

## INTRO

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**Jess Brough:** Welcome to Before the Applause - an audio programme for hybrid arts festival Fringe of Colour Films. We are going to be hearing from the filmmakers and artists who are behind the films in this year's festival programme. Some of these films will make you laugh, many will challenge you, and others will be thoroughly dismantling in their ability to find their way straight to your heart. Please enjoy hearing from the people behind these remarkable films and this continuation of their stories. In this episode, we are going to hear from Mohammed Ali Shashdari, the writer and director of the film, Can Be.

## DIALOGUE

**Mojere Ajayi-Egunjobi:** My name is Mojere Ajayi-Egunjobi and I am the creator, I guess, of the film Dear Omolere. The film starts in a forest, kind of. The opening lines are Dear Omolere because it is a letter to my grandmother. You'll see me, I'm a disabled Black woman, dressed in white, I have my crutches and I'm in the middle of the forest and we are going on a journey together. The film was inspired by Akwaeke Emezi's Dear Senthurán, which is like an epistemology, a book of letters in an autobiographical context. It was a response to the book as it was commissioned by a collective I worked with in Birmingham called Building Our Own Knowledge. I decided to write a letter to my grandmother because she's very far away and I don't get to speak to her often. And so I thought about what it would be like for me to first use my main writing format, which is poetry, and turn it into a letter, and then put that in a visual format of film, and what I would want to say to my grandmother and how I would want to convey all my feelings to her.

## [FILM CLIP]

0:02:17 And I think the fact that I'm going on a journey in the film allowed me to convey things that weren't even written in the poem, and it conveyed expressions and heaviness and grief that I just couldn't put into words. So yeah, I think that they work very beautifully together in a way that I didn't even realise was possible. In the film, I'm dressing all white. It's a kind of nod to ancestral veneration from my tradition. I'm Yoruba. We wear white in kind of like funeral spaces and when we are venerating our ancestors. And on this journey, I'm simultaneously in the forest but reminiscing about my grandmother's garden that I have never seen and how it was full of life and now it is empty. It's kind of talking about our relationship and how I have grieved a lot of it even though she is still alive just due to our distance. So I'm going on this journey, I'm going on this walk trying to connect to her through nature, knowing that there's no ultimate destination because I'm not going to be able to see her but knowing I'm always with her. I showed it to my mum and she loved it. My grandmother is actually visually impaired so I haven't been able to show her the film but I do want to read her the letter. I think it will bring up a lot. It's easier to say in art, you know, the things you cannot say to a person in real life. And I have a very complicated relationship with my family who are based in Nigeria. So maybe one day I will show her the film. I don't know she'll understand everything in it, but I think she'll love it anyway. The line, my blood does not define me, is kind of literal as I have sickle cell anemia. And when you watch the film, you see that I am on crutches and I am kind of struggling with the journey of going through the

forest and all of the different levels and climbing up different valleys and things like that in the forest. It's kind of a part of the journey, something that I had to accept within myself and not let it define me in the places that I wanted to go. And taking inspiration from the story of my grandmother and how she was able to reinvent herself again and again, it would never define me because I could always wake up and choose to be a new person regardless. I created the film with my best friend, Hannah Adorei. They actually did the camera work. When we got into the forest, I had certain shots already planned. There's a shot where you see my skirt on the floor with the crutches and it lines up with the dialogue. I thought about the shots of the trees and a shot of me climbing out of kind of like bushes and wilderness. But apart from that, we kind of just, we work well together. They know me incredibly well and they've known me since I was 12. So they they pushed me definitely to think about what my inner child would be like in that forest, which is why you see me running, because it's just such like a big expanse of space and it inspires you to run if you can. I thought about the sounds of the forest and I really wanted to incorporate all of the bird noises, the sounds of the trees and the wind and like as much of it as I could. We didn't have that much equipment. Yeah, I just kind of let the landscape dictate what we would film. There is a scene where you see my face in a close-up and it superimposed the landscape, and that wasn't planned. After I saw that beautiful open field, I thought I would really like to incorporate this somehow because I feel like this encompassed all of the feelings I was trying to convey in the poetry and how big and overwhelming they felt to me in that moment. Yeah, it was kind of a collaboration between me, my best friend and the forest. The poem definitely took a different form as soon as I put it to the film because, like I said before, the visuals were able to convey some things that I didn't even, I wasn't even initially expressing, but putting the visual with the poetry it brought some parts of life that I I wasn't expressing but I just didn't know how they were landing. So there's a part where I say I hold on to a chain thinner than silver and I feel each chain great and that is the part where I'm emerging from the forest and I think watching it back it kind of really conveys the heaviness of living as a black woman with a disability and figuring out physical obstacles and overcoming them. I guess I convey it with the line, but watching it and hearing it at the same time, it's a new kind of weight and definitely conveys the message better than if I had just spoken it. I found it a little daunting to create because I knew I was going to be in it and it's hard sometimes to see yourself reflected back at yourself in your art so literally. And I had to kind of get out of my head about that and just allow it to be what it would be. I don't know if I'm supposed to advise any filmmakers out there but if I am it would be to just make it and then release it and let it go. It doesn't belong to you after it is out.

## OUTRO

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**Jess Brough:** Fringe of Colour Films 2023 takes place from the 23rd to the 29th June, but this audio programme will be available in perpetuity. If you are listening to this before the festival, we hope you can join us either online or in-person in Edinburgh, and if you are listening after the festival, you can stay up-to-date with our work at [fringeofcolour.co.uk](https://fringeofcolour.co.uk). This podcast was brought to you by Fringe of Colour Films, a hybrid arts festival for Black people and People of Colour. This series is presented by me Jess Brough, produced by Halina Rifai and Fringe of Colour, theme music by Xavier LaCroix and is supported by Creative Scotland. Thank you for listening.

