16. We Are Here

**Ajak:** Good evening. This is Ajak here at 3CR. As you know that we're going to go to, on Sunday, International [ Day of People With] Disability. And we celebrate this one with a beautiful artist here with me in the studio from the Wild At Heart. And we're going to start with Frank Linehan, artist name Damage.

**Ajak:** He's going to tell us about the title of it and he's going to perform one song live and play a track from the album. Damage is a loud project based in Melbourne Australia, formed by a songwriter Frank Line..

**Frank:** Linehan, yeah.

**Ajak:** Linehan in 2019. And the message that struck me here is about hope and the arts. It's really a beautiful way of coping and send a positive message out. So Frank is going to talk to us about this. Welcome to the show, Frank.

**Frank:** Thank you.

**Ajak:** What do you mean when you say Damage?

**Frank:** Well, I had a number of friend guitarist, he had a disability as well. And we used to jam together and I used to teach him my songs and he'd play them on guitar. And we got him to Wild at Heart a couple of times.

**Frank:** And then unfortunately, well, I won't jump to the finish. I asked him, what did he want to call our band? And he said when he was in the garage band, they were called Damage. I said, okay, so we kept that name. Unfortunately he passed away about a month after that from a heart attack, and he was in his early fifties. So I thought I'd keep the name just in honor of him, if that makes sense.

**Ajak:** Oh, that is beautiful. And what do you mean when you say that the message of hope through music?

**Frank:** I got sober in Alcoholics Anonymous when I was 33. I'm now 57. So I talk a little bit about spirituality some form of a higher power, but sometimes it's in metal or hard rock style.

**Frank:** So I like the heavy music. And I actually like heavy lyrics, but I'm not a devil worshipper, put it that way. So I sing songs about making amends things like that.

**Ajak:** Yeah, you're going to play a track. Two tracks. One is going to be live, and one is on a recording, your album. Can you tell us the song that you're going to perform?

**Frank:** It's called Roadrunner. I have to admit I found the lick in a blues book. And then I wrote the words around it. So It's very classic blues rock and roll. And it's about a black Cadillac.

**Ajak:** And why blues?

**Frank:** Good question. A friend of mine invited me to a blues club in Brunswick, or Coburg actually. And I was thinking it'll be African Americans playing trumpets. And that's not really my style, but when I got there, there was people my age and older giving their time to the blues and blues rock. So I decided to pick guitar up again. That was about five years ago, and then I started writing songs.

**Ajak:** Wow, that is beautiful. And the CD is going to be, is it already released or it's going to be?

**Frank:** There's two CDs I've got that are released now. And the third one's been hopefully printed at the time of speaking.

**Ajak:** And so the one that have a collection of 10 tracks written by you, oh wow. Okay. ' Drunk Fight'. So is that the title of a song or the album?

**Frank:** It's the title of the first album and it's the second track of that album. And the second album's called It Ain't Loud Enough. There's a track on that as well.

**Ajak:** Alright. Can you play us something?

**Frank:** Yeah, sure. The first album and half the second album recorded at Audrey Studios by a producer called Craig Pilkington. So just a shout out to Craig, thanks for that. And this song is called Heads Will Roll.

**Ajak:** And what does that mean?

**Frank:** I wrote a riff on the guitar that sounded pretty metal ish and Heads Will Roll just came to mind. And I thought about the French Revolution and all that sort of stuff, so I've done a bit of Googling, YouTubing and researched the executions in France at that time and basically wrote a song about it. So it's got a heavy lyrics, which I like.

**Ajak:** What an amazing track, huh? Yeah, rock and roll, really. I was going to ask you Frank, if it wasn't for music, what do you think during the lockdown as well, what does music mean to you?

**Frank:** It means a lot of things, but recently I've been making money from it. I made $13,000 this year as a busker. So I paid for my first album, which was $3000 over a year. Yeah, a lot of things, but making money out of it has been great too.

**Ajak:** Yeah, it's very hard for independent artists and I think it's a good thing to be able to earn some money from your music because it's not easy, particularly now the music is took over by...

**Frank:** Live streaming and whatever.

**Ajak:** But apart from the money. Soul. What does that mean to you as a musician?

**Frank:** I got a long story written here, but basically my father, my earliest memory was him playing with his guitar and his case and his sheet music. And I was mesmerised by it as a five year old kid. And me mother told me that they used to go around the country pubs and jam with their friends. I was just talking to my mother the other day and she said that my grandfather used to play trumpet at the primary school when he was 12 years old, 13 years old. So I think it's in the genetics because I just naturally tend to play guitar and sing and write songs and record them.

**Ajak:** And how are you getting to Wild At Heart organization to work with? Amazing director, Phil.

**Frank:** Yeah. My caseworker, I picked up guitar about two or three months before I found Wild at Heart. And I started writing songs and recording them. My case manager gave me a web printout of Wild at Heart's website. And I thought, it's too good to be true. Music and people with disabilities. But no, it was quite legit, to use another word. And the NDIS has played a big part in Wild at Heart and myself.

**Frank:** They pay for recordings singing lessons, getting CDs printed all sorts of stuff. So yeah, that's been great too.

**Ajak:** Yeah, Phil has been very good. He's just been a drive, I commend him for his work for the community as well, surrounding this amazing choir for many years. And a patron of art, a passion of music for him. It just amazes me. So tomorrow on Sunday, it's International Disability Week. What does disability say about the society we live in? What does it mean when you're different? What does it mean? Because people are not bad, but sometimes people just can't comprehend if someone act differently or they look differently.

**Ajak:** That is unconscious bias. How do you deal with that? You can tell the others, listeners.

**Frank:** Yeah. I don't watch TV. Cause there's just too much negativity that I don't need to entertain my mind with. I'd rather play music or do something else. So I condition myself to listen to positive thinking tapes and YouTube videos and stuff like that.

' Cause my mental illness is negative enough as it is without pouring more negativity into it. So that's why I shy away from TV and tend to do my passions.

**Ajak:** What amazing way of dealing with that. I think thinking positively is very important for people who are different as well, because otherwise you can't cope. And now when I say that, even people like me, I don't have a recognized disability, but being a black person. I can tell how people are treated when you're different. So that's what I was getting to. How the perception of the society about the different people.

**Frank:** I think people judge consciously and unconsciously, or sometimes both. And for good reason. If you watch the news, it won't take long before you hear somebody do something that ain't too good, so they just think everyone's like that. So pre-judging is a top thing I've found, yeah.

**Ajak:** Yeah, and keep doing the beautiful music. Because that's the way you can make yourself good.

**Frank:** I'd like to leave something behind when I go.

**Ajak:** Yeah. And also to be connected with people like Phil.

**Frank:** Yeah. Wild at Heart's been great. The Community, the people, it's been great. They are.

**Ajak:** So, can you play the other songs?

**Frank:** I'll try. Alright, I'd say hi, Frank from Damage. This is a song called Road Runner.

**Ajak:** Thank you so much, Frank. You did an amazing job. Thank you for coming in. And we appreciate it. Thank you very much. It was beautiful and just say the people to like your music or buy it for Christmas.

**Frank:** Buy it, rock on, buy it. If you're interested in buying some music on bandcamp, I'm The Damage. And I'm on Spotify and all the various platforms. So yeah, check it out. Thank you.

**Ajak:** Thank you, Frank. You listen to 3CR and this is Ajak here with you. Our show called Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a Zulu word. It means I am here because you are. We're going to have this amazing woman Sage Renton, performer, rap over record beats. She is a rap artist and blues soul singer from Dandenong, Melbourne. She writes and perform about her experience including period of homeless, mental illness, health. She has a powerful message of positive and social for the people who experience injustice in life. And we have a lot of people like that. Welcome to the show, Sage. Tell us about your music. What inspired you to write this?

**Sage:** I've always loved music, but I was never confident to write my own lyrics. I'd write something down, go " that's stupid". It doesn't sound right. That sort of thing. Then I did a bit of singing with a church and didn't think anything of it. Then I was studying in Box Hill. I was doing community services and one of my teachers said there's a place called Wild at Heart and they're looking for a singer cause they used to be a band called Bipolar Bears.

**Sage:** And then we never actually connected for maybe another two years. During COVID I worked with Phil online with his gospel group, Phil's the manager at Wild At Heart. And so that was really good. That's how I connected from there to Wild At Heart. Now that I've been there, maybe two going on three years.

**Sage:** I'm actually just blossoming. I've been able to write, find my story, find who I am and what I'm comfortable with. And what I want other people to hear about what I do. The encouragement and support from the staff at Wild at Heart, the relationships with the other people that come along, it's all amalgamated to providing an environment where I can write what I believe in and sing and, do some instruments.

**Ajak:** Yeah, that sounds amazing. I was just going to ask you about your experience that you write the song about. The social justice and for people who experience injustice in life and also mental health issues. To you, are they related? Because injustice is just so huge. And it could be people in disability as well discriminated against. It could be other people who are not having...

**Sage:** It's interesting you ask that because I've done a lot of study. And when people ask what have I learnt with my study, I always say I've learnt to love people better and more so myself. I've studied education support, disability services, community services, drug and alcohol counselling, mental health and youth work. Everything I've learnt I just want to help people heal.

**Ajak:** That's amazing. And music does heal people as well, which is what you're doing now. And when it comes to social injustice, what do you say about that?

**Sage:** You just do what you can. If everyone puts a little bit of effort in, it's going to result in big changes. It's like the woman in the Bible who put the mite in the charity bin, and God said she has given more than anyone else who gave lots of money. Because she didn't have anything, she gave the little she had. And it's like when people in the community, every little thing helps make big changes.

**Ajak:** You're absolutely amazing, because you just say it. We individual, we have a responsibility as a people, it's just not a one person are going to do it. And so what are you going to sing for us?

**Sage:** I've got two tracks today. Okay. One's called Wrapped in Blankets, Homeless Homage. It's about being homeless, which I identify with. And then the other one is called God Same Same . And it's just the way faith is, unifies us rather than divides.

**Ajak:** Sounds beautiful.

**Sage:** Yeah, thank you.

**Ajak:** You sound amazing. I don't know how people do rap, because it's just, the words are very close. And you did an amazing job. Did you make the beat?

**Sage:** Yeah, I've got help with one of the mentors at the program, especially with this next one. Gaining confidence as song goes by song that comes, getting more confidence in myself saying, this is what I want, this is how I want it to sound.

**Sage:** And then the next step is making my own beats, which is where I'm at now. I'm about to step into the future of my music making and making my own beats, making my own samples, all that sort of stuff.

**Ajak:** Yeah, and what is this song is about?

**Sage:** Homelessness.

**Ajak:** Yep. It's a big topic, is it?

**Sage:** Yeah. I've written a few about homelessness. This one's generally about homelessness. But I've also written something, it's called A Girl Lost in the City. And that one's hip hop and spoken word. It's about my experiences, the specific experiences I went through. I lived in a condemned hotel for a while. Slept in the park with the bats and they would sing at night. Some people say they don't sing, but they did to me. So yeah. I think who we are is enough. And everyone's story is good, and even when the bad stuff that happened, you always grow from adversity.

**Ajak:** I love that. Positivity is the way to go ahead. Otherwise if you're stuck into being sorry then that is not a good thing. And I love the courage that some people fall over and they get up, which is really a good thing. Not many people does that. Well done. What about the next one? What is it called?

**Sage:** It's called God Same Same. So it's basically about faith and how our faith is united and brings us together rather than divide.

**Ajak:** That's correct, yeah.

**Ajak:** Thank you so much, Sage, you did an amazing job. Thank you for coming. Making an effort and come here. What beautiful music. Would you want to tell people where they can get your music?

**Sage:** They need to come along to some of the gigs for the Wild at Heart crew. We need people to come along and support us because you know what? We're doing some amazing things. It's not a popularity contest. It's about being yourself, being real and sharing that with each other. And just celebrating the diversity of our community.

**Ajak:** Actually, that is a very powerful word I think. Yeah, tell us about the gig coming up.

**Sage:** There's a hip hop gig on Sunday at Mama Chen's in Footscray, Sunday the 10th. And then the week after that there's going to be a gig for the Wild At Heart team. That's going to be at Open Studio the following Saturday or Sunday.

**Ajak:** That's great.

**Sage:** And look, people love it. I've had friends come along and they've said the vibe is so real and authentic and just so embracing of everybody and there's such a great atmosphere. You're missing out if you don't come along.

**Ajak:** They will. Yeah. People will come. Thank you so much for coming here. Thank you.

**Sage:** Oh, thank you so much.

**Ajak:** And Phil as well.

**Sage:** Excellent. Thank you.

**Ajak:** That was amazing music.

**Sage:** Thanks guys.

**Ajak:** Welcome back again to 3CR with Ubuntu. We are blessed today, we have this amazing artist, just came in. As on Sunday it's International Day of People With Disability. And what a beautiful way to celebrate that day because of the music. There is nothing better than art.

**Ajak:** We are here with Benjamin Coggins. He call himself The Mad Hatter. It's a hip hop project of Benjamin Cogan's. A multiple discipline artist - musician, writer, social, community, and mental health activist. Waving emotion through provoking the creative and community building, artistic response for the failing society and political system around us, using art and connection as a hammer to help shape the new vision of the community and imagination. Wow. Welcome to the show, Benjamin, and tell us about the names and tell us about the project.

**MadhattaMC:** Yeah, thanks so much for having me. It's a real pleasure to be here. I'm a long term listener of 3CR and I think it's such an important voice in Melbourne, of voices that get left out of the mainstream conversation.

I've been performing in bands since I was 12. I started playing guitar at age 11 and music's always been a way of regaining a sense of self from having experienced horrendous and ritualistic childhood abuse. And just living in a society that really is pretty traumatic and pretty undermining of any sense of self worth, community connection, any hope, any sort of sense of decent values.

**MadhattaMC:** It's a brutal society and I had a brutal upbringing. So music's always been a rebellion against that. A sense of reclaiming, a sense of power, connecting with people, putting our stories together. I don't know, just. Rebelling against the awfulness of it and finding ourselves in that. And reempowering ourselves and building our army, I reckon,. Like our army of community that we can reclaim our sense of humanity.

**MadhattaMC:** So hip hop's something I've always loved since I was about 10, and I've always, it's really spoke to me as a weapon in that whole struggle of reporting what's happening in the world. Like Chuck D from Public Enemy said, I got his record when I was like 10, and I was like, Oh my God, that really speaks to me.

**MadhattaMC:** He said that hip hop is the street media. It's reporting what's happening in the community that you won't read in the newspapers. So yeah, really spoke to me, but it's only been the last couple of years that I actually met a friend in a psych ward a couple of years ago, who gave me the confidence to really lean into that and do hip hop myself.

**MadhattaMC:** I'd always done it in my head and I'm always writing in my head, but I didn't find the confidence that I could participate in that. And I think I've been a bit of a nerd about hip hop for a long time. It's something that I feel really comfortable within. I've been a poet and a writer for a long time, so hip hop feels like a natural outgrowth of that.

**MadhattaMC:** I've always been using words as a way of reclaiming my sense of self, and I've been a political activist as well for a long time, so that's all about crafting slogans to challenge the injustice and also to organize people. So hip hop is bringing a lot of different elements of me together. I'm able to do all the music in the studio, so I have that.

**MadhattaMC:** It's About building community and also having it as a sense of reclaiming my own mental health. Just going on what Sage said earlier. Two weeks ago marks the four year anniversary of me being off the streets. I spent three years homeless between 2016 and 2019. So yeah, a lot of what Sage said really resonated with me.

**MadhattaMC:** It was a culmination of my own trauma and mental health. Hip Hop's really helped me, and my music as well. I do a lot of different music as well. It's been central into rebuilding myself from the ground up and finding community and finding my voice. And leaning into that as a way of not just empowering myself, but hopefully connecting with people and inspiring people and feeling part of a community.

**Ajak:** You touch a very important topic about the society. We blame people for example, if someone experience homeless. People condemn them or they don't look at them.

**Ajak:** They think there is something odd with them, but the symptom is a symptom of society. And people remove themselves from that and how you bring people to understand, to listen, that it's a symptom, like what you just said, being abused as a young child, you didn't have a control over that.

**Ajak:** But the society was, and maybe the people abuse you, they had something wrong with them as well. But the very interesting thing that people remove themselves from those things, but somehow we hurt people or we harm people in dire way. So how can you make the community listen and come together and say it's not your own fault it's the symptoms of the society.

**MadhattaMC:** Yeah, that's a really important question and yeah. Thanks so much for articulating it so well. I'll try and summarize this as quick as I can, but for me, my way of regaining my sense of self when I was young was trying to find an explanation for this and there is an explanation.

**MadhattaMC:** We live in capitalism. Capitalism is a system which only incidentally provides for human needs as a byproduct of accumulation for a tiny minority who are in control of the wealth and the means of production in society. I don't think I need to explain this to people.

**MadhattaMC:** We're all in a housing crisis. Houses aren't produced for people to live in. Houses are produced to be speculated on a market to maximize capital investment. And as long as we have capitalism, we're going to have homelessness. It's not a shortage of housing. It's that houses aren't for people.

**MadhattaMC:** Capitalism is not a system designed for people. And I think you know, I've been saying this since I was 10 years old. I don't think I'm talking to a brick wall anymore. I think everyone realizes this now.

**Ajak:** And that is actually the aim of the system that built the liberal, what do you call, I can't quite say it well. But capitalism is bad. If you don't make it, it's your fault, fix it. But how someone is someone put you down, like what happened to children, what happened to be abused, how they can get up and do it themselves? That is immoral in a society that they don't see that part, they blame the victim. I think that is the beauty of music, we're so blessed, we people in the world that some of us have a creative thing that you can run to. It's like, where do you go and hide? Or you free to speak through your art, which is a really beautiful thing. I think it's a really good thing that we're going to listen to a beautiful song from you.

**MadhattaMC:** Yeah, great. Thank you so much. It relates to this track, because this track is all about this.

**MadhattaMC:** And I guess I would make the argument that mental health is created by collective gaslighting. By a society refusing to acknowledge the profoundly traumatic and dehumanizing experiences that we go through. It's not the trauma itself. The trauma is socially constructed by our collective responses to that.

**MadhattaMC:** And then society would rather those people have the label of mentally unwell than it have to look in its closet and look at the psychosis in the core of the psyche of our society. So I refuse to be a scapegoat, so that society doesn't have to do any self work. My mental health was caused by an abusive society and a gaslighting society and a society that refused to take responsibility for its impact on people. On children, on our communities, on LGBTI people, on non white people, on people that are gender diverse. And I'm gonna put that blame right back on that society and we will not be mentally unwell just so our society can get off scot free. We're not standing for it anymore and that's what I'm here for to put that blame back where it belongs. So this song is called Right Bygones.

**Ajak:** That amazing track. Thank you so much. Tell us where the people are going to find you guys performing that.

**MadhattaMC:** Yeah. It's great to listen to music online and stuff, but we're all about building a community. So I think coming out to shows is really important.

**MadhattaMC:** So Wild At Heart, and Inkrewsive Crew, which is a hip hop crew that we have, we're representing here today, have a showcase at Mama Chen's in Footscray on Sunday the 10th of December, between two and five. Check out on the socials, check out Wild At Heart Community Arts or Inkrewsive Crew on both Instagram and Facebook.

**MadhattaMC:** You can add me on Instagram, @madhattermc. Or, I've got stuff on SoundCloud, on MadHatterMC. And soon we'll have stuff in an EP release and in the next couple of months have stuff on Spotify and Apple Music and all that stuff.

**Ajak:** What amazing work. Wild At Heart, and you guys, thank you so much for coming in, and we hope for the best.

**MadhattaMC:** Thank you so much for having us, it's been a pleasure. Don't forget that music is community.

**Ajak:** Absolutely, you're right, absolutely. Join me as I cry with Ubuntu Voices Wednesday at 8:30pm on 3CR. Ubuntu is a Zulu word meaning I am here because you are. Ubuntu celebrates the positive contribution African Australian make to our communities in music, academia, the arts and everything in between. Come with me on a journey. Ubuntu Voices, every Wednesday at 8:30 PM.