

## Who Are You Wearing – Stephen Bailey

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI PRITCHARD-MCLEAN: Hello and welcome to the Who Are You Wearing podcast where I, Kiri Pritchard-McLean, sit down with some of the most stylish folk that I know, and I chat to them about fashion and style and clothes. And it's just lovely, really. This week's guest is a dear friend of mine. A superb stand-up comedian, it's Steven Bailey.

We recorded this episode in March of 2021 and I was in a tiny room that I, um, that I really over-egg by referring to it as a walk-in wardrobe. And Steven was at home in Manchester. Now this is the first ever episode I recorded of the Who Are You Wearing podcast, because Stephen and I talk about clothes, fashion, and perception all the time.

And I know Stephen is so eloquent and funny, plus I trusted him to try out this daft podcast idea with me. And as usual he was funny and clever and professional. And it went so well that we decided to make a series. So if you are listening to this podcast and enjoy it, thank Stephen, um, because he gave me the confidence to do more and more of them. Right, enough of me being a fan girl about my own friend. Please enjoy me asking Stephen Bailey, 'who are you wearing?'

STEPHEN BAILEY: I think the earliest I remember being interested in fashion is like 11 and 12. And it's because we were in the school uniform in the day, and I really didn't like a school uniform. Do you know what? I tried to make that as quirky as I could. Even if it was just like a little necklace and some jewellery or whatever.

KIRI: Love it.

STEPHEN: Um, and so that's when I really got into it. Because I felt like my personality was stripped away by the uniform. But before that it was whatever my parents put me in, do you know, like the shell suits and whatever it was. Like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

KIRI: So you did – you didn't have as – like a strong sense of style as a kid, then? It was just like whatever you were in, you were just in.

STEPHEN: Exactly. I liked, um, when I was in charge and when you could get away with it, which was obviously not for a wander around the shops, I liked more fancy dress, which is really interesting because I hate that now. But like I really would be like – I remember dressing up as a Dalmatian whenever I could get away with it. And it even had a little necklace called Ben, so the Dalmatian version of me was called Ben. Yeah.

KIRI: Love it. But still got a little necklace on as well. Little – little zhuzh to the outfit.

STEPHEN: Yeah. Yeah.

KIRI: Um, so who was it? Was it – was it Mum who'd decide what you wore? Or was it Dad? Or was it a mixture?

STEPHEN: I'm not – I mean, you know, we're very working class. There wasn't loads of money. So I think it was whatever they could afford or on sale. That's what you'd be put in, really. But at the time I really didn't – it just wasn't what was on my kind of – like I say is that I'd rather dress up as a Power Ranger then. So

that just wasn't in my eye line, really, what I was wearing day to day. I didn't really have a strong affinity to clothes at all. It was more like, 'I want to play this character.' Like I'd feel strong as a Power Ranger and I'd just feel like – I remember always feeling very comfortable as Ben the Dalmation.

KIRI: This is where I really want to ask if you're – you're one of those gay guys that has that – you know the kink where they have like puppy – what are they called? You know, like full puppy masks?

STEPHEN: I know what they're called – I don't know what they're called but I've seen them in kebab shops and on a Channel 4 documentary.

KIRI: In a kebab shop?

STEPHEN: Yeah, they just – I think, you know, they were coming to get their meat at the end of the night. And I mean, whatever you're into. I don't do that, I'm afraid. I think I grew out of it.

KIRI: It's a shame because it – the outfits are very strong. Um –

STEPHEN: Also the men always have like really amazing bodies, so – that are in these dog outfits.

KIRI: Really?

STEPHEN: Yeah. They do. I've – I mean I'm sure there are others that don't, but the ones I've seen are always like – everything's sat where you imagine it's supposed to be sat.

KIRI: Oh, that's interesting. Well do you think that's a case then of like they've got like the – the face of a dog? And that's why it's hidden? And that's why they've gone all out on their body?

STEPHEN: I – I don't know. It is something I'm really, really fascinated in, is this – because I don't know what it's supposed to be. Is it because like they want to like cock their leg to wee in public? Is it – I really don't know what it is with them. But I mean hey, who am I to judge? Some of the stuff I've worn.

KIRI: Uh, well were you ever made to wear something as a kid that you hated?

STEPHEN: No, I think my own parents were really good in that. Because as I mentioned earlier, the Power Ranger outfit, like they let me be the pink one.

KIRI: Kimberly.

STEPHEN: Kimberly, yeah. And I loved Kimberly because she did gymnastics, she had the bow and arrow, she had the flying zord, pterodactyl, and so that was it. But they let me have all that, and then I don't remember ever hating anything. And I really loved, which I brought later in life for a while, um, like when you got to a wedding they put like an elastic dicky bow on you.

KIRI: Oh, yeah.

STEPHEN: Like I would wear that in, um, when we got to high school and you had to wear the uniform, I would always replace the tie with a dicky bow until I started getting reprimanded for it and it was where like, 'the – the uniform is the god damn tie.'

KIRI: Oh my god, I love that.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: So you – so, right. Let – there's so much to unpack there. So you're a little boy. So how old – Power – when we're in the Kimberly era, how old are you there? Like ten? Nine?

STEPHEN: So Kimberly era is like – not that tiny. Like eight, nine, ten. Like junior school. And then dicky bows was like – well, I only – I barely got away with it for the whole of the first year of high school. But it – so definitely first year. So I guess – what's that, like twelve is first year?

KIRI: I love that. I love the idea of like – firstly like little Stephen being an eight, nine, ten year old in a working class area in a pink Power Ranger like costume, supported by his parents, like living his best life. That feels like a really beautiful scene that, you know, it would've been unusual in the 90s, right?

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I'm not going to lie to you. I know we've had this conversation before, but the way I dressed being a – and being, you know, a queer person, the way I spoke, it – I never found it to be an issue until I left the safety of where I grew up. Like it was only when I got to say, uni in London, when people would comment, being like, 'is that what you're wearing? Ooh, this – that's an interesting top, you know.' Or that – what – where, you know, they get right in your face and go, 'have you got makeup on?' Like that didn't start happening to me.

So I was always like shocked because it happened to me later in life. Like you'd think you'd start getting the bullying kind of like 13, 14. But I think I got it around like 20 onwards, because people just

accepted like that's – 'oh, that's Stephen.' Like I never had any issues with it.

KIRI: That's amazing.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: That's, um, a – it's – it's one part uplifting in that that was your like experience growing up as a queer kid in a working class area of Manchester, but also it's really sad because you would – the tedious assumption would be, 'and in university everyone's educated and liberated and' – and then the fact that you started to – people started to basically like try and clip your wings in your 20s, just such a sad thing to encounter.

STEPHEN: Yeah, um, and it – it's just weird how it affects you. Because you think it's, you know, all – like all the stories you hear, it's like, 'as a kid.' And I'm like, 'as a 23 year old.' It took ages for me to get like – when I started stand-up, I always started wearing a suit because I just believed as a performer you should wear a costume.

I was always like, 'if I went to see Girls Aloud and they were in jeans and a t-shirt, I'd be seething.' If I was in something they would wear the club, I would be mad. And so I always wore a suit. But then it was kind of like knocked out of me because I hadn't earned the right to like wear this dicky bow and suit and bronzer. And so then for – then for ages I just started wearing like my slob. And I just always remember feeling a bit like, um, like it just – it wasn't – didn't feel real.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Was there any trend that you as a teenager in particular tried to repeatedly pull off but it would just – wasn't happening for you?

STEPHEN: I could not do – so it was two things. Um, one was – do you remember when like Rockports was the big thing? The big shoe? The Rockport shoe? I just felt like – because people would like tuck their – the bottom of their school uniform into the sock and then you'd wear the Rockport. Now first of all, my family were poor, so it was – we had the like rip-off version. The Stockports. So first – already, you're at a loss. And then I was just like – this tucking your uniform into your sock is not my vibe at all.

So I wouldn't do that. So that never quite worked. And then do you remember like 16, 17 when indie was the big thing and all the boys were indie bands and everyone wanted to be the Kooks or whatever? And boys were wearing the, um, the eyeliner? The black eyeliner?

KIRI: Guyliner.

STEPHEN: I just couldn't get it right. I either went too thick or it was like melting down my – I – I got that wrong for ages, whereas now I've got it. But back then I just could not.

KIRI: Oh, I love that you tried to conquer the guyliner. Because I – I don't think that – because I grew up without that – we're the same age, so like that – that black eye on the waterline that we all did. But it – it ran down everyone's face because it just does because that's – that's the shape of eyes. So it was just one of those things, it's like such an unflattering trend that you know is going to look absolutely rubbish in like 20 minutes. And then that's the thing, that you grow up as a teenager and be like,

'you've got to look flawless and you've got to have this makeup that will immediately run down your face.'

STEPHEN: Yeah, some people just did it though, you know? But I think those people that did it well, they didn't really have it on. They just had naturally beautiful eyelashes.

KIRI: I love that conspiracy, but it's not true. It's not true. I think some people –

STEPHEN: Oh, damn. And the other thing, while we're talking about what I couldn't pull off, there were so many things. Um, the – do you remember like just the buzzcut all over? I used to have a number two all over because I used to hate my curls. So I'd have a number two all over, but I had like – I hadn't grown into my ears or nose at this point, so it was just too much going on. And obviously it didn't reflect my personality. Like all the kids that were like smoking weed and going on the rob at the weekend, they can pull that off. But I couldn't.

KIRI: Oh, I just see like again little like Stephen with his shaved head trying to be one of those boys. But – but having a beautiful heart full of like – red head – red head curls. Like that's the real Stephen inside.

STEPHEN: That was it. It took me – and it was – I always remember, I'll tell you the first time I realised I was different to like all the lads at school. We all went into town one day and everyone was buying a CD from HMV. That shows my age. And, um, all the boys brought Eminem, The Real Slim Shady. Do you know, with his first single. And I bought the Witch, Blame it on the Weatherman. Not even joking. And I really – that was the first time I was like, 'something's amiss here. What?'

KIRI: [laughs] And, um, do you stand by your decision?

STEPHEN: Yeah, 100%.

KIRI: Um, the trends. Did – did you find a trend that fitted you as a – as a teenager? Because the big trends when – you're right, when we were growing up, were there was – everyone went through the emo phase and then there was like the indie phase. Was there one of those – oh, and before that there was like the Adidas popper phase where it was quite like the – the, you know, like it was the Rockports and it was the town kind of wear. What I would say 'townies' growing up in the countryside is what we used to call them. Um, but everyone wanted to dress like that. It was sportswear, basically. So what, you know, what were your big trends? Is there any that you were like, 'yes, I love this one.'

STEPHEN: No, I missed them all. Like literally I know what you're talking about with the popper – like the popper tracksuits. I would be – I've got a picture, um, I must – I'll send it to you after we've done this, where it's everyone else – so I'm out on the streets drinking underage, being a lad. And everyone else is in what you were talking about here, and I am still in jeans, a nice shoe, and a shirt. On the streets, Kiri.

KIRI: [laughs] Oh my god.

STEPHEN: We were going to the park to drink.

KIRI: I love that you've still gone like, you know, like a dad at a – the night do of a wedding.

STEPHEN: And it really was like a dad jean as well, do you know, because it was like that point in time. Skinny jeans weren't a thing, so it was that like proper dad, Burtons menswear jean. Yeah.

KIRI: Bootleg, yeah.

STEPHEN: Bootleg.

KIRI: God, the bootlegs really hung around for a long time, didn't they?

STEPHEN: I think they still are. We – we've got a generation that needs to die off and then we're fine.

KIRI: Yeah, no, the Simon Cowells. They never let go of the bootleg. When you were a teenager, did you have – did you go through like a rebellious stage with – and did it – did it show in your style? Or were you – were you quite straight-laced?

STEPHEN: Well I was – I was a bit of a goody two shoes to be honest. And I think it's because I had so much other stuff going on, being like, 'why do I fancy Daniel in PE?' And trying to figure all that out. That it was like, 'just crack on with your –' and also, I just – I think because I didn't really fit in with the boys, and I wasn't one of the girls, and so – and how that came about in school was obviously – it was like I wasn't allowed to girls' sleepovers. I wasn't allowed to girls' PE. Girls have to, you know, it was still very much gender-assigned like clubs and stuff back then. I don't know if it is now.

But, um, because of that, so it was like – I didn't really fall in with the boys, so it was like – it was fine for a PE session or to hang

around the playground, and – but then as well with the girls, like I said, it was these restrictions, because obviously every boy and girl will sleep together if we allow it, so I found this thing where it was like it – it just pushed me more to schoolwork. And then because I was becoming a bit antisocial, my dad made me – he was like, ‘right, you need to do some of it. Join something that you enjoy, da da da.’ And we all thought it was going to be drama, but it was taekwando.

And that was like one of the best things that could’ve happened to me, because – because I was like 14, 15, I was almost too old for the kids in the kids’ club, because they were like seven, eight, nine. And I was really too young for the adults, but they were like, you know, ‘you’re tall, you’re – like let’s put you with the adults. And we’ll team you up with, you know, people of a similar size,’ which tended to be women.

And – but because we all got on in this club, like I was hanging around with these people that were like 20, 21, 22, who were accepting me as I am. And then that just meant I came out of my shell a bit more. So I was – so I always felt like I kind of got that classy dress sense quite early on, do you know? Because I was going to a lot of dos. A lot of taekwando dos. So I was always in a nice shirt and the jean again and the shoe. Um, and so I think that gave me like this level of maturity that made me not rebel.

KIRI: Hm, I love that when I’ve asked you about like outfits that – that relate to your rebellious phase, it’s a taekwando suit.

[Both laugh]

STEPHEN: Yeah, yeah, if – if anything it was when they tried to make me pull off the yellow belt. I was like, ‘I need to get onto the next belt really quick. Yellow does not suit me.’

KIRI: And it’s still a suit as well, which is classic Stephen Bailey.

STEPHEN: Yeah, that’s it. I remember once being like, ‘ooh, I might wear one on stage. I might wear the suit on stage with like a shirt and a dicky bow underneath. That would be fun.’

KIRI: I love that. I absolutely love that.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: When I think of you now and your style, so like if I close my eyes, I would think of like – it’s a suit, there’s a dicky bow, there’s pastel colours or bright colours, but there’s a lightness to it. And like a funness. I think there’s loads of fun to the way that you dress. And at what age do you think your – because you – you said you didn’t think about it at all when you were a little kid. So what age did you feel like your style started showing?

STEPHEN: I think honestly it was like when you got to college. Because I think, you know, we had the school uniform, which I actually think in hindsight is a good thing just because of people’s different financial situations.

KIRI: Incomes, yeah.

STEPHEN: But, um, I – it really was like getting to college. Because I was like, ‘you’ve got to think about what you’re going to wear.’

Like and I – and it was like, ‘and what do you wear and what makes you feel good?’ And honestly I’d say those two years of college, there was not a style. Like I tried everything. Like on my, um, 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I had like this gorgeous like pink – I wish I still had it, um, like a pink shirt that had like white floral things on it. And then I wore black braces and I had like a patterned trouser.

And I dyed my hair – I was going through a stage as well being like – because obviously everyone took the mick out of gingers, and so I was like, ‘well what do you do?’ And then I found Lindsey Lohan when she was an angel and a Disney princess, and I was like, ‘well she’s trying different things.’ So I kind of always was like, ‘well what’s she doing? Because that – if it suits her it should suit my complexion.’ So I meant – so at this time as well like I did like – I went like a nice, warm brown. But then I had like a few sharp – similar to you, Kiri, actually. Like a sharp blonde – a few blonde – but like thick bits through. Um, yeah.

So that’s when I really started experimenting. And then it was really like when I got to uni, I was like, ‘I want to always be presenting me.’ And I remember going up for my first outfit, my first day of uni. And once again it was like a woollen checkered trouser, um, a nice brogue, and then it was just a simple t-shirt but like a polo t-shirt. So it was like quite smart but it had character. Um, so that was it.

But then also I was like the only one who would go on a uni night out wearing a suit. So I’d wear – because I’d just always – I wanted to be like – I went through a classy stage, like I was like, ‘oh, I just want to present myself as classy and demure.’

KIRI: Classy and demure. I absolutely love it. Do you think of, um, you know when you're putting together an outfit, do you think of makeup as a part of your outfit? Or is that a separate thing?

STEPHEN: See, that really depends on the day. Like I always wear makeup onstage because I do think if you're putting on a show. For me it just feels respectful, like to put on a bit of makeup and, you know, that's when I'll really do a bit of contouring, a nice little eye. Um, and I'm one of those people where it's like I like to put a lot of makeup on to give you a face, but I want people to almost be like, 'is he wearing makeup?' Like I don't want it to be like drag for example. I just want it to like cover any imperfections. But, um, if I'm going for a nice meal, gay dancing, um, or like on a show, I'll put makeup on. If it's like we're just meeting for a coffee, it's just about the outfit but I will wear a bit of tinted moisture, yeah.

KIRI: And how – like what's your – your journey with makeup, I think, is interesting as well. Because it's – I think it's so great that you talk openly about it. And it's – it's such a – it's a weird thing that like everyone you see on the television, like gay, straight, whatever, is wearing makeup. It's part of the job. Um, and it's so weird that straight men don't talk about having, you know, like sports players who go on and do punditry are in makeup. And it's like this weird, hidden thing.

And I think if people spoke about it more, it would de-stigmatise makeup. Because makeup shouldn't be gendered. And it should be fun. Do you see it as being fun yet? Or do you still carry some of the stigma? Are you – are you aware of people, like you were saying that people in uni being like, 'are you –' getting in your face and being like, 'are you wearing makeup?'

STEPHEN: Yeah, no, I definitely have fun with it now, um, and I love trying all different kind of makeups. Um, I love, um, I went through a stage of trying a really nice blusher, which was different for me. Um, so I really – and it just made me look like a little doll and I really looked – do you know when you’re like eyeing yourself up? Being like, ‘gorgeous.’ I was really doing that. I must get some of that again. Um, so yeah, so I really have good fun with it.

The difficulty I have with it is buying it, really. And obviously in our jobs, going into a makeup room for a TV show, it’s really awkward. Like you have – I still get a bit awkward with – because what’ll happen is you get your schedule for your TV show if you’re doing it, and it’s almost like, ‘makeup time.’ And for a boy it’s like – it is always like five minutes, quick powder, check your hair’s in place. And then with the – the girls, um, I don’t know if it exactly happens this way, but there seems to be more of a conversation. Because I have seen it on call sheets where it was like, you know, someone might have an hour, someone might have 20 minutes. Yeah.

KIRI: Usually my experience is you get at least 45 minutes. And when you sit in the chair, they go, ‘right, what do you like?’ And I don’t see that conversation happening with men. Does it happen with you?

STEPHEN: No, so I really have to – I always have to – I mean luckily I’ve got a gaygent. And so it’s very – it’s a lot easier to talk to him. And so I have to be like – he’s like, ‘they’ve assigned no time for makeup,’ and I’ll be like, ‘well can they please? Like it’s really –’ and it’s that awkward conversation being like, ‘well how long do you need?’ And it’s like, ‘well I don’t really know,’ because even to this day when I’ve been doing TV for like four years now, it’s still –

I don't know, because I still get whatever's left over, do you know? I always feel a bit rushed.

And then it's like going in and going – I like to have on a lot, because essentially I like to be contoured, I like you to show off my cheekbones, which need to be drawn in. But then I have like – I like a bit of eye makeup and an eyelash to make my eyes pop. But at the same time, I don't want it to look like I've got heavy makeup on.

And that is like feasible, and I – I found a makeup artist called Nicole Fairfield who's brilliant. And she was – I spoke to her about it and my insecurities about it. She came over to my house one day and we just did it until I liked it. And then in the post she sent me all the products so I could learn to do it myself should I ever need to. And that was brilliant. And she didn't charge me a thing for it, because just like this conversation now, she was like, 'of course it's just not thought about. It's like a quick powder and off you go.'

Um, but also at the same time, I'm not at a level of success yet where I can just go, 'I'd like Nicole Fairfield in every job, please.' Which I can't wait to get to because then I'll just be like, 'babe, you know what to do.' Whereas at this stage – and whenever I've tried to explain it I feel a bit embarrassed or like I'm taking up people's time because they're thinking, 'well I've got to do – insert name of woman next. Like I've got to do this person, I've got to do that person.' And so you're like, 'oh god, like ugh.'

And there's been sometimes when I've arrived on a set and there's been no makeup time allocated to me. Not – because I think they just think, 'oh, we'll just do a quick powder and set that's it.' And then you have to have this awkward conversation.

Or you don't get it and then you just feel bad like what you're putting out there because it doesn't feel sincere, and obviously you don't want to look like a diva.

So I – I find that very difficult. Because I do think – I don't know if the – I don't know if it's the stigma of men in makeup, or I don't know if it's just something we've got to change. But it – it feels weird now. I even feel weird like when you go to the makeup counter in a store to find, you know, to try something new or be like, 'oh, I fancy having a look at that.' And you're rubbing it on your hands and I get that vibe going, 'do you think I'm going to steal?' Because they never step up and go, 'what are you looking for? Can I help you? What are you – what are you trying to find?' They – they just hover. But I'm too embarrassed to ask because of how they're reacting to it.

KIRI: Do you know why? It's because you look too much like Lindsay Lohan and I think she went through a stage of stealing.

STEPHEN: Yeah, oh yeah, that's it. That's it. They're like, 'Lindsay's in.'

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Have you got a bit of clothing that's quite – I always think of you as well, I don't see you in necessarily vintage in my head, um, I – I see you in like really on-trend, on-brand stuff. But do you have like an older item of clothing that you've had for ages that you love?

STEPHEN: I have a – like my mum's – it's faux sheepskin, uh, but I always call it the fur coat. But it is faux. But it's like her faux coat from the late 70s, early 80s. And it was her mum's. And I wear it

when I do Celebs on the Farm and it's cold outside. And it's just – like it is so regal I can't even tell you. I think it's the poshest thing anyone in my family has ever owned.

And it's like – I remember because it went from my gran to my mum and my mum was always like, 'I'm going to give this to your sister.' And I remember having a word with her being like, 'listen, we need to talk about this whole gender thing. Because I'm going to wear that and get so much more joy out of it than my sister.'

KIRI: I've seen you in it. I've seen you on the – on Celebs on the Farm and you look great in it. I'd – like to me I thought that was like, yeah, I thought that was something that you bought recently. Because it's – it's such a good cut on it as well, that it is timeless. Like it'll always look great.

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I – the series just gone was the first series – I wore it on Celebs on the Farm, and I was so scared because it was like I don't want to ruin it. And obviously I'm surrounded by pig shit. But that definitely – and I got some things like that I bought, I love a market and an independent vendor. So I remember like when I first moved to London and discovered Camden market – because at first – I remember for like months when I first moved to London, being like, 'I'm not going to Camden market.' Because I thought it was all like gothic and rocky and just the antithesis of me.

And then I remember just going one day, I think it was for food, and, um, I just found this store. And that's when I found this cape. And I was like, 'if anyone can wear a cape, I'm going to wear a god damn cape.' And so I bought this cape and I loved it. And it was – it was quite expensive, and it was – everything there, they only had a couple of. And they – they made them. And then I also went

back another time because I was like, 'I'm going to buy two of these capes because I know I'm going to want them.' But I went back and there was – there wasn't there anymore.

And then I found – it was like a sailor t-shirt, you know, with like the white flap at the back and everything? And then the anchor was like – you would've loved it – it was like gold, kind of glittery, sequiny vibes. And I remember – this was like me at my best in fashion, but also it was like at the worst time.

Because this was when people started coming – because back then as well I had a proper job. And so I'd go in in the sailor t-shirt, even though it was a job where you could wear what you want, and it wasn't a formal job, and people would be like, 'are you wearing a sailor's top?' And I'd be like, 'yeah.' And then they'd comment and it'd be like – then the days you weren't wearing it, they'd be like, 'oh, you're not in the sailor's top today.' Do you know, little things like that.

And it seeps in. I didn't realise how much it seeped in. But all of a sudden, you're no longer wearing the sailor top. You're no longer wearing the cape. And I was like, 'this is me at my best.' Because I feel like, you know, I used – when I moved to London I was like, 'I'm going to live my best Carrie Bradshaw life.' And then I was like, 'you're killing my inner Carrie Bradshaw.'

KIRI: Yeah, it's a shame, isn't it? That you have those items of clothing that make you feel like you're most you. Because that's what I think clothes can do. They can make you feel like you're most you. And sometimes the you that you want to be, that you aren't quite there yet. And it's so sad that people just feel the need to pass comment in any way, you know? Like whether they think they're being like, 'what? I'm just saying, I couldn't pull off

something like that.’ But you’re like, ‘yeah, but now you’re suggesting there’s something to pull off,’ do you know what I mean? Like it’s –

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: And it just makes you – it brings an – an element of insecurity in, into a conversation you were never having with yourself. And it’s – it’s what other people put on. That’s – I mean, that’s so sad. Because also like to paint the picture, your job was like – it wasn’t – not that it would’ve been a problem if you were, but you weren’t in an office, do you know what I mean? Like you weren’t a – you weren’t a lawyer coming in in a little sailor’s thing being like, ‘right, I’m here to talk to you about your divorce.’ It was the world of showbiz again, where there should be like ultimate tolerance, right?

STEPHEN: Yeah, it was behind the scenes in TV. And like I had some people, don’t get me wrong, that completely empowered me. Like when you’re in a studio, for example, and you’re working on the crew or on production, you wear studio blacks. So that means you don’t – if you get caught on camera, it doesn’t really matter. And people would always laugh at me because my studio blacks was actually – it was a vintage Stella McCartney sequined black t-shirt. And then I just wore it with jeans and a boot.

And I was like, ‘I am following the rules.’ And they would take the mick out of me all the time. And that one I could laugh with, because I was like, ‘I know.’ That one was fine because I was like, ‘I know it’s supposed to be like plain black, but come on. If I’ve got to be here for 14 hours, I’ve got to have some joy.’ Um, but that was more – I got like – that felt more like banter. Like where more

people like – like you say would be like, ‘oh, I couldn’t pull that off.’ I’m always like, ‘that’s a sly remark.’

KIRI: Yeah, yeah. There is a difference, isn’t it?

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: And it’s – it’s so – because also people can say things innocently and not know how hard people have had to fight with their own image to get to the point where they’re wearing that item. And you can send people 18 months back in their head just by making a comment.

STEPHEN: Yeah, definitely. And I remember like, um, I was – I’d just moved agents for the 96<sup>th</sup> time, and, um, I was doing a – like a showcase, right? And I was like, ‘you’re doing a showcase, it’s full of TV people, obviously you’re going to bring like the razzle dazzle.’ So I had like this burn orange – like you say, I like a fun suit. Um, and by the way, I would never wear this at a wedding. That is someone else’s time. So I do go quite plain Jane at a wedding. Like a grey or a navy blue. I’ve just – FYI. But for this I was like, ‘this is like my wedding.’ So I wore a burn – it was like burnt orange with a white, um, a white shirt.

And then it was a – an oversized black velvet dicky bow. Everything about it was quite fabulous. And the show went amazing. And at the time it was when Xtra Factor was airing. And they would come and see me about booking a guest because they were having comedians on each episode as guests. And they were like – they wouldn’t book me. And I was shocked because the gig couldn’t have gone any better.

Like do you know when you'll go – like there's times when you walk away, you go, 'I've got that job.' And there's times when you walk away and you go, 'I've not got that job.' And it was definitely one of those where I walked away being like, 'I'd love to know the excuse if they don't book me. Because there's no reason to not book me.' And the reason, I dressed a bit too old for that show.

And I – and the thing that hit me in the heart with that was like the – the person who said that was someone who was like a really good friend of a really good friend. So I'd met her at birthday parties, I'd – she was no – by no means my friend, she didn't owe me anything, but I just thought, 'first of all, you've seen loads of different looks on me. And second of all, that is a stupid reason not to book someone.' Because at the time as well I was like 28, so it's like, it's not that old. And then, um, and then also I was like, 'but you can change an outfit.'

KIRI: Yeah. It's the like – there's so much – that's such a benign reason. Like if someone's been really funny and smashed it and go, 'well we loved all that, it's just we don't like what they're wearing,' it's like the one thing you can definitely change. Oh god, it's so heartbreaking.

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I – I have got to the point now, now I'm a bit more confident in myself, of going, 'you're bad at your job. This is no reflection of me. Because if you're booking people because they wear what you deem to be that show, well let me tell you something. That show doesn't exist anymore. I'm still around getting work.'

So it's like, I felt like, 'well that says a lot about you more than it does me. But at the time I didn't. I was like, 'this is so –' because I also felt like, you know, I do a lot of inappropriate material. At

least use that. Like you could really say, 'he did so many dick jokes and that is not appropriate for this show.' You know? 'Dannii Minogue does not want to hear a dick joke.' But I know she does. But that's what you could've said.

KIRI: Yeah. Well I – I think over the years we've had a lot of conversations about what you wear and advice you've been given. And I think in times when, you know, when work hasn't been as plentiful as it is for you now and also when we're finding ourselves – you find your voice on stage and then you have to find it on television, I think you've let people's critiques like, you know, change the way that you look. Like I've seen your style evolve and move back like – does that feel fair to say that?

STEPHEN: I think that's entirely fair. I think, you know, from when I started, I came out the best dressed open spot the comedy scene had even seen. I – I think that's fair to say. And then it was, whether it's an agent, a TV producer, other comedians about knowing your place, that pushes you back. And there's only so much you can hear where you go – and obviously you're looking at your bank balance going, 'well if this isn't – if this is why I'm not working, I need to change.'

And then I went through this stage of just wearing like jeans and a t-shirt like every other white boy in comedy. And I just – I remember feeling like not me. Do you know? Just like, 'this is not the show I want to put on.' And I – and I think that was the big issue. I felt like I don't feel like I'm putting on a show. I feel like we've gone for a brunch hangover. If it was a brunch where I wasn't hungover, I'd be dressed up. But this is something where it's like, 'just put jeans and a t-shirt on.' Like that's what it felt like.

Um, and so then – and I – I genuinely think it was when I started to – when Katherine Ryan invited me to tour support her, I feel like that A, changed my career because it got people to pay attention and go, ‘ooh, this is a serious comedian if he can do gigs with her.’ But also being with Katherine, who is so fashionable and so into her look and putting on a costume almost, I was like – it almost felt like it gave me permission back. But then I felt like, ‘oh, you’re trying to figure it out again and be, you know, what do you want to do?’

And then I – and it – being with Katherine more and more over that tour, I was like – Katherine doesn’t have a specific look. She just looks great. And I was like, ‘oh, I can do that. I don’t have to always be in the dicky bow and suits. But I can be when I want to be.’ But at the same time, like I like to shop in – I don’t even know how to articulate this at this point, because I don’t – I really don’t think we’re there when it comes to fashion yet.

Of being like – because there are clothes that are in the boys section, and there are clothes that are in the girls section, and obviously no one has seen me do my speech arcs, but it’s like I think clothes are just clothes. And so I wander around and, you know, whatever catches my eye catches my eye. And sometimes it’s not even – I think people think like the, um, kind of – the stuff I get that’s more womenswear is going to be like sparkly. But sometimes it’s such – just a simple top like this that I just like the fit and I like the neck of.

KIRI: Yeah, totally.

STEPHEN: When I feel at my best and my happiest and my most comfortable and my most confident is when I do have a mixture of the two. So like my – I love – very similar to Ru Paul, I love like a

suit but where it's got like A, what is deemed a female blouse under it.

KIRI: Yeah, but that's like – that to me is someone being artistic and expressive and going, 'this is what fashion's telling me, and I'm going to take those bits that I like and I'm going to be Stephen in fashion. I'm not just letting fashion wear me.' You're wearing it yourself. I think that shows really strong style.

And it works the other way – it's like I will go and buy like – trackies are better in men's like departments. They're just better. Like because they're not trying to make you look sexy. They are just trackies. Um, and like shirts as well. I'll buy men's shirts. Tend to fit me weirdly better. Um, but then yeah. It doesn't – it's so weird that it's seen to be odd if – if the traffic goes the other way in terms of if a man was just sort of perusing womenswear, people would be – would make the assumption they were shopping for a partner.

STEPHEN: Yeah, 100%. And even the – the hardest thing for me to figure out was sizing. What size am I in women's? Because obviously I don't have breasts. Like we have natural different body shapes. So it was trying to get that shape right of like what works for my shoulders, what works for my bosoms.

KIRI: And what's – what size are you, babes? I'm fascinated.

STEPHEN: She's a size 14 and proud of her curvatures.

KIRI: Yes please. That's, um, that's always my target size and I fluctuate above it and then sometimes if I'm – well, if I'm – I'll let you into a little secret from my – if I'm sad, I'll go to a 12-14. Never when I'm happy. Never when I'm happy.

[Both laugh]

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: And did you – I think at some point you worked with a stylist, right?

STEPHEN: Yes, I have worked with a stylist. Um, so I've – I've worked with like – I definitely – when was it? When I started making money, really. 2018. 2018-2019 I started working with this guy called Joe. And I was like, 'I don't have a specific – I want to feel comfortable, I want to look good, and I don't want someone in the audience to be able to be wearing what I'm wearing.'

And that was kind of his job, was to pull all that. And we went through loads of stages. And some worked and some didn't. And some like – I always say, I mean my Comedy Central special was a grey outfit but I forgot to put in – and Joe did give me – of them me, but I forgot to put them in – those – do you know – I don't know what they're called, but they're like the pads for your arms so you don't get sweat patches.

KIRI: Oh, well sanitary towels people use, don't they?

STEPHEN: Yeah, but there's like – we got the actual ones that are meant – so they kind of like – it's got like double sided sticky tape, so it sticks in onto your clothes. So we got those and I'm there dripping because – well you did the same regards where it was so hot in that bloody room. And it was dripping. And then I got back and I was covered in sweat patches. And I was like, 'oh god.' And it's always the thing. So now I never forget my – we'll call them sanitary towels. I never forget my sanitary towels.

Um, and when I'm feeling a bit more expressive I've got this amazing friend called Deni, um, and they're non-binary. And they have the best fashion. I've known them for about, what, 11 years now. And, um, they're incredible. And they get what I mean when it's like, 'I want to be, you know, I just want to add a little flair or a little flavour to something.' And yeah, they're @stylebydeni and they're just absolutely – I mean I think I'm artistic, but they – they are a piece of art. It's incredible.

KIRI: Great, that's so good. And – and just the idea as well of what you're saying, I totally agree. Some – a – a comedian, um, like a headliner when I started out was talking about what I wear and stuff. In a – in a nice way. And was saying, uh, it's – he – he said, 'I think it's important for our audience that we don't look like them.' That we look like someone you've paid money to see a ticket for. So if you look like the person who's sat next to them, you know, like in the seat, it's – it's less, I guess, spectacular. It – for most people. For some people, you know, an everyman charm is exactly what you want.

But your jeans should – and I guess some of it's about cost, but like if you're going to wear jeans, you wear a really nice cut of jeans that fit you. You don't, you know, just – it's whatever's on sale in Sainsbury's whether it fits you or not. Like it's that thing of looking like almost like otherly. Like looking like a star, I guess. And – and clothes can really help with that, can't they?

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I think whoever that was, I think that is great advice. Because it's like – if you think someone has just walked out of the audience, and let's face it, in some venues we really have, that – do you know what I mean? But it's like if you feel like that, I think there's almost – I never had issues, to be honest, from

– I’ve had issues about just these straight men that are uncomfortable with a gay man. But I don’t think it’s had anything to do with my outfit. If anything, sometimes I think the outfit’s helped people get on board quicker. I really do.

KIRI: Yeah, well do you think that about when you walk out on stage and – because I think that yeah, like I say you’re very stylish and – and not in – afraid to like embrace femme fashion, that people – it – does it give people a shorthand? They don’t have to like they’ll already probably going, ‘oh, I think he might be gay.’ And then you start speaking and – and like they go, ‘oh, I think he – I think he’s gay.’

Do you know what I mean? And so they’re not going – because some audiences are going, ‘are they? Aren’t they?’ And – and they find it distracting because people find it so – I mean that’s some of the conversation around people who are non-binary, is that people want easy boxes and non-binary is saying, ‘oh, no no. I’m – I’m not part of the boxes,’ which is why I think some people struggle. Um, so do you think your fashion helps you out onstage in that way?

STEPHEN: Do you know what? I think it does. I think it says – I think it confirms what you’re going to get from this next act, do you know what I mean? I think you know you’re going to get something maybe a bit smutty, a bit cheeky, a bit sassy, a bit pop cultured. Like I don’t think you’re going to hear me talking about Brexit, do you know? And I think it – I think that settles in their brain.

I do think I still have to do the things like – do you know like I know some of my friends who are women, um, who are like, you know, ‘first of all you’ve got to prove you’re funny before you can

just be funny.’ I still feel like I have to do that a little bit. Be like, ‘right, I don’t want to fuck any of you.’

Because I do – I would love the ego of some of these straight white men that are missing a tooth in Coventry that think you want to shag them. And it’s like – so I feel like I have to have a different way of doing that joke every time I go on tour, of going, ‘I don’t want any of you.’ And there’s going to be dick jokes. And I do it different every year, but I do feel like for the first couple of minutes I have to set out my stall.

KIRI: That’s so interesting. So interesting. Because yeah, I guess you’re using your fashion as well as a – as another tool that you use. That you – do you know the first time I saw you?

STEPHEN: Oh.

KIRI: You were wearing, um, jeans and a smart shoe, and a t-shirt you’d made yourself that said ‘the gay after tomorrow.’

STEPHEN: Yeah, I did go through a stage of that where I was like – I had loads of different ones. And, um, I had ‘homo and away: the Stephen Bailey soap opera.’ And this was when I’d been a bit like battered by it all and was like, ‘right, I’m going to wear jeans and a t-shirt.’ And I was like, ‘I’m going to wear t-shirts on my terms.’ And I got loads printed at a Flex Palace. I’d – I went in and I just gave this guy this list of all these like different like kind of gay puns.

KIRI: I love that you’re like, ‘I’m just going to wear jeans and a t-shirt.’ And the – and then the first time I’m like, ‘I remember you, and the t-shirt had “the gay after tomorrow” emblazoned across it.’ And you’re like, ‘yeah, that’s me in jeans and a t-shirt, babe.’

STEPHEN: Yeah, and there was 'the gay after tomorrow,' there was, uh, 'homo and away: the Stephen Bailey soap opera.' There was, um, 'homo alone' because I was single at the time. Um, there was so many.

KIRI: Oh, I love it. Have you still got any of them?

STEPHEN: No, because even I found that quite embarrassing. Like, um, it was – it was just – I just thought, 'ooh, maybe some people will show interest and I'll sell them as merch in Edinburgh.' No one gave a shit.

KIRI: It's a really sweet idea. Yeah, I – I think it's – I think that shows someone who's thinking about like branding and thinking about what they are to the world and what their audience will want from them. And now you have your audience. Yes, you didn't when you were on stage at Beat the Frog doing 8 minutes, but now you have your audience. They're absolutely the kind of people who would buy a t-shirt saying 'homo alone' on it. Like for the single gays. They absolutely are. You just – you cottoned onto something, you just didn't have the audience for it yet.

STEPHEN: I just didn't have the audience and I didn't have the confidence. Because I do think – there was just a lot of like judgment around it. And it – it's took me a really long time to go, 'oh, I really – I really don't care what that producer at Xtra Factor thinks.' Do you know? Like it took me ages to get there. Whereas now I'm like, 'yes, if I did it I would sell crowns. I would sell dicky bows. And I would do the t-shirts.'

But I'd probably do them a bit more classy than I did back then. Like I really did it in your face. Whereas I think I would do it a bit

more – I'd do it a bit more classy where people have to look like – like the way people lean and go, 'have you got makeup on?' That's what I want them to do with the t-shirt, is like, 'does that say "homo alone?"'

KIRI: You should get ones with just a little bit of embroidery on the breast that says, 'are you wearing makeup?' That would sell.

STEPHEN: That's a really good idea. And the – they gay slogan ones, the gay puns, I'd love to get that on silk pyjamas.

KIRI: Well sign me up.

STEPHEN: Yeah. You'd wear them. Yeah.

KIRI: I'll absolutely have a pair of 'homo alones.'

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Is there, um, in terms of like history and fashion, is there an era that you – because I always think of you in – in like suits and dicky bows, which I guess is a bit sort of like 20s, I guess. But is there like an era of – that you were like, 'oh, I love that just for the fashion'? Because obviously if you go back in history, there's nearly never a time for – for you to be gay and safe. So let's remove that part from it.

STEPHEN: Yeah. I kind of – look, I mean because for men throughout time, I always think – I think 20s is spot on. And also like the 40s. Do you know? I feel like get me in like a nice 40s suit, trilled, and do you know – I know this was mainly for the ladies, but hello, we're taking me to the 40s. You know like the cigarette that Bet Lynch had with the holder?

KIRI: With the holder, yes. Of course.

STEPHEN: Cigarette holder. That. And that's me again combining the feminine and the masculine.

KIRI: Yeah. I could also see you in, um, the 70s. You know where men were very, you know, they wore the – loads of bold colours, loads of bold prints. And would often wear like really soft scarves, you know, like silk scarves and had really gorgeous, long hair. Like I think the men in the 70s were really quite fabulous. Like I can see you there.

STEPHEN: Well I think some were and I thought some look rotten. Um, but I think you're right about the – I do. For – for me, some of that was like, oh, it was – I think it's – that must've been the time where it – the saying 'the nan's curtains' came from. About you wearing your nan's curtains.

But there is some of it where it's like, no, I'm totally – because I used to, um, wear – so when – I used to let my curls go a bit longer, and I'd put like a scarf in and come like – like that come down. Um, I did that during uni. I wouldn't do it as much now, um, mainly because I don't really think I was pulling it off. I think it's a lovely idea and I think if you've got the right face shape and your curls – like Eyal from Love Island could definitely pull that off.

KIRI: Um, is there – have you got a bit of clothing that you put on and you just feel amazing straight away? That you're like, 'I can whack that on and I'll just feel great?'

STEPHEN: A suit. A simple black suit and then – that on its own I know I could wear with anything and just feel great, because I feel

like you can really wear a simple black suit with like a t-shirt and a trainer and go out and have like an amazing power brunch. But at the same time slip on a brogue and like a nice pussy bow blouse, and I could walk straight onto the stage. But just whenever I put on a suit, um, I really feel like ready to seize the day. I feel really powerful in it.

KIRI: I love that. Because I don't – I'm – I've got someone making me a suit at the moment because – because I've got big knockers and a big bum and I'm short, I – suits are just way off for me. So the – if I want something and I need it to fit, I – I get someone to make it for me. So I've got someone making me a – like a 70s like power suit.

STEPHEN: Oh, great.

KIRI: And man, I'm excited to – we – hearing you talking about suits then, I'm like, 'I want my suit. I can't wait for it.'

STEPHEN: There is something – I mean I've quoted Ru Paul too much in this, but he's always like, 'dress for the job you want, dress for like the money you want.' And I do think there is something in it. Like I feel like when – when I let everyone get in my head and, um, when I let everyone get in my head and so I stepped away from the suits and I stepped away from the dicky bows and I stepped away from all that, I – I didn't feel very powerful and good stuff wasn't happening. Like for me workwise and financially.

The minute I refound my style – and like that cape, I used to wear that cape I told you about, that I found in Camden Market. Once I'd wore that with a suit – so I got these black suit pants, and this was like maroon. So I'd wear that and then I'd get – I had like a

cropped blazer, so it would come full length in the arm but cropped there so you could see the bottom of the cape pop out. I have never felt more powerful. And once I'd got that back on, I really started to feel like, 'right, the gigs are going great.'

And I got that for Katherine's – the first tour Katherine invited me on. And I – these gigs were going great. That elevated my confidence. And so then from the money I'd made from that I was like, 'hm, what should I buy for the next set of tour dates?' And then it was like, 'right.' And so I just slowly, slowly started building it and experimenting.

And sometimes I still get it wrong, but on the whole – and I like to do it myself. Like I don't work with a stylist as much now unless it's about, as you say, fitting. How something fits, um, and how to find that. Or like when I had the idea of I wanted to wear a gold headband crown, like I'd be like, 'uh, Deni? Where does one find this?' But now I like to put it together because then it feels more sincere to me.

KIRI: So it feels like you have more ownership of your style in a way.

STEPHEN: Yeah, and I think, you know, you miss what you lose, don't you? And so I think having that time of losing it, even though it did – and even now like I've spoke to you about it off microphone where it's like – it still affects my confidence, being like, 'should I wear this or do – will people still be like, "who does he think he is?" da da da.'

Whereas now it makes me feel good. I – and I love like putting the outfit together. That's why I have that separate rail from my wardrobe. Because then I look at the week and go, 'you're going

to have a great week. Dress for the week you want,' do you know what I mean? It's such a mood of – I've seen that. And the other thing is, I can be quite scruffy. Like if I don't have to leave the house, I'm totally hoodie and joggers. Like if I don't need to go anywhere.

Um, but I obviously – that's not something that makes you feel good. But there are days when it's like right, well – because then you was doing this, then I was like, 'well, you know, we are on a – like a video call, so it's – it's all about the headwear. So I'm going to put the crown on.' Um, and it just elevates your day all of a sudden. Like you're ready to take on the day. And there are days when I've walked into a run through being like, 'hm, should I wear Stephen Bailey like the performer or should I just go in being like 'oh, your run through, da da da.' And, um, oh, for those listening, a run through is like an audition for comedians. And I'm always like, 'no, go in.' And every time I've gone in not afraid of what I'm wearing, I've got the job.

KIRI: Same.

STEPHEN: And every time I've felt a bit of a pansy about it, being like, 'hm, should I be wearing this just for a little office run through?', it's never gone my way.

KIRI: Yeah, I did – that took me way too long to cotton onto, that I'd go and do these run throughs, as you say, which is pretending to do a panel show in a boardroom to bored interns sipping diet cokes with a – like a raised eyebrow. And I would just dress normally because usually I was coming down from Manchester anyway, and then I was like, 'do you know what? They're booking me for everything, so I'm just going to dress like I would dress if I got the job.' And I started to get the job.

STEPHEN: Yeah. I remember auditioning for something recently, and I ended up getting the job. And I – but I went in in that way, where I was like – I'd got all these new blouses and stuff from over Christmas, and then I'd got a few new simple suits. And I was like, 'this is – this is what I'd wear if I got this job.' And I went in and one of the questions that they asked at the end of it is – they were laughing and I was like, 'this has gone really great.' And one of the questions they asked, which I really took note to, was, 'oh, do you always dress like this?' And I was like, 'um, pretty much, yeah.' And I – I was like, 'isn't that interesting? I wonder if that was part of the sale of it, do you know?'

KIRI: Yeah. Yeah, totally.

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: What's your relationship with shopping? When it comes to clothes or makeup, like do you go very often? Is it fun to you? Is it difficult? Like where would you go shopping? Would you do it all online or do you love a little mooch around? A little try on?

STEPHEN: I hate doing online shopping, actually. Unless it's something that I can't – if – unless it's something I've – I've visualised in my head, being like, 'oh, this would be a really cool outfit,' and so I knew what I needed and I didn't know where to get it from, i.e. the crown, then I would get that online. Um, but otherwise I like going. I like seeing things in person, I am a fan of a dressing room.

The only thing I feel that I am – I'm maybe a bit hypocritical in that sense, is when I buy the quote unquote 'girls tops.' Because obviously you're in the 'ladies department'. You've got the 'ladies

dressing rooms'. Why are you taking that top from the ladies dressing room to the male dressing room? That makes me feel really, really awkward. So for that now it's like I know I'm a size 14 and I just grab that and I try it on at home. Um, but I would say ladies wear, I haven't bought ladies wear, I don't think, in person. I think I've only ever bought that online.

KIRI: Really?

STEPHEN: Unless I'm forgetting something, I think I've only ever bought that online. And I think that is because it's – I don't – I mean I don't know why clothes have to be gendered. I do not know why clothes have to be gendered. Like I should be able to walk in – like next to the men's – men's suits, there should be some high heels and some pussy bow blouses, do you know? I – I really think that. Because that is – and it – I'm – like I say, I'll happily walk out on stage in that outfit, and I feel very confident. And there's not one bit of me that doesn't feel confident wearing that. But the – the transaction of buying what is deemed ladies department stuff makes me feel sick. Like makes me feel sick.

Like with makeup, if I know what I'm getting and I don't need to try it, I'll probably make a fuss, like be like, 'I wonder if Jessica will like this for her birthday,' do you know, stuff like that. Like on the phone. But, um, that's only if it's like smash and grab. Um, and even still a lot of the makeup I get, if – like I say, if I know I'm going to get it to save just the whole – it's that – like I say it's an awkward transaction of being like – because the minute they say, 'who's this for?' It's like, 'oh god.' Um, and so with makeup if I know what I want, I'll get Nicole to get it for me and she just posts it to me. Um, but then with the boys' clothes, I really enjoy a wander around town for that.

KIRI: That's so interesting. Because I always think of you as being – and I'm not saying you aren't these things, but like so empowered in your own skin and your own sense of expression. But it just shows you that the world can still make someone like you feel like there's an otherness to you.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: In terms of makeup, in terms of clothing.

STEPHEN: Do you know what it is as well, is like I – I really hate having to explain myself. Like I don't need you to take the shine off this purchase that's going to make me feel so empowered later on by these weird questions, do you know? I – I just find it – it's – yeah, it's more just – I think it's the lack of patience and just like the awkwardness and that feeling of going, 'I have to answer this away so you feel alright with it.'

KIRI: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's dehumanising, isn't it? It's literally the – the word for it.

STEPHEN: Yeah, and half the time, do you know like when they're – when they're going, 'is this for you?' It's like, 'I – I'm covered in a face of makeup now,' do you know what I mean?' They're like – I very rarely leave the house without like tinted moisturiser, a bit of eyebrow, and a bit of mascara on. So it's –

KIRI: Yeah, read between the lines, babe.

STEPHEN: Yeah. Come on. It's like – it would be like me saying to them at the counter, 'did you mean to come in that orange,' do you know? I would never – and like I like to experiment, I like to treat myself a bit like an art project, especially when it's onstage.

And I think the only thing I would – I would always like to make – like raise awareness about is be like these awkward interactions. Like if a boy is in a makeup – like don't make them feel weird about it. Do you know? Like I remember once wandering through Soho trying to find an independent place, do you know, just being like, 'I wonder if there's like a gay makeup store.'

KIRI: Yeah. God, there should be.

STEPHEN: I don't know if there is. But I –

KIRI: They should make an absolute fortune.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: And – and you know what? I've seen it happen before where – I think with my partner it's happened, where – because he's very glamorous with what he likes to wear.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, and they've gone, 'oh, is this for you?' And to – as a joke. And he's like, 'yep.' And then they don't know what to do. Because, you know, nine out of ten men are like, 'no, obviously not. It's for my partner because I'm not gay.' Um, and he's like, 'yes, I – I like beautiful things.' And they just don't know what to do with it. But they're wrong.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: They're – they're the ones like trying to desperately hold onto these things that mean nothing. That are all constructed,

that pink is for a girl and blue's for a boy and, you know, skirts are for women.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: And all this kind of stuff is just nonsense. And it takes away so much of the fun about fashion. Like most little boys love dressing up and putting on dresses and, you know, because they're fun.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Like – it's sumptuous.

STEPHEN: I, um, it's really weird that like I feel like I have to make – give an answer to make someone feel comfortable even though they don't give a shit that they're making me feel so uncomfortable, you know? They're not thinking about their reactions, then you have to think about that. Um, and I don't – I don't know what it is. Like is it that we're all too judgy? Is it that we're too stuck in these like gender – such gender roles where it's like, I've had people tell me before where I've been in for a meeting about a TV show and then they've – that whole meeting where I'm there to try and get a job, they've gone, 'do you know the whole office has been discussing if we prefer your hair curly or straight.'

And it's like – well part of me feels like if you're paying my bills, you can tell me which way to wear it, eh? But I don't know why you wasted my time. And it's like sometimes I do it curly. I like it both ways as well. Like so sometimes I do it curly. Especially if it's got a bit longer, I prefer it curly. But sometimes for me I just

prefer – I like the tidiness of like when I've like done the – the quiff and after a fresh haircut.

KIRI: Love it.

STEPHEN: And I think if I was going to, say, a wedding or a photo shoot, I'd definitely go more quiffy. But for the rest of the time it's like the curls are fun.

KIRI: They are. There's a real sense of fun to it.

STEPHEN: But I couldn't believe it was a conversation, do you know? Being like –

KIRI: It's so rude as well that they think that they can have it about people that they are like – presume, because they don't necessarily know, about like you and your relationship with your gender identity to be male. So because they wouldn't go – I don't think they would go to me, 'we've just been discussing. We prefer you in a high neck rather than a low-cut top.'

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Do you know what I mean? They just wouldn't say it. Or even something about like, 'oh, no, we preferred – we've seen a picture of you when you were blond and it looked better then.' They just wouldn't have that conversation. So to be like – for – to have your appearance up for debate like that is really awful.

STEPHEN: Yeah, I remember – I remember saying to my agent like that day, being like, 'I feel very strange about this.' Because on one hand they're talking about you, which is good. But on the other hand, I'm like, 'why are they not talking about my humour

or my intelligence or all the things I want to be speaking about? Why – like they're not going to give me a show, 'Stephen Investigates Curly Hair Versus Straight Hair.'

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Do you think you're, um, I've seen you wear stuff with like – you've got that great rainbow sequin t-shirt that you wear, which is like really fabulous, and also is – is political. It's – any time there's a rainbow on a queer person, it's a political act, isn't it? Is that something you're aware of when you dress?

STEPHEN: When I saw that rainbow t-shirt, I was like, 'yes, please.' For all – just for all the right reasons. Like to be A, out and proud. B, I just thought it was amazing. I could – and I was like, 'I'm going to buy the size even bigger so then in can like almost look a bit dressy over a pair of skinny jeans with a nice boot.'

And I remembered wearing that when I did Celebrity Coach Trip. And everyone was like, 'oh, are we going to a – like a Pride parade? Are we going to a Pride –' and it was like, 'no, we're going to the next stop on the coach.' But, do you know, just being like – it was – once again it was one of those things when everyone had to comment, but I've now got to the point of not giving a shit about that and I think that is the political statement.

And I think I don't – I don't aim to do politics out of it. I would say what I am aiming to do more – to be more conscious I guess, is I am now – which I think you're getting to, is trying to be – steer away from like fast fashion, get things that can last for years. Like I used to – guiltiest sin – but was poor, you know, I would buy a cheap £10, you know, high street pair of jeans, which is no good for the world. They would not last very long. Whereas now I do

invest in jeans. Do you know? Um, so I'll spend that a bit more so they last longer. It took me ages. And I'm not going to lie to you, it was The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills that actually taught me that.

KIRI: I love that. Oh my god, I can't wait for that to be a pull out quote on this podcast.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: What? Did they really? Go on. Tell us the story behind that, then.

STEPHEN: So because, you know, they had – they had obviously talked about Chanel and all these things that I could probably never afford. Like Louis Vuitton luggage and all that stuff. And they were saying – there was just a comment being like, 'well people think we do it to be vacuous,' and they were like, 'and honey, sometimes we are.' But they were like, 'but actually everything I own lasts longer. I've had some of these bags for like 30 years or more.' Like some of these bags have been passed down. Like, um, they got one of them out where it was like a – I think it was a Chanel clutch, and they were like, 'you know, this was my mum's mum. And it's still in this amazing condition because it was made properly.'

Um, and so like that kind of opened my eyes to it. Going, 'oh.' And at first it was a shallow side going, 'well I'd like to own some Chanel. So if it – if it lasts that long, do it.' But then it made me start thinking, going, 'but actually you – I bet if you looked in your wardrobe, you've got a lot of stuff that you've not worn in the past 12 months.' Maybe not you, but like people listening. And I certainly do. So then I was like, 'if you got rid of that and just had

everything you want, like you're doing your bit for the world, but also it will last.' And like my mum's and gran's expensive coat is still being worn by me and it's still in pristine condition.

So just little things like that. And, um, Sarah Jessica Parker. Another one. She had a shoe line and people were slagging her because her shoes were expensive, which she was like – she got them made in Italy by an Italian manufacturer, they weren't dead overpriced. It was – it was just that typical thing of it wasn't just a celebrity whacking their name on something cheap that will only last you less than a month probably. It was proper Italian leather and it will last you a lifetime.

And she was really like, 'if you bought one pair of these shoes, you won't need another pair. This is just – this pair will see you through for good occasions and, you know, day to day wear.' And – and I was like, 'hm.' And so then just started looking into it a bit more. And don't get me wrong, I'm still guilty. I have not got a full wardrobe that I'd be proud of going, 'look, I'm doing my bit for the world.' But I'm getting there, do you know? And it – and I think it is more of an investment when you get those pieces.

KIRI: Totally, yeah. And – and I think that having – being someone who's like newly wealthy, I guess is the phrase, um, suddenly I feel like I have access to stuff, I have more money than ever before to buy fast fashion, and I'm trying to go, 'no, hold on.' Whereas my money has always counted, but I didn't have choice before. And having more money has given me choice. So where am I choosing to put my money? And that's become important to me.

STEPHEN: No, I think that's right. I mean because we've all got to be doing our bit. The global warming is real, people. Um, and so –

KIRI: Finally someone said it.

STEPHEN: Yeah. So it is like – and it – like it's for me, it's like, like you said, I have more money now than when I was working at Sainsbury's and stuff like that. And I remember when I'd work at Sainsbury's and, you know, you'd get your pay check. It felt like so much at the time that I'd run and – I didn't have bills or anything grown-up. Was still with my mum and dad. And I'd run to like Topman and buy everything. And it wouldn't last.

Like it – it would not – part of me – part of it's because of me, because I – I was 18, 19. I'd be up the stripper pole, I'd be having vodka cranberry that does not come out. Vodka cranberry does not come out. So I'd just be replacing everything on loop. Whereas, you know, my first thing when I got into this comedy was, 'I'm going to prove a point and I'm going to buy my first home through comedy. And no one's going to help me.' And do you know like when your parents are like – I mean my parents could offer a lot of money but was not going to give a deposit. But you know when they're like, you know, 'well we'll – we'll buy you this.' And I was like, 'no, I want to do this – the whole house I want to do just me.'

Um, but now the next stage, now I'm here, is like I do want to sort out that wardrobe. I want to be more thoughtful and I really – and also, you know, I want to be a bit Beverly Hills housewife, quite frankly. A bit shallow but a bit thoughtful. So it's like I want Chanel. To have Chanel. But also it is good for the world.

KIRI: It is good for that planet. That's – if that's how you – that's what you tell yourself, babe, that's fine.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Now we've – now we've fixed climate change and, um, gender in shops, um, do you see your style evolving? Changing as you get older?

STEPHEN: I do, actually. I think I'm going – I can see myself becoming as I get older more of a gentleman. Like where I used to – like I used to love, like you say, bold colours, pastels. I am – I really do enjoy myself now in like – like my favourite group – uh, suit, sorry. My favourite suit is like a grey double breasted suit. So it's very, very simple with a nice black brogue. And then I like – maybe something to pop under it. So I can see myself going a bit more like, you know, English gentleman. I want like, um, like a nice trilby countryside hat. I want, um, my friend Deni, actually, has – do you know like, um, I don't know what it's called. Like a clutch handbag. Like it's – basically looks like a sheet of A4 but you can put like your phone and stuff in it.

KIRI: Yeah. Yeah. A clutch.

STEPHEN: Like – yeah, a clutch. Like I think I'm going to start carrying one. Because it's like I don't like my pockets always bulging. You can just shove it on the side. Um, so I can see it evolving more like that. And I think it comes from A, confidence, is one side of it. The clutch handbag. And the other side of it is maturity as well. Just being like, 'I think I'm ready for a – something a bit more simple and classic.'

KIRI: Love it. I can't wait for the clutch. I'm so excited. I've got loads of vintage clutches that I used to wear – have on nights out and I don't go – so when I'm in Manchester I'll go through them and send you pictures and if you want any you can have them.

STEPHEN: Oh, fab. That would be great. Thanks, yeah.

KIRI: Yeah, I've got some good – I've got a really good oversized one from, um – a vintage red leather one from Paris that's really nice. I'll send you pictures.

STEPHEN: Oh, that would go with my, uh, I've got one of the red berets because of Emily in Paris. Yeah.

KIRI: Is, um, is there an item of clothing that you can just always see yourself wearing?

STEPHEN: So I've got this oversized black shirt. So it's – it's from the women's department – I'm doing air quotes, people – it's from the women's department and it's called like a boyfriend shirt. And I really love that for once again one of those simple – do you know like if you rang me and were like, 'Stephen, I'm in Manchester, let's grab a quick glass of wine before I'm off to go and record this thing.' It was one of those things where I'd – I'd throw it on, I'd feel dead fancy, but it's dead easy. And I just feel like I just look dead fit in it.

KIRI: Yeah, that's a great answer. Are there any, um, because I've started noticing – so I'm only in my early 30s, but I've started noticing trends coming back. You know when you were growing up and – and your parents would be like, 'I remember that the first time around.' You're like, 'what? I don't know what you're saying to me.' And now I'm seeing girls going like 90s. Um, are there any trends that you're hoping never come back?

STEPHEN: I kind of hope skater boy vibe does not come back.

KIRI: [laughs] As in Avril Lavigne Sk8ter Boi? Or you mean where we all wore those baggy trousers that soaked up the rainwater and were all ripped at the back because they were too long and wore trainers?

STEPHEN: Yeah, those ones. Like the – the baggy jeans and they always had like – there was like a keychain and – a very long keychain. Like that. And because what I found was no one ever knew what shoe to wear with it. It never looked good. And flares. I feel like flares came back when we were – it was maybe in college, flared jeans. And obviously that they'd already – were like 70s. Made a comeback. I really hope we don't see them again. Do you know where you couldn't see people's footwear? Not for me.

KIRI: Oh, flares are on their way, babe, if they're not here already.

STEPHEN: Oh no, I can't.

KIRI: They're – they're coming back.

STEPHEN: They're – that's going to make me anxious.

KIRI: Get used to it. Well because there was the 70s and they came back in like the 90s.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Kind of Britpop boys wore cord flares, didn't they? And so there was a little bit of that when we were like growing up. And – and then yeah, there was more of a bootleg. And I'm sure that flares – I've seen it in a – in a few fashion mags that the flare is back.

STEPHEN: Oh, no. Do you, um, out of interest, do you have like different kind of fashion styles for different occasions?

KIRI: Um, yeah I guess for stage I have two – I have like stage, doing the clubs, and then I have stuff that I would wear for, uh, when I did like – in a musical show or like an All Killa No Filla where we go really big. And then I have like daywear filming where I always have sequins on somewhere, but I can't be in a leotard or I can't be in a –

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: A little sequined cocktail dress. So it's got to be like a bomber jacket or a shirt with some embellishment. So yeah, I have different layers of my 'brand' in inverted commas.

STEPHEN: What about if you were going to like a 30<sup>th</sup>?

KIRI: I don't wear any sequins, um, because it's workwear.

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, it would be like wearing those – you know, when you – when you're a – a kid and you wear those black polyester trousers to school and then you wear them for the school disco a different – a different top?

STEPHEN: Yeah.

KIRI: Um, so yeah, I love big bold patterns still and bright colours and, uh, yeah, it'll never be – just to keep it easier for tax deductions as well, and never will be anything that I've worn onstage. And loads of vintage if I – like I love charity shops, so

nearly all vintage if I can. And I've got – I've bought a few little Vivienne Westwood dresses over the years that, um, I probably don't fit into at the moment because lockdown. She's been good to me. Um, okay. What outfit would you want to be buried in?

STEPHEN: I would definitely go for like what I consider classic Stephen, and almost like a fuck you to that producer. I'd love like the burnt orange suit, the white shirt, and the big oversized black velvet dicky bow. Because that feels me at my best and at my happiest. And although I'd be dead, I'd really hope everyone was enjoying the vol au vents.

KIRI: Yeah, I think you'd look – do you know what? It's such a good, uh, good outfit. You'd have to be like open casket. Like it has to be open casket.

STEPHEN: Yeah yeah. Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. I'd be like, 'Nicole, are you available to do my, uh, makeup on my death day?'

[Upbeat electronic music]

KIRI: Oh, Stephen. I will never cease to be inspired and educated and empowered by Stephen. I genuinely think it takes real courage, especially as a working class lad, to try and speak up about queer representation in the media, um, and I'm so proud that he does. But I wish he didn't have to.

I mean I think about it a lot, that it must be exhausting enough to live as a queer person in this country. And then being brave enough to put his head above the parapet to just try and make things better for everyone is just incredible and one of the reasons why I love Stephen so much. That and the outfits, obviously. I hope you enjoyed that episode and, um, yeah. I'm

sure you just – if you didn't before, you definitely love him as much as I do now.

I had some really lovely messages as well. Jessica got in contact and said, um, of our Aja Barber episode, 'absolutely loving this ep. And I totally agree with Aja about knowing the basics of how to sew and mend clothes.' Yeah. She says, 'I did two years of compulsory home economics in high school and hated it because the boys at our brother school didn't have to do it. I'm still a raging feminist but wow, those needle and threads, girls, have come in handy.'

Do you know what? It is never not going to be useful to put a button back on or mend a hole. If you're like me and you chomp through leggings every sort of six to eight minutes, then it's useful to be able to stitch them up again.

Um, Angie said of Aja's episode, 'I really enjoyed it. Definitely got the brain juices going and I purchased Aja's book, which is arriving on Thursday. Cannot wait. Thank you Kiri and co for continuing to put out smashing episodes every week.' Oh, I'm so glad you got her book. Um, I really have been like – it's like real brain food.

And like you – I feel like it's – you know when you have a smoothie and you're like, 'I feel like I'm a better person for just having this.' Um, even though you're like, 'yeah, I'd have to stop knocking back three – three bottles of Prosecco every week to make that happen.' But that's how I felt reading her book. I was like, 'this is – just knowing this stuff will – will make the planet a better place. And this is giving me all the tools to make the right decisions.' So if you haven't bought Consumed, I do – do recommend it.

Um, thank you so much for these messages. It's really galvanising, um, to hear that you guys are enjoying it. And makes sitting on the floor of my cupboard, getting a dead leg, having long chats, um, absolutely worth it. I say that, it's absolutely worth it just to chat to these people anyway. Um, if you want to write to us, you can email [whoyouwearingpod@gmail.com](mailto:whoyouwearingpod@gmail.com) and you can follow [@whoyouwearingpod](#) on the gram.

Now I've just got time to sing about an indie business that I love. And inspired by all the things I love about Stephen, um, and his original love for the slogan tee, I'm going to talk about Philip Normal. So the eponymous label is the creation of Labour Councillor and activist Philip Normal, and I am so deeply in love with just how camp and kitsch and stylish and clever the clothes are. Oh, there's so much good stuff. I've bought some new presents from there. So from Corrie inspired t-shirts to Trans Lives Matter totes, Philip's pitch perfect references and sense of humour are all over the range.

Um, and I want to talk in particular about the iconic La t-shirt celebrating the catchphrase of the It's A Sin gang. And it was released in collaboration with the Terrence Higgins Trust. Um, I think you can get it in black and white and there's a limited edition pink one. Um, so as of the end of August, this t-shirt has raised over half a million pounds for the Terrence Higgins trust, which is obviously one of the leading charities, which deals with HIV and sexual health. So over half a million quid. Oh, I absolutely love it. Going to a brilliant, brilliant charity.

Obviously there's that range, but check out everything else as well. There's some – just some banging deft stuff. There's a La t-shirt but in that range there's a great one that says Hundetectable, which I love. Because obviously we all love the

use of the word 'hun.' And undetectable as well, reminding people that you equals you. So reminding everybody that, you know, if you're living with HIV and you're taking your medication, that's it. You don't – you won't pass it on and you can lead a full and healthy life, is something that is, um, I think not enough people know about. So of course anything that helps to raise money, um, for the Terrence Higgins trust, who help raise awareness and educate people on this, um, is a wonderful, wonderful thing.

And yeah, just the sense of humour and stylishness of how they do about it absolutely reminded me of Stephen. Um, so we will be back next Monday, and I'm chatting to a brilliant actor and a really snappy dresser. Getty Images, all over it looking sharp as hell. It is Kiall Smith-Bynoe. So see you then.

[Upbeat electronic music]

Who Are You Wearing is produced by Jo Southerd, the artwork is by Mary Phillips, and the music is by Ani Glass. This has been a Little Wander production.