

## **The Directors Interview: Stephen**

**Michael:** Stephen, I'm curious to know what you felt when you heard about this project.

**Stephen:** I'm sort of interested in anything that, sort of, raises awareness about mental health.

**Michael:** Did you think it was possible for Marcus, as a performer and an artist, to inhabit and perform your own experience?

**Stephen:** I was interested in watching him try, and I realised I would probably have to go into it quite deeply, what it feels like to have psychosis, and to be paranoid.

**Michael:** How has it felt, over the last couple of days, actually being inside the project, and directing Marcus?

**Stephen:** Yes, it's been really interesting to watch it play out, to watch someone play, sort of, me, how it felt, and to express that, so that other people could understand it.

**Michael:** Do you think there were particular moments in the shoot when you really felt you could identify with what he was doing, and feeling, and saying?

**Stephen:** I think, probably, the first point where I, sort of, thought, 'Yes, this is working,' was when he did the rope in the hall. That forcing yourself through the door is just such a big thing. It had to look like a big challenge. I thought, 'Yes, that really does give people an insight into how difficult it is.'

**Michael:** How did it make you feel, seeing Marcus convey your experience? Did you feel a sense of relief that somebody else was going through it, and it wasn't you that time?

**Stephen:** Yes. I spent thirteen years of my life really unwell, with paranoid schizophrenia, and, you know, that's a big chunk of your life. It was a really difficult time. To actually watch someone else express that-, it was, it was such an overwhelming experience. It, sort of, held me back so much. It was like this immovable object. It was just this ever-present thing inside my head, that I just couldn't shift.

**Michael:** One of the things we were worried about in preparing the project was that seeing it re-enacted would somehow potentially trigger something in you. Were you worried about that?

**Stephen:** I was a little bit worried, because, you know, reliving a dark period of your life-, but I really enjoyed watching Marcus, seeing all the pieces come together, and watch it being acted out.

**Michael:** So, it was almost as if Marcus was doing it for you, so you didn't have to do it.

**Stephen:** Yes. This time it wasn't me who had to force myself out the door, you know what I mean? It was someone else. I could just observe it. Today, it's Marcus who's going through that.

**Michael:** So, it gave you a, sort of, perspective on something that you had been through, but Marcus was now doing it for you, as a surrogate almost.

**Stephen:** Yes.

**Michael:** When you think about an audience watching this film, what do you think it can do? How can it help an audience to understand something which is talked about quite a lot now, particularly after the pandemic?

**Stephen:** Well, there is a lot of conversation about mental health, but, pre-pandemic, it seemed to be all centred around anxiety and depression, and this is obviously psychosis. I think there does need to be more understanding of that. When people see the film, I think they will have a better understanding of how hard it is. Maybe they might notice certain behaviours, and they might have seen someone in public who was acting a little strange, and a little odd, and instead of, sort of, laughing at that person, they might have a bit more understanding, and a bit more compassion, and just, sort of, think, 'Maybe that person has a mental health problem. Maybe that person is struggling.'

**Michael:** Yes. For us, you were just part of our team today, and you directed in a way that was very clear-, Marcus got very clear instruction from you. You were quite tough on him.

**Stephen:** Yes. There had to be that pressure there, and there had to be that, sort of, build up. When you are unwell, and you're isolated, you just become so lonely. Psychosis, and mental health in general, can be a very isolating thing. It's getting a bit better now, because, like you say, people are talking about it a bit more. I've worked in mental health for years, after my recovery. I don't feel like I have to fix people. Do you know what I mean? I want to connect with someone, and I want to understand and explore how they feel. I don't see them as an illness or a set of symptoms. Do we need to re-integrate everybody with a mental illness back into society? Wouldn't it be better if people in society just accepted them as part of the community? Do they have to be well before they become, sort of, a valid human being again? Mental illness isn't going to go away. People need to understand its complexities. There's no magic pill. It's going to be around for a long time. It's been around for a long time.

**Michael:** Yes. So, how do you think your film-, when you go back on the train tonight, how will you look back on these two days?

**Stephen:** I've really enjoyed it. I think it will help. I think the people who see the films-, I think they will walk away with a better understanding. If people could be more understanding about it all-,

**Michael:** Accepting, accepting of how someone is.

**Stephen:** Yes.

**Michael:** Thank you. Thanks very much for everything you've done, and for your collaboration. You've directed this film.

**Stephen:** Well, thank you for asking me to do it. I've really enjoyed it.

**Michael:** Thank you Stephen.