know, there's still support needed. Only of very small number of artists - probably anywhere, but particularly Northern Ireland - you know, really gets the dizzy heights of the likes of Snow Patrol.

Charlotte:

But there's a lot of amazing artists making careers for themselves now and touring the world, and becoming a bit more savvy as well about their music, and also using lots of different types of creativity. So they'll work in film or they'll work in graphic design or they'll work in visual. You know, there's lots of different areas where musicians are getting involved now in multi multi-arts and multimedia, and contributing to sync and TV shows and soundtracks and various other things. So I see a much more confident emerging music scene.

Jordan:

So, with that in mind, if we were to go back 25 years to when The Good Friday Agreement was signed, and even before that, I suppose, what was the picture like then for you, Leesa?

Leesa:

I was in a completely different - I was working actually in a car dealership, selling cars. So I've had so many jobs in between. But the thoughts of - I always wanted to be a writer since I was a child. I was writing poems about my granny's flatulence when I was eight, nine years old, <laugh>. but you, you never really felt -

Jordan:

I'm sure your granny was cuffed about that?

Leesa:

She loved it. Yeah. <laugh>, I used to perform them as well on a Saturday afternoon <laugh>. So yeah, it was pie in the sky. It was so ridiculous. If you'd just say it: I want to write films, I want to be a film writer when I grow up, you'd have been laughed at. And I think I was laughed at many times when I'd come off with things like that. But now - for my daughters, for example, they're creatives as well, and it's not laughed at, it's actually achievable if you work hard. So that literally is the difference.

Leesa:

Me and my children are having a completely different - where it's taken me all this time, to now I'm 45, that I'm writing films, feature films and shorts, and my kids are writing films now and they're 12 and 15.

Jordan:

And what was the scene like, the music scene like then Charlotte, if you go back 25 years ago in Northern Ireland, around the time The Good Friday Agreement was signed and even before that, what were things like?

Charlotte:

Yeah, well I think traditionally music's always played a really key role in youth culture in Northern Ireland, you know, it probably saved quite a few people during the Troubles. And it brought people together, you know, pre- Good Friday Agreement, the rave scene, which has probably been more my age group. And then before that

Leesa:

I was there.

Charlotte:

Well, it brought people together, didn't it? It really did. It took people -

Jordan:

Where was the best rave?

Leesa:

Well, I went to a rave, the first rave that was called Evolution in the <inaudible> Leisure Centre. I think that was 1992 or something - that was to do with children in need. So kids were allowed to go. And I was 14 and that was it. It was an all night rave. And then from that, it used to be in the Ulster Hall called Hell Raiser. And there actually was a night at Hell Raiser, and there was a bomb scare in the Ulster Hall, and we were all evacuated out onto the street. And it was actually Carl Cox, who was one of the big DJs that was world famous.

Jordan:

It's still a massive name.

Leesa:

Yeah. Yeah. He came to Belfast and he did it no matter what. And we all got - it actually came over the tannoy when he was in the middle of his set. Everybody needs to get out, there's a bomb. So everybody was put out under the street and everybody just started singing, dancing. There was people dancing on top of lorries that were parked, equipment lorries, and the atmosphere was absolutely electric. And then they were like, everything's fine, you can go back in. And we went down and finished the night off like nothing had happened.

Jordan:

Sorry, that's mental. So people were allowed back into the venue and then the concert just continued as normal as was.

Leesa:

We were only out in the street for about maybe half an hour, 40 minutes so the police and army, had a quick scoot around the Ulster Hall, and then we were all allowed back in, and Carl Cox went back on, continued on a set, like nothing had happened.

Jordan:

So I suppose that taps into what you're saying about, you know, music...

Charlotte:

Bringing people together, safe space for people that didn't matter what side of the community you're from. I mean, I grew up in 1980s Derry, and there was a very small music scene and I was just a wee bit on the young side, so I didn't get to experience some of the goth and the live music scene of that time. And then I moved to London. But just before I moved to London, I started going to raves - funny

enough, just over the border at a place called <inaudible>. Everybody congregated there, and we had the best nights and you forgot your troubles, you know what I mean?

Charlotte:

You forgot the Troubles existed. and then of course, fast forward I moved to London and I missed that, period where you had the kind of evolution of the likes of David Holmes and people like that, running nights at the Art College and Sugar Sweet and you know, and Orbital coming to play here and, and things like that. And, you know, Phil Kieran did a lot around that time as well. So the rave scene was - and then Celtronic in Derry, I mean if it wasn't for Celtronic, in Derry, it's a small town -

Jordan:

So what's Celtronic? Is that...

Charlotte:

Celtronic is an electronic music festival, and it's been going for about, I think it's been going 25 years. I think maybe a little bit longer. It's an avenue for DJs and electronic acts to showcase. And in the northwest of Ireland where people, you know, were kind of forgotten, a little bit forgotten. It was an amazing opportunity to showcase. And, the guy that runs it, Stewart, he was bringing in acts, international acts in to DJ, and they probably created one of the greatest party nights that the North has seen.

Charlotte:

So those sorts of things were happening. And then you had the Art College nights here in Belfast. And then I suppose fast forward again to 98, I actually moved back in 98 and I started to see a bit of a shift and change in live music and more venues putting on more live shows. So it was, it's always been there. It was always either underground or in the background, and it was keeping people, it was giving people enjoyment during dark times.

Charlotte:

So there's always been a great scene, but I think it's really flourished in the last 25 years.

Jordan:

Flourish. That's the word I want to use. Leesa, in the 25 years since The Good Friday Agreement's been signed, how would you say the arts have evolved and flourished?

Leesa:



Oh, it's - massively. I mean, funding is a big thing. There's funding now for all sorts of things from theater to film, to just writing short stories, poetry, there's festivals, investment. A lot of companies have come over now from the rest of the UK, America, you know, there's, people aren't afraid to come here anymore.

Jordan:

And what would you say, Charlotte, in terms of how things have evolved and flourished since The Good Friday agreement was signed?

Charlotte:

Yeah, it definitely brought a confidence in terms of investment. So Belfast and Derry have both grown as cities. I think we've still got a long way to go, I think, don't get me on my high horse now, but the investment in the arts is still chronically underfunded and the arts need more investment given that it does contribute to peace and reconciliation and the economy. Saying that though, you've had the MAC built. You've got the Oh Yeah opened, the Black Box opened, you've got the Nerve Centre in Derry and the Millennium Forum.

Charlotte:

All these places were, well, the Nerve centre was there before The Good Friday Agreement, but, all these places were sort of built in and around that time. So you can see the investment that's come in to Northern Ireland and long may it continue, and music has flourished regardless of funding. Yeah. I suppose that's one of the things, you know, there's a confidence in young people and young people I suppose are writing about things that are very similar, are all around the world now as well. There isn't that thing hanging over their head, which is the Troubles, if you know what I mean. Some of, well, 25 years, you know, you're talking about 25 year olds who didn't grow up in the Troubles, so they're writing about things that matter to young people anywhere, which is really important.

Jordan:

So what you're saying is that, 25 years ago, a lot of the music that was being released or written would've focused on, for instance, the Troubles, whereas now you're seeing it move away from that and kind of different social issues if that's what they're focusing on?

Charlotte:

Yes and no. I mean, obviously the punk era, some bands embraced it and actually wrote about it. Like the Stiff Little Fingers said, we want an alternative Ulster. Other bands, like the Undertones wrote about, teenage kicks and everyday things because they were living the chaos on the streets. So they wanted to live normal lives and live normal lives. And I think in Northern Ireland for a while there was - around the time of The Good Friday Agreement, all of a sudden people didn't want to go near a political subject.

Charlotte:

I noticed that for about a good 10, 15 years there people were not writing music about the Troubles, about politics. They just didn't want to be pigeonholed as Northern Irish act writing about a political situation...

Charlotte:

Or writing about politics. So they steered away from it. And I found that that became, quite obvious about Northern Ireland music. And then in the last five, six years or so, I've seen a real jump in young musicians writing about social issues. So you've got people writing about gender and sexuality, women's rights, that's all starting to come to the fore again - about poverty, about unemployment. I'm seeing that now more because hip hop, there's more hip hop here and hip hop always kind of addressed certain issues. Punk always kind of tried to embrace certain issues.

Charlotte:

So, I I'm seeing more of it now than I've ever seen before. Maybe that's because there's a confidence that, like I say, they didn't grow up during the Troubles. They're embracing certain issues and we don't have to - young people aren't thinking, well I don't want to talk about the Troubles cause that will pigeonhole me as a child of the Troubles. You know, people wanted to get away from that, but so now they're writing about issues that affect young people globally. Yeah. And the politics has kind of shifted to that.

Leesa:

And unfortunately the, the theater is not like that. It, it seems to be -

Jordan:

Oh, that's interesting that you think it's different.

Leesa:

It's, that's the reason why I had never been to see a play before I wrote my own play. Except for big musicals coming from London and things like that. Because they were all about the Troubles and a lot of them were focused around West Belfast and it was all around that kind of community.

Jordan:

And did that put you off?

Leesa:

It put me off, yeah. Because I lived in the Troubles and I remember the misery and how it was. And I don't want to go on a night out, which are very rare when you've got two young kids, and sit and be made miserable again. And it's very hard to write about the Troubles and not be kind of one-sided. And that basically is the way that most of the plays were there really. There wasn't anything that kind of represented me or anything I'd experienced. So whenever I wrote my first play, the MAC actually came to me afterwards and said, A demographic has come in here to see your play that we've been chasing for years...

Leesa:

And we've never been able to get them, which was great and it wasn't done consciously, but then afterwards when I thought, no, I'm the demographic, the working class, Unionist, whatever background.

Leesa:

So it's true, you know, that is right. Since that there have been more things written, you know, about the working class community just in general. But I'm looking forward to younger playwrights that are, you know, 20 now, that are coming on that haven't got the experience yet to write for the likes of the Grand Opera House or the MAC or anything, to see what they're going to write about. And I really, really hope that it is about other things rather than this happened to us, and that kind of divisive theater that one side will love and the other side will not.

Jordan:

Would you say comedy is a device that we can use to kind of help us make sense, I suppose, of a past that is quite complicated?

Leesa:

Yeah, I think it's the only way - comedy and music actually are the two things. I mean, I used comedy in a different way to make a point about, you know, feminism in the kind of "50 Shades" popularity, and that was the only way I thought that I could put the point across to my own friends who were very much in love with this book and didn't really see the darkness that I saw in it. That was the only way I could think of. And it's the same, I mean, I comedy is literally metaphorically a vehicle that you can put people in and take them somewhere that they wouldn't be able to get to on foot.

Leesa:

Although I do remember that even my first play, which was "50 shades of Red, White, and Blue", the, the actress Caroline is from a different community.

Leesa:

She's from the Short Strand, and there was people live near her - refused flat refused to go and see it because it had red, white, and blue in the title. And it took them a good lot of years, maybe seven or eight years before they eventually agreed to come see a Maggie Muff play and then they loved it and you know... But that were people of a certain age, right about the age of me who do remember, pre The Good Friday Agreement. And it's difficult to take that step and look at another community that maybe was cast as their enemy for half of their life.

Leesa:

And then think actually, and this is the whole point of it, they're just like us. I remember going on a short education trip when I was at school cause I was at the girls model and we, then had a Catholic school and we did shared - and it really was shared education.

Leesa:

Because even on the coach too, I think it was the Giant's Causeway, it was one from each school you had to sit beside. There were strict rules in those days. You had to sit beside somebody. But I remember on the coach just looking around and thinking: there's the rough one in my school and there's the equivalent in their school. There's the shy one, there's the shy one, and there was, I could say, oh, and people paired up and do like for like. You know, they are literally a mirror of us. But it's like a lottery where you're born, your postcode.

Leesa:

We're all humans, but it was a real epiphany moment for me. And I think I was only like 14 or something at the time.

Charlotte:

I think that's why Derry Girls actually resonated with so many people, um

Jordan:

The TV program?

Charlotte:

Because it didn't, it wasn't about the Troubles, it was about human relationships. And it was done with comedy.

Jordan:

Yeah. And I suppose to look at music again, Charlotte, we've talked about how people have been united through music like the Carl Cox rave for instance. But talk to me a bit about the role you feel music maybe plays in creating non-sectarian spaces.

Charlotte:

We've talked a little bit about how - the rave scene, the dance, electronic scene, is all about community coming together. But music can be used to create a safe space. It can be used to support dialogue. It can be used to educate, and then - but it has to be pure and it has to be done from the grassroots up. It can't be forced. And I think the most successful music scenes have always been very organic and have grown out of a group of people, whether they're young people - usually it has been youth culture and youth scenes - punk rock really became a fashion statement in London and Berlin, but people were actually living that anarchy on the streets in Northern Ireland.

Charlotte:

And young people in the seventies, that was a way to come together regardless of your religion. And you go to the <inaudible> and you watch a band. The same thing happened with electronic music then as you got into the nineties and beyond. And now today I think there are still communities that are divided and, I think they're the communities that we need to reach and we need to work with. There's still division, but I think one of the scenes that has started to help bring young people together in the hardest to reach communities has been hip hop.

Charlotte:

I think that expression through lyrics...

Jordan:

Artists like, I suppose, when you look in England for instance, like Stormzy, who would rap about issues to do with his black community. Is that a method that could maybe be applied here ?

Charlotte:

I think it is, and I think it has been for a while. We've noticed it because at Oh yeah we do a bit of outreach work and we go out into communities and we actually consult with the community groups or the youth groups and overwhelming interest has been in hip hop. And they'd usually use hip hop to address the issues that are affecting them. And in communities that are hit by poverty, it's not really the other side that is the problem. It's, poverty itself. It's a class thing.

Charlotte:

It's suicide rates, it's drugs, it's alcohol. And that form of expression helps them to - not to get technical, but music classes and music workshops can really warm you up and you can start becoming

a bit more - you get a bit looser as you start to spit out lyrics. So hip hop has been great. Electronic music has been really good as well. There's young people with a real interest in DJing. But, you know, right across the board, music has been a really great vehicle for us to engage with young people that are finding it hard.

Jordan:

What do you think could be done or needs to be done?

Charlotte:

Well, I think more investment in the arts, generally, but I also think that, visibility and success stories always help. So I think we were talking about Jordan Adetunji earlier. There's people like Jordan...

Jordan:

So for anybody who doesn't know who Jordan Adetunji is, tell us a bit about him.

Charlotte:

Jordan is a hip hop artist, RnB, hip hop artist - he the first black artist that we ever had at the Northern Ireland Music Prize. And he's signed, signed now to Sony RCA. And he's an amazing example. And a really positive ambassador for the black and minority community and music, but also in terms of that style of music. Young people, you know, for a particular age, like 14, 15, are really into their hip hop and their RnB. And he's a great ambassador. So we need more ambassadors, we need more role models.

Charlotte:

And I think we're creating more of those as music becomes more diverse over the last few years. So it's just about harnessing the power of those people and taking them out and bringing them into communities, but also just giving young people access to these kind of heroes, you know?

Leesa:

And do you know what, it's another community for them to belong to. It's a separate community. Like that's what I found in the nineties with a rave. There was ravers and then there was heavy-metallers. Yeah. So people were usually one or the other.

Charlotte:

Your alternative tribe. Yes.

Leesa:

And it was another community. Which was better. There was no nonsense. And, it was a separate thing to where you were born, what street you were born on.

Jordan:

Has The Good Friday Agreement allowed for more diversity in Northern Ireland, I suppose in the arts, but in society as a whole?

Charlotte:

Yeah. I think that Northern Ireland is more diverse than it's ever been. You know, it's a much more multicultural society. I think more people have had the confidence to come here and settle here. And we've been more welcoming. I think like anywhere we have got racism to deal with. But I think in general we've been much more welcoming, and open to new and different communities. And I think that's helped our communities for a more intercultural approach.

Charlotte:

And those influences - if you look at London, and back in the 1950s and, and the Windrush generation, and the black and Caribbean communities settling there, it wasn't until the eighties you saw these amazing hip hop bands coming through. Like Soul II Soul and bands like that. And now you associate London as being the most diverse, musically diverse place, one of the most musically diverse places in the world. And it's because of that mix and that melting pot of people.

Jordan:

We talked a bit there about working class communities. Has The Good Friday Agreement made the arts more accessible to working class communities?

Charlotte:

I think working class communities still struggle. But there are more opportunities created through the likes of the Oh Yeah Centre, the Nerve Centre and various other arts groups that now, have a commitment to engaging those who could do with better support. And so we have programs where we, want to improve access. So we remove barriers like cost.

Charlotte:

We actively go out and work with the community group and we don't parachute in or we try not to. And again, sometimes that's unavoidable when you're getting very little funding to support people. But you want to go in and develop meaningful relationships with communities and youth groups. And

let them know that music is there for them, that we can provide them with access and we really want them to participate.

Charlotte:

I think what has changed - but it's very slow change - Nonetheless, there's so many opportunities have opened up over the last 25 years. One of the things - when I was growing up, I didn't think I had ever chance of working in music. I loved music, I was a fan of music. I didn't think I had a snowballs chance of getting a job in music because there were no jobs in music. And jobs are still few and far between, but the opportunities are better. You can be a freelancer now, you can work in backstage careers there's lots of events and festivals to work in.

Charlotte:

And as a performer, there's a lot of support out there to help you if you want to improve your opportunities through singing lessons or doing courses around how to monetize through streaming platforms and well, you can't really make much of streaming platforms, but you know what I mean.

Charlotte:

It's that kind of knowing the business side of the industry. So there's more opportunities through that kind of learning. But, you know, I'm mindful of, a report I saw recently in The Guardian that said that fewer working class young people are going into the arts night than ever before. But I don't think that's a Good Friday Agreement problem. That's across the UK and potentially, you know, down to a Conservative government and the policies that's just completely crushing people's opportunities. But, there are communities out there that we need to reach out to and to engage.

Charlotte:

And if there's anything we, we try to say in the Oh Yeah: you can have a job or a career in the music industry, don't think of it as I need to be the next <inaudible> or, what you can do is you can travel the world as a guitar technician and it's an exciting job. And you can do that with a little bit of training. So - backstage careers are so exciting and I would just say those opportunities have opened up.

Charlotte:

Um, and we just have to make sure that more young people in working class areas are aware of those opportunities.

Jordan:

Do you think we still lag behind, say, England, Scotland and Wales when it comes to things like the creative industry?



Charlotte:

Well, first of all, I would say we don't lag behind when it comes to film industry. You would probably be better placed. But, from myself looking at the film industry, I mean, you know, Game of Thrones just helped the film industry here explode. And you know, you go to certain parts of Belfast and they're building studios all over the place. So the film industry's flourishing. That's amazing.

Jordan:

We've seen recent success at the Oscars and Irish Goodbye.

Leesa:

I think the Oscars were so good because like they had the feature films, they had the shorts, there was all sorts of different actors, and I honestly, I even put a tweet on about it. I just saw - everybody who wants to write or work in the industry are buzzing it was such a buzz to see them winning. They just won everything.

Jordan:

What did you feel like when you saw, you know, locals up on the stage, the world stage at the Oscars?

Leesa:

Brilliant. Like, so good. And, you know, my daughter has just started acting, my youngest daughter and her agent was there at the Oscars with the guys from the short film, the Irish Goodbye. And she was watching it and I was like, there's your agent at the Oscars on TV. And as a child to have that direct link to the Oscars, you know, and then she came back to their - they do a drama class on Saturday there, and she was telling them about this one she met and that one, and she was chatting to this one and showed them the photos. And I just thought like that that would've been just unheard of when I was a child, you know?

Leesa:

So it has opened up.

Jordan:

Is that something you would say then has changed since The Good Friday agreement?

Leesa:

Absolutely. Even the likes of Derry Girls, I mean, that changed everything, for the better. I mean, like to have first of all female led comedy coming out of Northern Ireland, which had never happened before. Based in the Troubles that wasn't really about the Troubles. But it was there in the background, was amazing, you know, but the only worry I have now is has that ticked the box of that, you know, because at the same time as Derry Girls came out,

Jordan:

There's more to be done. Is that what you're saying?

Leesa:

Yeah, I mean, I was writing a female comedy for TV and I kept getting - oh, but Derry Girls, but Derry Girls... So I think, after a period of time, maybe TV companies will be looking for another kind of comedy that's not Derry Girls, but unfortunately now everything will be compared to Derry Girls. But, yeah, it's changed massively.

Jordan:

What does the future look like in the arts in Northern Ireland and what are the challenges?

Leesa:

The future? It looks good. In film and TV, there's never been more opportunities than what there is now. There's a lot of trainee routes you can go into through Crew and Writing and things like that. There's creative writing classes, there are role models. There are people who are writing for tv, writing films, musicians that people can ask.

Leesa:

And for any young person that is thinking about that - reach out and ask, most people are available. You can contact them on social media and things like that. And I think nearly everybody would be delighted to give anybody tips and advice because we remember what it was like when there was no one to ask. So yeah, there's more opportunities and there's more people to look at. And you can watch - if you're writing comedy for example, you can watch somebody who is writing comedy and see what they're doing, where are they going? Listen to the likes of interviews and pick up things.

Leesa:

Whereas we never had that. So that, I think that's the main difference really. It's happening now and hopefully more will come.

Jordan:

That's it for this episode. And there's lots more to explore on our OpenLearn Hub, which features music, art, and a series of guest essays. Search OpenLearn Good Friday Agreement online to find it. Thanks for listening.