3CR Binary Busting Broadcast
Sunday 21 March 2021, 3-4pm

*Queering the Air*

**Simona:** I'm Simona Castricum, and you are listening to the Binary Busting Broadcast on 3CR Community Radio 855 AM.

**MV:** Queering the Air would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation: true owners, caretakers, and custodians of the land from which we broadcast. We pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to any First Nations people listening to this broadcast. We recognise their unceded sovereignty and that a treat was never signed. So you're listening to Queering the Air, a critically engaged queer commentary with an interest in the intersection of queerness with other experiences of marginalisation. And this show is presented by peers on the LGBTIQA+ spectrum. You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter via the handle @QueeringTheAir, and listen to our podcast via 3CR.org.au/streaming/queeringtheair.

And on today's show, it may contain descriptions and discussions on mental health and illness, othering, and queerphobia, that may be distressing to some listeners. So if this is a trigger for you, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, or QLife on 1800 184 527, or contact your state-based service. I'll place those contacts on our web page show-notes later today.

And for Trans Day of Visibility, I'll be presenting a special edition of Queering the Air as part of 3CR's Binary Busting Broadcast, which is a dedicated seven hours of radio programming centring on the trans and gender diverse and nonbinary experiences, voices, and narratives, mixed in with music and interviews and other topics that really relate to this particular day and the visibility of trans and gender diverse people. You can check out the rest of the schedule at 3CR.org.au/binarybusting. So over the next hour, you'll hear discussions with Hunter Dillon, a queer transmasc person, tattooist, and sex worker with chronic invisible illnesses who lives in Naarm, Melbourne. And then around 3.30 pm, I'll be speaking with Malaika Mfalme, a queer nonbinary mixed-raced African-Australian person of colour, who is a singer-songwriter living on Gadigal land. And we'll be speaking about queer and/or cultural identities in the context of intersectionality of disability, illness, ableism, visibility, and representation, and how those overlapping identities are navigated.

So here is my first interview, which I conducted with Hunter Dillon earlier this week, and I hope you enjoy this particular interview. I was really honoured to be able to speak with Hunter. We've only met over Instagram, so I hope to meet him again in real life. In any case, this is my interview with Hunter Dillon. You're listening to 3CR community radio 855 AM digital, and streaming via 3CR.org.au/streaming.

**Hunter:** So I identify as a queer trans disabled person, and I also have dabbled in sex work. I have CFS, chronic fatigue syndrome, as well as ADHD, OCD, and PTSD. PTSD has its own list of symptoms. So I'm basically just tired and sore all the time, and then on extra special occasions I crash, and that usually lasts a few days. But I really just have to navigate what I do with my time, so that I can be as healthy as possible.

**MV:** And when you talk about crashing for a few days, can you explain what that means for someone that's not familiar with that term in relation to your illness?

**Hunter:** Sure. Yeah, sure. So when I crash, it feels like I have a really bad illness. Like, I get body cramps. I get very physically sore. I can't really move. I don't have any physical strength whatsoever. The illness itself is, for me, triggered by emotional stress, so the fact that I also have PTSD makes the CFS crashes worse, because when your nervous system is going on high for such a long period of time, it kind of depletes, and suddenly you have no dopamine. You have no energy. You can't even think. You can't recall any information. It's like a brain fog, and it can last anywhere, you know, from a day, for some people it can last months. I'm lucky in that mine usually passes within a few days. But for a lot of people, they're bedridden for weeks or months, and the depression that comes with that is, you know, also excruciating.

**MV:** So let's talk about that a bit more. So how do these chronic illnesses – so you have CFS, which gives you the crashes, but there's also OCD and the PTSD.

**Hunter:** Mm-hmm.

**MV:** How does that affect you in relation to your other identities? Your queer identity, your trans identity, and so forth.

**Hunter:** I think that it – it's intersectional, because I'm juggling trying to have a community with queer people whilst also being super restricted in the types of activities that I can participate in. And so it's really hard to be a part of a community when you're sick and tired all the time, and other than maybe social networking, there's really no space for people to have chronic illness to get together and spend time together. We're all stuck to our beds. So it's very difficult to be a part of a queer community or a trans community and maintain friendships with people from those communities when you can't get out of bed. And maybe there could be events that were just, like, laying in bed, something super low-key where people just watch films, and people are aware that, you know, no-one here has any spoons, so let's all just sit around together.

**MV:** For people out there that don't understand what 'spoons' mean, can you explain what that means in relation to chronic illness, and maybe give an example of how you use that in your daily life?

**Hunter:** Okay, well, yeah, so I have to assert a lot of boundaries with the people that I'm friends with. They all know that I have a chronic illness, and for me personally, it's kind of like how much energy you have left. For me, on a daily basis, I have to think, 'Okay, I've got 'til 2pm to do activities,' and then usually I nap from 2 'til 5, because if I don't nap, I have one of the crashes that I mentioned earlier in the evening. So I sleep every day for many hours throughout the middle of the day, and then that gives me more energy to then do a few more extra things in the evening.

So it's a juggle of social, mental, and physical, really, that you go, okay, well, what social things do I need to do today? I need to see this person. Maybe I need to meet this new person. That's gonna be a high-level activity, so maybe I won't have any physical energy for anything else that day. Or if I have to ride to uni one day and go to class for three hours, I'm probably – I can't make plans for the rest of that day because I won't have any energy left, and it's about constantly juggling these activities to be like, 'Well, what's the most important thing that I need to get done?' And a lot of that means that you leave out social things, because, you know, you have to make phone calls. You have to go shopping. You have to cook dinner. So all of these take away little bits of the energy that I have, and then I'm just left with nothing.

**MV:** I see what you mean in relation to the restrictive nature of the illness and the way you need to prioritise what some people would view as, sort of, administrative activities.

**Hunter:** Yeah.

**MV:** And therefore you're stripped away of those opportunities to spend time with community and friends and —

**Hunter:** Correct, yeah.

**MV:** — a sort of broader sense of self-worth and belonging, and this ties in really well with the follow-up question that I wanted to ask. Like, the sense of belonging and how you feel you belong in typical and non-typical queer spaces in relation to accessibility and inclusion in these spaces. Can you give a bit more information on that?

**Hunter:** So typically I think that queer spaces are provided for queer people. They don't necessarily think about the other disabilities that queer people might have. It's often just left out of the equation. So when I think about trying to be a part of a community, I feel like I don't have the same agency to attend things or be a part of things, because a lot of it is maybe nightlife. Maybe it's – you know, there's a lot of people in one space, and these types of things, I feel like I can't go to, because it's just too much of an overload for me as a neurodiverse person.

So when I go to events, I am aware that the events aren't created for people like me, so I have to be really picky in the events that I choose to go to, and I need to – I often will spend time hyper-fixating on looking at previous photos from the event so I can look at things like, what are the people wearing that are attending the event? How many people are in that room? So that I can in some ways navigate how I look, or essentially make myself invisible within that space. How can I make myself not seen within that space, so that if I do, you know, have a moment where I'm having really bad anxiety, that I'm not the centre of attention, that people aren't all looking at me.

So I feel that even when I'm welcome in a space, I purposefully make myself as invisible as possible, so that I'm protected in some fashion, because the anxiety's so bad, I feel like it's physically noticeable at times. And then that, you know, I draw blanks. I can't communicate with people. I can't think on the spot. I've got nothing to say to anyone. So a lot of that, I think, has to do with the fact that there's, you know, so many people within the room, maybe the strobe light, and the combination of all these things just isn't catered for neurodiverse people, and so it can be very confronting and scary. So often you just don't go, and then you're excluded.

**MV:** And then you kind of – I suppose when you are a person that is neurodiverse, when you are in these situations, you usually – beforehand you have this idea of what your social script will be, and sort of predetermined —

**Hunter:** Yeah.

**MV:** — sort of, encounters you might have and how you might approach them, so when your social scripts are blown out the window, I can see why you feel like you're frozen and you can't interact with someone.

**Hunter:** Totally. And, you know, I've spent a lot of time in therapy, and I've learned that I can have certain phrases that I just have on-hand for when I draw a blank. You know, just certain questions like 'Oh, how was your day today?' is enough to maybe deflect so that people are no longer looking at me, and they're looking at the person who's speaking. And so it was, like, a thing that I needed to learn, was like, hey, have this little script that you just have in the back of your head at all times, and they're your go-to. So whenever you draw a blank, at least you've got these, you know, five different things that you can say, so you don't look like a deer in headlights.

**MV:** I suppose, how does the queer community understand the intersections of your identities?

**Hunter:** I think I'm lucky in some ways that I've gotten to a point in my life where a lot of the people that I spend time with are also members of the same intersectional minority group that I am. It's much easier to communicate your needs with people that also have their own needs, so nobody seems to be put out by each other's boundaries or requests, but there was definitely a long period of my life where I was pre-diagnosis for CFS, and I didn't understand why I was so tired. I didn't understand why it made me feel sick after I spent time with people that I cared about, my friends, my family. I didn't really get it, and so I didn't have any language to explain any of those things.

And then your community thinks that you're just – you don't care, or that you're just cancelling all the time, and they don't really get why you can't go to the thing with all of your friends, and, you know, because they don't understand if I go, it means I can only go for a certain amount of time. Everything is on a schedule for me, and people didn't really understand that for a very long time, and so they would just think I was being selfish or rude or bossy or controlling. And especially as a transmasculine person, that can come across as being abusive. If you've got, you know, all these limitations and rules that you need to set for the people that are in your life, they can take that in a very different way if they don't understand why those things are in place.

So there's a huge gap within that part of my identity and the rest of the community. Or if people have more understanding about why people act the way they act, and why, you know, 'why Hunter has to leave after two hours,' or, you know, 'why does Hunter never come on these long road trips,' they think it's about them. People naturally think, 'Oh, maybe they don't like me, or maybe they just don't want to hang out with me,' and so then you end up losing friends, and you lose community, and it's been a gift to get a diagnosis and an understanding, because it allows for behaviours to be accepted.

**MV:** Another thing that we wanted to speak about, because we had a pre-interview and you were speaking about, like, opportunities and self-agencies, and I suppose what I wanted to know is how you access and navigate public and private spaces, which also can include learning spaces and interpersonal and interdependent relationships and friendships.

**Hunter:** Yeah. Well, I got to La Trobe actually. I've only just started uni. I started this year, and I've been pleasantly surprised. On an institutional level, there's been a lot of conversations about people's pronouns at the start of class and in introductions, which never was a thing back, you know, when I went to school. There's lots of access to unisex bathrooms. The staff seem to have at least had some form of pre‑educational teaching before I've arrived there.

So it's really easy to not have to navigate my gender in that space, which is very different, because in most institutional spaces, say, work – I was a barista for a long period of time – I was stealth at work about my gender and about my sexuality also, because people make jokes, and they think it's funny, and they think it's appropriate to ask you inappropriate questions, and sometimes it's just easier to not say anything at all. And so it's nice to be able to be in a place where people ask you, 'What's your pronouns? Oh, cool.' And it's just nothing, and then there's no explanation. There's nothing more. So that's been really great.

 Also, as far as La Trobe's concerned, they have a great mental health department or disability department, and so I'm able to get extensions, I'm able to get, I guess, a bit more assistance than maybe other students get. They take a little bit more time out to explain things to me. I only have to say, like, 'Oh, I have ADHD, sorry. I can't recall information,' and they're like, 'Oh, no worries. Here's a prompt for you.' Like, the kind of – they just seem more aware that people learn differently and that people's brains work differently, and yeah, it's been a really great surprise.

 They also have, like, lots of elevators, so I don't have to walk up and down flights of stairs and – you know, from one side of the uni to the other. So that's been really good for my physical body.

**MV:** And on that, let's talk about your experiences in healthcare with clinicians. What has that been like?

**Hunter:** Terrible. This is, I guess, a really big question, because I'm 35 now, and I've been on testosterone since I was 24. Right now, my biggest hurdle that I'm facing is NDIS. It is an absolute joke. They don't seem to accept any of the letters that I've provided to, you know, indicate how I suffer and in which ways. They've made it very difficult, and I've been denied many times and had to appeal many times, and I'm still appealing, and I've heard that it can take a year to a year and a half before they will, you know, approve you, and that it's set up essentially for you to fail, and that the sicker you are, the harder it is for you to actually get access to the help that you need.

It's just not set up for people that are queer and also disabled. So they just expect you to be able to go and see any psychologist or any psychiatrist, but as a person who's queer and a sex worker and a polyamorous person, finding a psychologist that gets all of that and doesn't think, 'Oh, you're a person who just hates yourself, and that's why you're a sex worker,' or, you know, 'you don't feel that you're worthy of love and that's why you're polyamorous' – like, those theories and feelings being put on you can be very dangerous, and I've had to go through countless experiences of that to land on somebody who I was able to, you know, actually be honest and open about all of the different intersectionalities of myself and have them be able to help me. And then unfortunately they resigned after eleven months, and so I'm still – I'm now back on the hunt looking for both a psychologist and a psychiatrist.

And NDIS just thinks, 'Oh, just go to anyone,' because they don't realise that just going to anyone is traumatic. It is damaging, and it leaves scars on you that you can't heal from. And that's all from the medical profession, you know, so I don't understand why there's not more training. Why do medical professionals not understand these intersectionalities? Why are they not trained on what it is to be transgender? I shouldn't be having to explain what transgender means to my clinicians.

I had a cervical cancer scare. Now, as a trans person, getting surgery on, you know, their genitals and their uterus and their cervix, and it's very distressing already. And I thought, you know, 'I'll just go in, I'll get the surgery done and I'll get out, and everything's gonna be fine,' and I amped myself up for it. And I got into the hospital, and I had about two hours to wait before I went under the knife, and I had to spend the first half an hour of my time there being what felt like accosted with questions about my genitals, about my sexual identity, about my transition, about the tattoos that were on my body and how they maybe don't have the same body-type that I now have and how funny that is, you know, that they're stuck on me forever, and these were questions coming from the nurse that was sitting with me whilst I was waiting to go in.

It got to a point where the questions became so intrusive and intense that I started to disassociate, and for about an hour and a half I started disassociating, pretending to be asleep, while not thinking about the fact that I was about to go in to surgery. You know, a time in which I should have been able to sit, plan, like, you know, preparing myself for this big surgery I was about to have, I was forced to disassociate from, due to the fact that this person felt entitled enough to ask me whatever questions they wanted. I became just this experiment, this thing that was laying on a table, and it felt horrible.

**MV:** Thank you for sharing that experience with us and feeling open and comfortable to share that, because that is an ongoing issue for trans and gender diverse people. So I'd like to end with a question that connects back to one of your answers. You were speaking in relation to not engaging with community because of not having enough spoons or the energy or the capacity to go out, and how that has affected your relationships outside in the community. How can we interact better with people who are neurodivergent and have chronic illnesses? How can we be better allies and better community members?

**Hunter:** I think that's a great question. There's probably more conversations that need to take place. I think that's the answer. I don't have the answer, but I imagine that if people were to have more conversations with, you know, people like me, like this, then people might understand. I guess it makes me think about people with hearing disabilities, for example. So they may provide an Auslan interpreter, but we're kind of stuck in this cycle of people going, 'Well, what if there's no-one deaf here anyway? Then we've just gotten this person out here for nothing, and you know, they're mostly not deaf anyway, so we may as well not get one,' and then that creates – you know, well, no deaf people are gonna come, because they can't access the thing. And so it's this cycle of, like, people go, 'Oh, we don't really need it, because maybe only one or two people here will need it.' Well, but if you made it accessible, then maybe 50 people will come that need that thing.

And so how can people help create spaces for me and for other people like me? Well, have conversations with us and say, 'Well, what would you need at a party? If I was gonna have a party and this is what the party was gonna be, what would be helpful for you?' You know, and then if 10 people have the same idea, include that in your event. Yeah, maybe just that, you know, I'd like to party too. I want to go to things too. I want to be involved, and it'd be really nice if there was just heaps more things that I could go to. That would be great, because like, just because I'm sick and just because I'm tired doesn't mean I don't want to party.

**MV:** Thanks to Hunter for speaking with me so candidly earlier this week about their experiences and illnesses and how that has been contextualised by their trans and gender identity, and how that intersects also with disability, visibility, and ableism, and all these notions that we find so often in mainstream queer media, how ableist bodies are put to the forefront and everyone else is basically forgotten. So it was a really beautiful and candid conversation. I'd like to thank Hunter again for joining me to have that conversation. You can see more of Hunter in the next in-print issue of Fast Fashun magazine. That launched on Friday night. This magazine centres on queerness and social responsibility as the norm, and get more information via Fast Fashun's Instagram handle @fastfashun\_magazine, and that is spelled F-A-S-T F-A-S-H-U-N.

After a few announcements, I'll be speaking with Malaika Mfalme about their Black and queer identity as it fits into discussions about trans and gender diverse disability, but before that, you'll hear their beautiful track, 'Imagine If You Were Here.' So you're listening to Queering the Air on 3CR community radio 855 AM, digital and livestreaming on 3CR.org.au/streaming.

*['Imagine If You Were Here' by Malaika Mfalme plays]*

*[3CR announcements]*

**MV:** And if you've just tuned in, yes, you're listening to 3CR's Binary Busting Broadcast – tongue-twister – here in relation to, and the lead-up to, Trans Day of Visibility, which is happening at the end of the month, and you're listening to a special edition of Queering the Air. My name is MV, and during the break, and during the break you heard the track 'Imagine If You Were Here' by my next guest, Malaika Mfalme. And Malaika is a queer nonbinary mixed-race African-Australian person of colour and singer-songwriter living on Gadigal land, and they're joining me to speak about the continuing conversation about queer and cultural identities, and how these overlapping intersectional identities are navigated. Thanks for joining me. How are you?

**Malaika:** I'm really well, thank you, MV. Yeah, how are you?

**MV:** I'm pretty good, pretty good. It's been a wonderful day, so I'm looking forward to listening to the rest of the broadcast, and how's things over there in Gadigal land? I hear there's been a massive downpour or rain, and how are you coping with all of that?

**Malaika:** It's extremely wet and I love it. I hate the heat, so – I know, I'm a bad African, but I really don't like the heat, I don't like the humidity. So when it's raining and cold, I just crawl under my little blanket and enjoy.

**MV:** It's like that Garbage song, 'I'm Only Happy When It Rains.'

**Malaika:** Literally, that's me.

**MV:** Well, thanks again for joining me this afternoon. So let's start off with a little bit about your identities. Tell us a little bit more about you, and who you are and what you do.

**Malaika:** Well, I'm African-Australian. My mum is Tanzanian, and my dad is from Sydney. I went to an American school in South Africa for about five years, and kind of grew up all over the world, so hence the a little American/international accent. But I identify as trans nonbinary and use they/them pronouns, and I've been identifying as a lesbian for years, but that doesn't quite entirely encapsulate my attraction to the large variety of gender spectrums, but I guess the key is I simply love women.

**MV:** And tell us —

**Malaika:** And I'm a – as you said, I'm a singer, songwriter, performer and activist, grooving and healing on Gadigal land.

**MV:** And tell us a bit more about the music that you perform and create?

**Malaika:** Well, I started writing music over a decade ago, and it kind of just started out as a coping mechanism. I was a young person living with – struggling with lots of mental illnesses, and music was something that really spoke to me, and I was able to deal with all that I was living with through music. And so that kind of turned my coping mechanism into my career, which I've been very lucky for, but it also means my music is extremely heartfelt and very much – very personal. So right now I'm working on my current EP called Yasmin, which I'm really excited about.

**MV:** Well, we just got, I'd hope, perhaps a little bit of a taste of the music that you perform in the break with your track, which is really quite wonderful, and I'm glad I chanced upon it. So let's —

**Malaika:** Thank you.

**MV:** So let's sort of delve in a bit harder now, and talk about how you feel that you belong in sort of typical and non-typical queer spaces when thinking about your intersection. So, you know, when you think about your queer identity and your Black identity, and we're thinking about things like accessibility, representation, and inclusion in these spaces.

**Malaika:** Mm, good question. It's tough, because it's quite rare to find PoC queers. I think it has to do with the shame that has been indoctrinated into our people from, you know, through colonisation, et cetera. But when I find PoC queers to hang out with, we hang on for absolute dear life. Most of the time, I spend a lot of time around my white queer friends, who are wonderful and I love them, and they use my pronouns correctly and they understand my identity. I think it's quite a bit painful when I am around my Black friends who I can speak to about so many different things, we can talk about culture and parenting and hair, but I don't talk about my gender and sexuality. Which is bad, because it's a deeply integral part of myself. It's something that I find myself talking about constantly. So it does kind of feel like I'm closeting myself when I'm hanging out with my Black friends, and then I'm also recognising that I'm always hanging out with, like, white queers, and it can feel like – it can feel like I never really fit. Like, my whole life's existence of being mixed-race and genderqueer, it's all about, like, fitting into these different boxes, and I feel like it's really hard to find community and people where all of your boxes fit into the same one. I feel like sometimes I'm kind of splitting between two or three.

**MV:** And that sounds really exhausting. How do you navigate that? How do you juggle all your different identities in these spaces? I had no idea it was like that for you. When you're – you know, you said that it was difficult for you to be your true self with your Black friends, and that you didn't fully, and perhaps there was a semblance there of othering – let's dig deeper, because when we were doing a pre-interview, this is something that we kind of – I thought we'd probably – a rabbit-hole that we would get down to, so —

**Malaika:** Yeah.

**MV:** How do you navigate all these spaces? You know, and I suppose one of the questions was like: how do opportunities present themselves to you, and how do you have self-advocacy and agency when you sort of access these spaces? And I suppose we can talk about, you know, public space and private spaces, but also, like, professional spaces, like with your singer-songwriting, like, yeah, how does that work out for you? That was a very loaded question, so I hope it makes sense.

**Malaika:** That's okay. I feel like – I'll answer as best as I can.

**MV:** Yeah.

**Malaika:** I feel like there's a lot of code-switching that goes on. Like, I'm – like, the way that I kind of deal with it is, I don't know, is this bad, but you know, when I'm hanging out sometimes with my Black friends, I'll just kind of not really talk about my queer identity. But it's okay, because I can talk about being Black, which is such an important part of my identity. And likewise, hanging out with my queer friends, it's like, 'Well, I'm gonna tell this Black joke, and none of you are gonna laugh.' Like, me and my sister will be off in the corner thinking it's hilarious, but there's a room full of white people just uncomfortable. It can be quite interesting and difficult to navigate, but what's really been beautiful is just exploring more of Sydney and finding more and more niche communities where, like, you know, the queers kind of exist, and we can all kind of find each other.

**MV:** That's so nice that those opportunities can present themselves to you.

**Malaika:** Absolutely.

**MV:** And I myself, being a person that is from Sydney originally – I haven't lived there for ten years – I can sort of understand, like, the sort of explosion and the sort of melting pot of different queer identities.

**Malaika:** Yeah.

**MV:** And also, you know, different backgrounds and ways of expressing themselves. Like, it's a really sweet space to be in.

**Malaika:** Yeah.

**MV:** And so when we speak about – we've spoken about how you navigate Black spaces. How about the queer communities? How do they understand the intersections of your identities? Because again, when we look at mainstream communities and mainstream media landscape, you know, there's a particular person that's put in the foreground, and that's usually, you know, the white cis gay male that's usually put there in the forefront. However, how does that – how is that interpreted for you in your queer communities? And you mentioned just before things like your mental health and, like, grief as well. Like, how do they interplay with the way your identity's perceived in queer spaces?

**Malaika:** Well, I think the key is I don't associate with cis gay white men. I think I just – I simply avoid Oxford Street and that entire community, because it is not for me, fam. I have found a group of very, very sweet queer people who understand a lot about my identity stuff, and like, don't really quite understand my Black side of things, but they're always here to listen to it and be, like, uncomfortable and white-guilted, which I'm very grateful for. I think more of where I find PoC queers and that – where that community is, it's definitely involved in lots of activism and stuff in Sydney, and that's where I can really find the people that I absolutely connect with 100% on all these different levels.

 But kind of, if I'm circling back to my own personal life and who I really spend all my time with, I was in a lot of different friendship groups when I first moved to Sydney about four years ago, and that really, really narrowed down just for Covid in October 2019, when my partner Yasmin tragically passed away. And the friends that we kind of made together, this one group that I was part of, that I was in and out of with all the other groups that I was in, they became my home, my family, my sanctuary, my safety. They straight-up did not leave me alone. You know, as soon as Yasmin passed away, there was 20, 30, 40 queers in my house at all times, watching movies and crying and grieving. If it wasn't such a tragic and awful time, I feel like it would have been fun, because we were all – we were all just spending time together and trying to get through the best that we could.

**MV:** Thank you for sharing that with us, and I'm also sorry for the loss of your partner as well. I mean, that's so tragic.

**Malaika:** Thank you.

**MV:** And especially in the lead-up to, you know, what we didn't know was Covid coming in, and having that support of your queer family is so important. It sounds like you have a really wonderful group of people there that uplift you and really support you and see you for who you are, so that's a really beautiful position to be in. And I suppose something else that you brought up there as well is the grief that you are experiencing, and —

**Malaika:** Mm.

**MV:** How do you work through that grief within your intersecting identities as well? How is that interpreted? How is it – you know, how does that come to fruition?

**Malaika:** Um, I think that lots of different cultures have different ways of coping with grief. And I think because I have so many different communities to draw from, I was – I kind of pick and chose my favourite bits of grieving and ran with it. You know? Like, I feel like African people, people of colour can be light about grieving, whereas white people can be quite, you know, repressed and like, 'Let's not feel this.' So I was like, fuck that, let's not do any of that. Let's absolutely feel all of this, the way that, you know, my ancestors would. You know, I cried and cried and cried and felt that – and talked to anybody who would listen. If an Uber driver asked me twice how I was doing, I'd be like, 'Sorry fam, here you are, here's my grieving.'

**MV:** For —

**Malaika:** And so, like, being very open about it is something that's really helped me. I mean, my whole album that I'm writing right now, Yasmin, is about her, and it's about community feeling, and grief, and what you do with all of those feelings. And that song that you played before, 'Imagine If You Were Here', is the first song that I wrote for that album, just about – you know, it's a song for people who grieve in general, just remembering the people that we've lost.

**MV:** I mean, that song has a different meaning for me now that I know a bit more of the background to that song.

**Malaika:** Mm.

**MV:** Yeah. Yeah, it's really powerful.

**Malaika:** Thank you.

**MV:** In your previous answer, you spoke about the activism that you're also involved in there on Gadigal land. Can you tell me some of the activism that you're involved in? What's happening over there at the moment, or what has been happening.

**Malaika:** Yeah, well, I was really, really fixed in the scene when I first moved, and when I was – especially, I don't know, 2018, 2019, I was at absolutely every rally, playing at every one that I could. I played at the Women's Marches three years in a row and the refugee rallies, Black Lives Matter stuff. When Yasmin passed away, I definitely needed to take a step back from activism. I – and I feel a lot, and I feel a lot of people's pain, and I really put myself in the situation that all of these people are feeling all over the world, with all of the things that we have to cope with on the daily, and I couldn't keep putting myself in these positions of pain once I was struggling so much, so I kind of ducked back a little bit. But definitely within the last, you know, half a year to a year I've been stepping back into the scene a little. Like, kind of dipping my toes back in. It's mostly just the big rallies that have been going on. You know, we had the March for Justice recently. That was for women and nonbinary people, trans women, in Sydney and all over Australia. I think that went really well. We've got our Trans Day of Visibility coming up as well. I mean, there's always so much going on in community and so much that needs help. It's almost difficult to pinpoint what I've been doing, because, you know, there's always this rally to go to, and this thing to share, and this person that needs donations, and, you know, you're just in it all the time, and I feel like so much of my life is activism that I don't even really notice it anymore.

**MV:** It's a busy schedule. When you become involved in activism and there's so much – you know, there's so much going on in Sydney as well, and the scene there is quite wonderful. I mean, the queer scene there is quite political as well, and very forward-coming.

**Malaika:** Mm.

**MV:** And I mean, on that, what can you tell me about the community healing and the building of a strong sense of community there around the movements for equality and social justice? How has that been like for you? You mentioned, you know, the community healing when your partner passed away, and how a lot of people were involved in there. Does it extend further than that? What have you found has been, you know – I can't think of the word, but what has been – damnit. What has been something really great about it for you?

**Malaika:** Yeah. I feel like because my person is inherently political – like, being Black, being queer, being trans – I don't really get to walk through the world and not assume a political lifestyle, because my very existence is political, because there are gonna be people in offices that don't like that I'm a lesbian, that don't like that I want them to use my they/them pronouns, that don't like that I'm Black and will ask for certain rights, you know, like not being arrested and all of these sorts of things. There are people in the world that don't agree with my very existence. So it's hard to pinpoint down and say, you know, this community activism or that community activism has helped me. It's just that we simply have bonded and formed a life around fighting for our lives, and that, you know, is called activism, but it's also just our lives.

**MV:** And it's so true, our very existence as queer people is a political act in itself, and to be visible – I mean, this is what this whole broadcast's about. Visibility and being out there. I mean, that itself – you know, and not everyone has that opportunity, in countries around the world where being queer or being trans is actually dangerous.

**Malaika:** Well, absolutely. I was going —

**MV:** And we're relatively okay here in, you know, so-called Australia. We can mostly walk around in a safe space. That's not always the case, but yeah, I suppose this is what the —

**Malaika:** Yeah, well, absolutely. My home country, Tanzania, it's illegal to be gay there. Don't even think – I don't even think about going home and presenting as trans. Like, I go home, I simply put myself back in the closet, and then I come back to Sydney where it's safe.

**MV:** That's so intense. I'm sorry that has to be your experience for you, but that seems to be something that's probably an experience for many people when they go back to their hometowns. I mean, when I go back to, you know, my folks' place in real suburbia Sydney, you know, you tone it down a bit so you don't get heckled on the street when you're just going to get milk. I mean, I get it.

**Malaika:** Absolutely.

**MV:** I mean, you know, otherwise I'll be safe, but yeah. So let's dig deeper. I know we probably have to wrap up soon. I don't want to say 'wrap up', but, like, I wanted to speak about so many things. So I'm going to just have a look at the questions, see what we have time for, but maybe let's look at the redefinition of our queer identities, when a lot of the time our voices and our visibility is ignored or silenced, because we're viewed as ungovernable because we're going against normativity, and usually our identity is erased, and you mentioned that through, like, colonising practices.

**Malaika:** Mm.

**MV:** So how do you think that we can redefine this sort of state straightism that occurs against queer people and queer identities and so forth?

**Malaika:** Just more queer people in power. It's like women's health issues and PoC race issues: just hire more women, hire more queer people, hire more Black people to speak on the issues that actually affect us. No more of these dinosaur white men standing behind their ancient ideals. Like, last year we saw a real shift in the world and actually had a massive conversation about race with the BLM movement raging all over the world. We need more of *that*. We need uproar, upheaval, and fucking outrage. More queer Black people in political office. More allies speaking out against the system that kills us. And I mean, also simply we could just throw away the whole system and try again.

**MV:** I mean, that'd be great, and I do agree that having more people in those positions of, you know, I don't want to say 'authority', but people in those really visible positions that can make a difference, make a headway, make a pathway for these more resistive movements and these more, sort of, radical left-ish movements. I mean, that would be incredible. I mean, we are seeing a little bit more of it with people taking office who are trans and/or gender-diverse. A lot more Black people and people of colour, indigenous people, even here in so-called Australia, you know, with Lydia Thorpe here as part of the Greens, so there is a movement. It's really, really slow, but having these intersecting voices and these beautiful narratives and stories more visible in media does make a difference.

**Malaika:** Mm, absolutely.

**MV:** So I suppose just to end with, I wanted to ask: what has been a positive outcome for you with dealing with these dealing with these different aspects of your identity? So today we've spoken about, you know, decolonising practices, your interaction between PoC and white communities, but also dealing with grief and mental health. And how has that helped you, sort of, like, make this identity of yourself and be who you are?

**Malaika:** Um, gosh. A few different things. I guess re: grief and trauma, I think I mentioned I've been living with mental illness since I was quite young. Something this awful, like, truly awful happening to you, it meant that I literally had to hit bottom and, you know, I don't know. I spiralled out when Yasmin passed away, and I really hit the bottom period of my life, and I, you know, woke up in hospital one day and I was like, 'Is this what I want my life to look like? What Yasmin would want for me?' Fuck no, of course not. And I really had this big, kind of, 'you need to turn your life around' moment. I checked myself into hospital, I got myself more well, and kind of spend my life trying to fight the pain. And through that, I think I was – overall gained a better sense of self. I gained a better sense of responsibility and how much my voice is needed in the world, not just for trans queer people, but literally for my family, for my twin sister, for my siblings, for my parents. You know, I can't just vanish off the face of the earth. It's not possible.

And so, like, being – when I hit that moment, I realised that I needed to come out properly as nonbinary. So I've done that now, and I am out and proud. I talk about being Black. I talk about being queer. And there are so many positive things that come with that. Like, I can't even tell you. I think the biggest thing is like, I can wear whatever I want. I can't tell you how often as a child I'd turn up to something wearing something masc and get asked to go change, and it put a burden on my younger self. Leaving the house became impossible. And clothes are something that it's meant to be the first thing in your day, and it's uncomplicated, but to wear something – coming out as nonbinary has been integral to finding my comfort in the world. I started binding and my clothes fit so, so well, and I feel amazing, and I feel beautiful and handsome. And it's just something that I never really got to do, because when I was, like, eight years old, I used to watch these makeover shows and wish somebody would come and save me from the daily dysphoria and the wardrobe choices. And I don't know, I look at myself now, and I didn't think that I'd be the hero in my own story, saving myself from the confines of traditional gender roles and traditional any roles. I just kind of – I kind of saved myself, and was able to move forward and really, really be myself. And by being myself, I can see that other people are more comfortable being their self.

**MV:** Wow. That's a really beautiful answer. Thank you so much for sharing that with us.

**Malaika:** Thank you.

**MV:** Thank you so much for joining me on Queering the Air and for 3CR's Binary Busting Broadcast. We really appreciate your voice, and if people want to get more information on your work, you can head to [facebook.com/malaikamusic](https://www.facebook.com/malaikamusic/), and also via your Instagram handle [@malaika](https://www.instagram.com/malaika/). Thanks again for joining me. I look forward to perhaps meeting you in real life sometime when I'm up in Sydney.

**Malaika:** Absolutely, yeah, and my twin sister and I have just started our own podcast called [Womb for Improvement](https://www.instagram.com/womb4improvementcast/), so if you want to keep hearing me chat about stuff like this, I'll be doing it with my other half.

**MV:** And you'll be able to find more information on that podcast via Instagram as well, is that correct?

**Malaika:** Yes, yep, that's correct.

**MV:** Awesome. Take care, I'll speak with you soon.

**Malaika:** Thank you so much, honey.

**MV:** Take care.

And that was Malaika Mfalme, a queer nonbinary mixed-race African-Australian person of colour and singer/songwriter living on Gadigal land, speaking about their queer and cultural identities in the context of Trans Day of Visibility. And for more information on queer identities, you can continue – queer identities and trans identities and nonbinary identities, you can continue listening to today's Binary Busting Broadcast up until 7pm tonight here on [3CR.org.au/streaming](https://www.3cr.org.au/streaming). Thanks again for listening to Queering the Air. I really appreciate you listening to us, and I'd like to also thank my previous guest, Hunter Dillon, for speaking about their trans identity and how it intersects with their illness, disability, and also representation of their identities. Really appreciate Hunter's time as well. So up next is Priya Kunjan of Thursday Breakfast, who is interviewing architect and DJ Simona Castricum about how to build a more inclusive world in a segment entitled 'Inclusive Architecture'. So thanks again for listening to 3CR, Queering the Air. Have a great afternoon and see you next time.