

Transcript of Interview with Krystal McRae by Robert Baker-Nicholas

Interviewee: Krystal McRae

Interviewer: Robert Baker-Nicholas

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Location (Interviewee): Brooklyn, New York City, New York

Location (Interviewer): Wake Forest, North Carolina

Transcriber: Robert Baker-Nicholas

Abstract:

Krystal McRae grew up in Brooklyn, New York City, New York. She is a freelance writer in New York City. She is also active in the team of justice which a documentary miniseries and also writes music blogs while being active in the music and punk communities. She is giving her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City as part of the LGBTQ+ community where considers herself an ally to this group of people. She speaks about how the pandemic has affected the LGBTQ+ community, her personal life, and her mental health. She also gives advice to her past self when dealing with a pandemic.

RBN: My name is Robert Baker- Nicholas and I am here with Krystal McRae. I am interviewing. I am interviewing her with an audio voice conference on March 13, 2021. At 11:45am. We are completing this interview as part of the project with the Arizona State University of history for contributing to the archive about the corona virus pandemic and other crisis. Since Miss McRae here has experienced many things during the pandemic, I've asked her to take part in this interview, and she has agreed to do so she is going to be contributing to the archive and a curation of the LGBTQ plus part of the archive. So, I have some few questions for you first, can you tell me a little bit about your background.

KM: Yeah, so like Brad mentioned, my name is Krystal McRae. I am a freelancer. I'm a freelance writer. I also am in the NYC DIY music community and music scene. I help on the show blog music news. And I'm also 1/3 of the team sounds of justice, which is a documentary miniseries examining the relationship between NYC punk community, and music community and how, how this all ties in to a social, a social justice background.

RBN: That's fantastic. Now that you've told me a little bit about your background, we're gonna dive a little bit more into that. And that you've told me a little bit about your occupation? Where exactly do you live?

KM: I live in New York City. I am a born and bred New Yorker.

RBN: That's fantastic. So, tell me about how you consider yourself part of the LGBTQ plus community or an ally of this said community.

KM: I have a lot of friends who are queer. I grew up in the church as well. So sometimes those two things don't always mesh. But I think living in New York City, you're this exposed to so much diversity, it's really hard to not be around that. And I would say that if you are trying to not

be around that, that's something that you have to examine and within yourself and find out why. For me, it doesn't really bother me. I have, you know, friends who are gay by, you know, non-binary, and to me, it's like, Hey, be yourself, dude, you got to do if that's who you are, I accept it. And I think that people need to really, you know, realize this connection between the queer community and other marginalized oppressed communities, because, you know, it's like, we all have the same common. And that's, and that's and that you don't fit into this narrative of being, you know, you know, cis white dude, or cis white women, like, you know, I am, I'm straight, and I'm black. But, again, like, we're, we're still part of marginalized groups. So, I think that for people that don't like us specific group base, or whatever, it's a problem.

RBN: Very well said, explain to me how you remember life within the LGBTQ plus community, in your own personal world prior to the pandemic? If you can.

KM: I mean, for me, it's just hanging out with your friends, you know, it's like, we'd all go to shows, we might go out to dinner, we might do whatever it is, you know, now, it's like, you know, we're a year into a pandemic, but we can't see each other. So, it's like, my friends are there, you know, but we just can't hang out, you know, we can't have a community of like, you know, events or punk shows or whatnot. But, I mean, I mean, just hanging out your friends, you know.

RBN: Yes. What were some of the things you did in your day to day-to-day life?

KM: So, I worked in Soho, in retail, I would, you know, get my morning coffee, or my favorite coffee shop, I would go to a lot of punk shows and rock shows and concerts, obviously, so write about music, you know, just like having like, you know, like normal social life, face to face. But now, but obviously, we're doing stuff like this or like, we're on zoom or FaceTime. You know, you have to pivot and adapt to that, you know.

RBN: Yes. Can you describe a normal day at work prior to the pandemic for me?

KM: Well, okay, so be having a bit of a background and then working in retail, it really depends. So, there might be like, prior pandemic, you know, I had a few days where I would work half days indoors, you know, that way, get on the subway, not have to worry about a disease suspected to kill people, you know, again, get on the subway, you know, been working, so hope might leave work early, go home then work an event come home, you know, repeat the next day. My plan my own showcases, you know, with other bands, artists, you know, go out to dinner with friends, go shopping, you know, just this normal day to day thing, you know.

RBN: Yes. So, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your initial thoughts?

KM: Oh, I was horrified. I think that I think what made it more horrifying and amplified, it was the fact that we knew we had a leader that didn't know what they were doing. And it's one thing to have an outbreak in, you know, like a big European country, or, you know, another country across the pond or whatnot. It's another thing where you have it, like, in your city, because that becomes more real. And I remember, like, know, this time last year, it's like, you know, walking through Soho, and like seeing some of the stores, like, you know, starting to like, kind of shut

down or, you know, being how some of the cafes and restaurants were like, we're not taking cash right now on that card only. And like, there was definitely an air of fear in the air because it was a new virus. And none of us knew how to handle it. And also, none of us knew how bad it was going to get. We all thought, all right, well, you know, we have a few cases here in the city, you know, locked down for a month or so but then, you know, lockdown orders went for a few months. And then you start seeing the death toll rising, and you're watching the news. And, you know, I'm thankful for leadership on the federal level that kind of kept us informed. But in terms of like, you know, our, our, you know, fake president, and how we handled it, it was just like, he's taking it as a joke. And it's not funny.

RBN: Yeah, yes, I completely understand your fear that you had. How has the pandemic affected your personal and home life?

KM: So, I was someone that was always on the go a lot, like, you know, I would go to work for nine hours and show those go to work for nine hours, got dinner with friends. And now it's weird, because like, this is the most time I think I've ever been home. Now, granted, I'm a New Yorker, so my family's all here. So, I'm blessed with that. But it's weird, because like, I went from like, being on the go, constantly taking the subway every day to like, you know, being home a lot. And like, you know, leaving the house to like, super, like necessary things like laundry, your doctor's visits. And it's crazy. I think, for me, like, at the very start of it, I was more okay. But I think as the month goes on, its kind of it definitely wore on me more, and, you know, still weighs on me, and it's like, wow, I really haven't seen like, or hung out with any of my friends in like a year. You know.

RBN: Yes.

KM: That happened lucky because I have had a few friends, you know, drive off and like, drop me off supplies, I needed to find the beginning. Or get a day one friend came and like, you know, dropped me off like a meal and hadn't seen her son for birthday last year. So it's definitely been hard. I think that that personal connection, and just being like, Oh my god, I want to hug a friend and I can't, cause you know, but to get vaccinated yet or not everyone stays at home still, you know. So, it's definitely been a very, very weird thing. For sure.

RBN: Yes, I completely understand. Now we're going to talk a little bit more about your social life during the pandemic, as you've touched on it a little bit. But how would you describe your as you mentioned a little bit about your social life prior to the pandemic. Could you expand on that a little bit?

KM: Um, yeah, so I, on any given night, probably seen that a show, I would probably go to concerts, maybe two, three times a week, don't have dinner a few times, and even being at work with my co workers. It's like, you know, you're all like different students and whatnot. But you know, you walk over to your friend, you have a conversation about how the day is going, you know, your order food with your friend next to you, you know, just stuff like that. I think pandemics social life is definitely been a lot of zoom, a lot of FaceTime, phone calls, voice notes, text messages. And it's funny though, to kind of see how some people prefer one or the other like I have friends I can give voicemails to for days and they respond. But then it's awful to

have friends that, you know, might not respond right away because they're just not been texters. I will also say being in a larger music community, and liking certain bands has definitely expanded my social circle from now I have friends that are, you know, that are in Scotland and Canada and whatnot from but I bet from like other people from like, from like this other community and all like, oh, like, what have they thought. So, I've actually made friends, and I've kept a lot of friendships and asked, but I've also made new friends, too.

RBN: Okay. So, I know you mentioned your feelings already about the onset of the covid 19 pandemic. Could you just recap that for us a little bit? Because what were your feelings about the onset of a pandemic, regarding your social life?

KM: I knew it was definitely going to change a lot of things, especially when you start hearing the term social distancing. Because I think humans by nature as a social creatures, so you have people you know, in their home. And granted, I think, this is where it definitely comes in. As big as adaptability and being able to pivot. I think a lot of us Miss social lives and like, you know, missing people. But we all do that this is what was necessary to keep others safe. And I think when you kind of frame it like that, it's still stuck, stuck as much. And, you know, yeah, like, now, you know, a year later, and my soul fares a little bit. A little bit, yes. But now, you know, you have hope on the horizon, because now you know, how to better manage it. And, you know, we have that same job at work. So, a year ago, I think, definitely a lot of fear, a lot of questions. You know, news was on constantly, this year, you know, a year later, it's still a lot of fear and apprehension. But know that, you know, we've kind of got to be like the worst of it. Now, obviously, my new fear is people getting fired, and COVID, the peak, which we saw during the pandemic, the height of it across the country, people listening and lessening their restrictions, and also just, you know, mandates and whatnot, and then cases rise again, that's always a fear kill, you know?

RBN: Yes. So, has there been any notable changes in your social life during the covid 19 pandemic? I know that you mentioned some, but what would be the probably the most notable changes that you would say?

KM: Oh, I'm definitely on social media more. I'm on social media so much more now. And I hate it and love at the same time, I had this conversation with my friend, and she's like, I hate social media. Oh, my God, I'm like, it's a necessary evil, you know, because without it, it's like, we really wouldn't be as connected to people as you were. And especially during this whole past four months of life not being able to be face to face, it's definitely become a lifeline. So I think that's definitely one big change in my social life. I will also say that I think with COVID, it always shows people's true colors, and how there are certain friends I grew closer to, and there are some friends, I kind of grew apart of them. And the girls apart isn't necessarily not seeing each other, although that can be part of it. It's just their behavior. So aligned with my own morals.

RBN: Thank you. Have you went out socialize in attended any LGBTQ plus events that you normally would have?

KM: I have not, I guess I don't leave the house. You know?

RBN: Yes.

KM:and whatnot.

RBN: So how do you think your personal world has been affected by the pandemic overall? But personal world?

KM: I think. So. A few different ways. I think my personal world is just now I see more of what's important, even though I kind of already knew what was important, but now you see it more. I think we also I know me personally, you also see how this system this whole American capitalist system is bullshit and has not worked for anyone other than people that have money, and how the people that are most vulnerable, so oppressed and marginalized groups, women of color, you know, people in poor neighborhoods, they are, they're probably some of the most effective people with this whole thing. And that's sad, because they're the ones who had who were kind of the backbone of this country, immigrants and just all of that, so I think my viewpoint haven't shifted I think the got more amplified, that makes sense.

RBN: Yes. Well, so how well do you think we are prepared for the next pandemic?

KM: It depends who we have in office and when it comes. I think having right now having a president that has a political background and was the vice president before, you know, kind of kind of took us through another infectious disease that could have been a pandemic definitely helped? Because he knows what to do. I think that hopefully, America is better equipped, but only time will tell.

RBN: Yes. So how has the pandemic affected the LGBTQ+ plus community.

KM: So, I haven't really touched base on this with a lot of my queer friends, I will say I do have friends that are trans. And they were getting actually start, you know, the hormonal treatment, pre pandemic, and then pandemic hit, and they weren't able to start supposed to. So I will say that I think stuff like that has definitely been hard. I think also just, you know, again, the isolation for anyone, you know, and everyone, you can't really go out, you can't really socialize. You know, I know, I have a friend that is bi and poly. And, you know, she's like, I miss seeing my community in person, I miss going to cake parties. And I was like, yeah, that's, that's socialization. Because, you know, no matter what community you're in, whether you're a person, a color, whether you're a woman, whether you're queer, it's like, you know, you have like your circle of friends, you have your support system and not being face to face, such as in your time like, this is definitely difficult.

RBN: Yes, it is. It definitely is. So now we're gonna move into a little bit about health during the pandemic. How would you describe your general health prior to the pandemic, your own personal health?

KM: So, my own personal health, I won't say, necessarily unhealthy. But I will say that, you know, I get like a typical, like colds for a few months. And, you know, I might get like, a weird out of like, bronchitis, or like, you know, something like that. So generally, pretty healthy. I won't say I have the strongest immune system. But you know, she's definitely time to, you know, took through some things. And I've been thankful for that. And I think this past year, just being inside and very masks. I think a lot of people have noticed people haven't really done stick as much at all like, yeah, you know, now it's like, you know, we had to do these things to keep us healthy, and they're keeping us healthy from other things, too.

RBN: Yes.

KM: That's been kind of a blessing.

RBN: Yeah

KM: Not to say that I'm not paranoid about my house, but I am, you know, you wake up a little cough and you're like, what is happening, you wake up stuffy you're like were to do but I've gotten better with that. I've calmed down a little bit for sure.

RBN: Thank you. So, explain to me your health now that it's been a year since this pandemic has started.

KM: Physical health obviously there's a few issues here and there like you know, I had to go through a surgery last summer for my for my eyes. I think my mental health problems suffered the most honestly. And to me that trickles down to physical because for me, my anxiety was very physical thing. So, the time shoulder, you know, the knots in your neck not sleeping, right. I think this because, you know, I think a lot about things. And sometimes I wish I did it, but my brain does not ever stop and slow down. So, it's just like, Oh, like totally still out there. Yeah. But yeah, no shit brain like tell me something I don't know, you know, but uh, I think physical health has been, you know, it's weirder. I think as well, it's not being around people have been better for sure. It's been around people on the subway, but you're around people in store. You know, not everyone washed their hands, but everyone uses hand sanitizer by their people are touching things and then you touch things and it's just like, Good grief. But I think it's definitely been a little better. Because, you know, we've all had to be more cautious. So.

Yes, I completely agree. Little bit about your family life how many people live in your household?

KM: Oh, there is four of us.

RBN: okay. How has working during the paint COVID-19 affected your family life has it?

KM: So, I'm a freelancer. So even though not getting a lot of work, but you know, it's like we have our little our little like our makeshift office. So, if I have to do something for a friend or

film something in the office and let my family know do I say they'll bother me? Two hours afterwards on X, Y, and Z right now, and they're pretty respectful of it.

RBN: That's fantastic. What if any post work routines Have you developed at home to keep everyone in the household safe?

KM:

What? What protocols? keep everyone safe?

RBN: Yes, if any, if you had to.

KM: So, I'm like safety Salley through through. So, when I whipping my shoes down, I'm washing my hands, I washed my face mask constantly. I've also started double masking, obviously, especially these new variants. So, I wear like surgical masks and a cloth over it. I will wipe down my leather jacket, I wipe down my purse I wipe, anything I touched, I touched outside, I get wiped down. My family will send me like, I'm totally crazy, but I'm just wired Well, we're all healthy and safe, aren't we, I also have disinfecting spray, so I spray stuff down, but I still spray my mail down. Even though not supposed to I do it anyway, for packages. Also, I get groceries delivered. So I have not set foot in a grocery store in a year. Except for maybe go like the one in my neighborhood from time to time, once in a while. But generally I don't go to the grocery store, I have my groceries to divert, and then I let them down to.

RBN: Wow, that's a lot of changes.

KM: Especially from like going from like not having to think about this, like, you know, a year ago to like all of a sudden now it's like, we're gonna wipe everything down. Because you have to, you know, I wipe my floors. And I have wood floors in my room. So you can imagine the wipes on the floor. You know, for me, for me personally, it for me, it's comfort. And I would rather have the comfort of knowing that I did all the extra stuff that knows that I didn't and then something else happened right away.

RBN: Yes.

KM: You know.

RBN: yes, I completely understand. What concerns Did you have about working during the pandemic?

KM: So, I have actually been unemployed for a while. But obviously, I've had a few freelance things here and there. So, I can do at home, which has been kind of great. But I think not not even so much concerned about working during the pandemic, I think it's like, the adjustment from going from like an in-person job, like an in person job for like numbers of years to like just being home all the time. That was that was definitely weird for me.

RBN: Okay, I can see that for sure.

KM: Yea.

RBN: What advice would you give your pre pandemic self about the covid 19 pandemic?

KM: I think after going through it for a year, I think it's always best to be safe and sorry. I tried to wish we had had some new things in place beforehand. Like I think it's weird, like not think about this the other day, thinking about the things that we did pre pandemic, that now are just so gross now. For example, I think mask wearing when you're sick should definitely be a norm going forward. I was like, wow. Especially in New York, when you're on a subway, and you might have like 80 people in one subway car and you're all breathing the same air. I'm like, how did you ever think that was normal? It's beyond me. So I think just to kind of keep up with that cautious attitude. Because it's big. It's like, I think people like the paint, being cautious of you being crazy. But it's keeping you safe and yourself on safe then everyone else, you know.

RBN: Yes. Is there any other points or topics that you would like to discuss?

KM: Um, I just think that now that we're a year into this, and like, you know, we're starting to like, you know, see the other side, I think that people can't get lazy and foolish. And you have to still keep your guard up. And you have to still do the due diligence just because of the vaccine here. That's great. But you have to also keep in mind that, you know, we don't know how long that protects a lot. Number one, and number two, it's not a cure, you know, you don't have a cure for this disease yet. So just those two things and you know, just keep being good to each other. I stopped trying to fight people, when they ask like to wearing masks and public, give doctors and nurses, and funeral directors and whatnot wearing masks are like 9-to-10-hour days. And you know, you're being asked to wear a mask in a grocery store for 30 minutes. It's not a big deal. So, get over yourself.

RBN: Yes. Well, is there anything else you would like to add before we wrap up this interview?

KM: I just hope that you know It definitely feels great to have competent leaders back in office but we still have to hold them accountable on their promises. And that's part of it too. And that's also another thing to hold people accountable for their, you know, for their promises, you know, that also have done more and that's also how you try to protect and keep marginalized groups and oppressed people too.

RBN: Yes. Well, I appreciate you allowing me to interview you today. And I appreciate you taking your time to complete this interview with me. Thank you.

KM: Thank you so much.