

Disrupt Yourself Podcast with Whitney Johnson

Episode 66: Philip Sheppard

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself Podcast. I'm Whitney Johnson. I think, write, speak, and live all things disruption. My guest today is Philip Sheppard a composer, cellist, inventor and professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Now, before we start, I want to forewarn you that the sound on this episode is not going to be good. I recorded it on my cell phone. But there's a lesson to be learned, and I'll tell you what it is at the end of the episode.

Whitney: Do you remember when you started playing, and did you always love it?

Philip: Yeah, I started playing the cello when I was three and a half years old. My mum is still a violin player and really great teacher, but when I was born um, I, I grew up around music just relentlessly and my brother was already playing the violin, and I remember thinking um, "I- I'm gonna play something bigger."

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: And I heard, it's a cliché ... and I think this story's true, but you never know when you kind of-

Whitney: When you're three.

Philip: -tell you're own story. Yeah.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: B- but I heard Jacqueline du Pre, on the radio, who was the world's greatest cello player; she was the most amazing, um, British woman cellist and, playing the Elgar Cello Concerto, and I re- ... I remembered distinctly hearing it and saying, "What's that?" And my mom saying, "Well that's a cello." "Well I'm gonna do that."

And I did my first concert, yeah in 1973, about two weeks after I started playing- I say concert um...

Whitney: (Laughs).

Philip: I played- I played-

Whitney: 'Cause you were three and a half years old.

Philip: I was three and a half years old.

Whitney: Okay, yeah.

Philip: It was- it was...I now remember- I actually remember the performance very clearly, it was at a club for the blind in my home town, and I played a piece called Charlie and Fred which is about two conies, and, we call them guinea pigs, that my cello teacher owns, and it was a very complicated ... it had about nine notes in this piece, but I played it twice, so they got good value in the concert.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: And I did actually try and play it in a concert recently, and I found myself wracked- I never get nervous when I play, but I found myself wracked with nerves, I completely f-flashed back to playing it first. But I always knew that-

Whitney: Nine notes.

Philip: Yeah, but-

Whitney: Child's play.

Philip: Yeah, yeah. Well- hmm, you know this, it's always easy when you're a kid.

Whitney: But you remembered how you felt.

Philip: Totally. But, it's funny, 'cause I- I grew up not realizing that music was difficult, and I've always had perfect pitch, or what the Americans call "absolute pitch".

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: But my sense of pitch is actually a violin A string played in a kind of shaky way because I used to go to sleep with my head against the wall where my mom was teaching the violin, and it's a remembered sound, and actually the funny thing is we're all born with-

Whitney: So do you have perfect pitch or-

Philip: Yeah, totally.

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: It's kind of a curse 'cause if something's not totally in tune I can't hear it.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: Uh, but actually everyone's- everyone's born with a sense of absolute pitch, y-you have to, so you can actually recognize your mothers voice.

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: Forget the father, (laughs). Your mother's voice out of a room full of voices, it's a proven, scientific fact. So it's a bit like an eidetic memory, like a photographic memory, we were born with these type of skills, and if you carry on using them it's the neural pruning thing then you retain them.

So every single Korean cellist student I've ever had has always had absolute pitch, and that's purely because of the tonal importance of understanding the difference between horse and, I think it's mother in Korean, is actually one kind of increment on a tonal scale.

Whitney: So simply because of the language that they're speaking-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: It programs them to have perfect pitch.

Philip: Yeah I- it retains- it retains the abilities that you're born with, you know. It's like- you know, knowing those subtle- and they are literally tonal pitch differences is critically important in that particular language ... in English it doesn't matter, we mangle vowels left, right and center and it all kind of sounds the same, which is why it's harder for someone like me to retain pitch but I was just- I had it basically hammered into me, just through sleeping through slightly bad violin playing.

Whitney: Have you read um, Glenn Doman's book- any of his work about babies and intelligence and-

Philip: Yes, I have. Yeah, a- and there's some- [I wrote a book actually about um, neurology and music](#), um-

Whitney: What's it called?

Philip: Uh, it was- well, it's a very contentious title, it's called [Music Makes Your Child Smarter](#), and it was- when I had- when m- my kids were young I was getting very frustrated with the baby Mozart industry.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: Which is being controlled by a certain company run by a mouse, it's not- refer to Disney, I have to be very careful. And, um, they- it was that whole baby Einstein, baby Mozart thing which is- if you play your children Mozart it's going to make them intelligent- that's a bit like saying, if I watch the Olympics I'm going to get fit, it's just not true. But, if you play an instrument before the age of seven it actually changes the physiology of things like the corpus callosum, particularly, actually in women- particularly in girls.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: There's a-

Whitney: Tell ... say more about that.

Philip: Well, y- you know there this- a lot of this theories aren't down at the moment. B- but the sense of uh, the cross-hemisphere communication, so w- written in the Corpus callosum- in the Corpus callosum for instance, in the way that the left and right brain interact. If you particularly play something like a piano which is using literally your left and right sides of the brain cross body, it's a bit like when children crawl, it tends to help their neurological development because of the cross body um, stimulation. With the piano, uh- by the way, I can't play the piano, I've tried for years I'm, I'm-

Whitney: I can.

Philip: Hor- see, uh ... then make ... it's just not fair, I'm so jealous, I'd love to be able to play it. I'm a composer, I write movie soundtracks and people say, "Oh come play something on the piano. " I learned for nine years, I can't play it at all, it's horrific. But when kids learn it, particularly girls, the- actual rapid development of- of it- it, it builds areas of the brain really rapidly, and it's- it's the equivalent of actually going running every day, y-... doing that will make you fit, watching someone else run won't really hack it.

Whitney: So I have to pause for just a second, 'cause this is really interesting to me. When you just said something there was a piece of me that started to cry a little bit.

Philip: Good.

Whitney: And, um, so I remember when I was three years old, I went to see *The Sound of Music*.

Philip: Awesome.

Whitney: And, I came home and I started trying to figure out how to play "Do-Re-Mi" on the piano.

Philip: Wow.

Whitney: And then I begged my parents, and begged my parents, and begged my parents to let me take piano, and I didn't get to start until I was seven...

Philip: Wow.

Whitney: But I still remember having babysitters coming over and saying, "Please teach me how to play something on the piano."

Philip: Oh that's amazing.

Whitney: And so, hearing you say that, it just felt like there was something in me that wanted to- almost the way you described it was I wanted to develop my left and my right side of my brain.

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Whitney: Like there was just this- I wanted that very badly.

Philip: That's amazing.

Whitney: So it's really interesting to hear you talk about that.

Philip: But you know, it's funny that that particular song got to you as well because that's one of the most perfect examples of a song doing what it's saying it's doing.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: It's teaching you a scale whilst being the most incredible piece of music. A- and scales are fundamentally boring, in fact, one... I mean, think about it-

Whitney: Not "Do-Re-Mi"?

Philip: It gives me goosebumps.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: And once you get goosebumps, magic. Unbelievable. It's- it's ... God, how incredible, what a great story. But, you know it's very important that you kind of as a kid have the agency of saying, "I chose to do this." What I didn't say that I actually was begging my mum from the age of two and a half to play and she said no.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And by the time- and, to me, it may have only been a few months but in my mind it was- it was a year.

Whitney: It was an eternity-

Philip: Oh yeah.

Whitney: Because at that point it was.

Philip: Well it- it was a third, it was half of my life.

Whitney: Exactly.

Philip: Equivalently, you know?

Whitney: Exactly.

Philip: Not anymore unfortunately, I'm way beyond that, but- but the point was, I was selling it, I was pitching to her that, I've got to do this, I mean, I also wanted to be a vet, but that's a lot harder to be honest with you, and maybe one day I will and I also wanted to be a Kindergarten teacher but-

Whitney: You could do that.

Philip: Well, being a musician is very similar if you've ever conducted orchestras it's honestly (laughs), same thing.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: It's herding cats basically.

Whitney: (laughs). So what- okay, so what orchestras have you conducted.

Philip: I've conducted- well this is hilarious, because this is full on imposter syndrome because I've- I've-

Whitney: Oh please, go ahead reveal it.

Philip: ... I've- I've conducted the London Symphony Orchestra-

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: ... and I've had two conducting lessons in my life, and I remember standing in front of them thinking, "Someone's going to know I really don't have a clue," so I just thought I'm going- there's big elephant in the room, I'm going to address it. And not- and I can almost say, "I'm actually cellist, this isn't what I'm really do- but I did write this music," and I got two little things that I had at up my sleeve.

This was actually in [preparation for the Beijing Olympics because I was recording the London Symphony Orchestra for the closing ceremony](#), and I disguised the piece of- because we were trying to keep everything secret, so I've written everything in Italian ... the title of this particular piece ... I- I, standing there in Air Studios, which is George Martin's studios, just thinking- I ... I mean, "This feels great" because I- I get very calm when I'm in a recording situation, especially in front of lots of other musicians it's- it's the time when everything comes together. I just said to them, "Ladies and Gentleman - I want you to know that, my right hand is going to conduct four, please ignore my left hand it's just going to be turning the pages and I might occasionally point at you, it really

doesn't mean anything." So, that's all they needed to know, and they- they all laughed out loud cause I think they're a lot ... used to people being quite pretentious and that was ... and that was fine.

We started recording this piece of music, and you can see them kind of looking slightly puzzled, and what I hadn't told them that that it was actually a very abstract arrangement of "Whole Lot of Love" by Led Zeppelin, and James, who was the person in the control room I was talking to the whole way through was actually Jimmy Page, so we got him out halfway through, and then by that point, that ... they completely won over...

Whitney: Wait, who's Jimmy Page?

Philip Sheppard: Oh, he's the- he's the guitarists in Led Zeppelin.

Whitney: Oh, so you have-

Philip Sheppard: They pl- they've got-

Whitney: The guy in the control room-

Philip Sheppard: Yeah, yeah and I've hidden him in there, and it was- it was those kind of reveal where I knew they'd go home and tell...well they were going to tell their kids, but their kids wouldn't have a clue who that was (laughs) you know, it was kind of, you know, like you.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: (laughs).

Whitney: Like me. I was in a hard rock band-

Philip: It's actually a really-

Whitney: ... what can I say?

Philip: It's actually a really good story (laughs).

Whitney: Well some people who are listening will really appreciate it.

Philip: You're gonna get mail (laughs).

Whitney: Yeah, I am, likely, "What is your problem? You are old enough to understand this cultural context." Okay? But I liked Stevie Wonder, what can I say?

Philip: Oh, oh he's God.

Whitney: Okay don't- okay. He is God.

Philip: He is the God.

Whitney: Let- let's come back to Stevie Wonder-

Philip: Side note-

Whitney: In just a second.

Philip: (laughs) exactly.

Whitney: Okay so, you basically- so, so you were just doing this-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: And then turning the page.

Philip: Turning pages, the left hand's doing nothing of any use whatsoever-

Whitney: Just doing this- okay.

Philip: Please don't look at it.

Whitney: But then halfway through Jimmy Page walks in.

Philip: Yeah, yeah-

Whitney: And they erupted.

Philip: That was kind of my trump card, and that point they- they- I'd won them over I think-

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: Mostly, yeah I could do no wrong and that was fine.

Whitney: Okay, so you just called out the imposter piece.

Philip: Yeah, and actually it's quite good to say ... a- and I do this actually when I do keynotes, when I do presentations, cause one of the things I do is- is improvised keynotes.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: Which is many people's idea of- they literally will have nightmares about that. But I walk out with a cello and people go, "Oh, okay, what's this then?" But

actually ... sometimes I'll go and do this for companies like Ernst & Young or Google who have a ... and my job will be to summarize everything that's been talked about during the day. Now the insurance policy for me is, I'm going to build a piece of music out of the main key salient points. If the piece of music is terrible, I can actually blame it on the content of the day being awful, so it's a win-win, basically I-

Whitney: You say that right?

Philip Sheppard: Yeah, and get away with it.

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative), uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: I- it's absolutely fine, and if, and if, if what I'm saying starts to make no sense at all and I'm doing ... and I'm playing ... when I'm talking then I can just sit down and play the cello and make nasty noises until everyone has felt-

Whitney: You're like oh, I'm bombing as well-

Philip: Yeah, exactly.

Whitney: So I'll just get out my-

Philip: Crickets.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: Yeah, just- I'll just make some noise now-

Whitney: You'll play something and then they'll all just-

Philip: Just slink off.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: Applause will come.

Whitney: Okay, I want to ask you one other question ... before we go back to Stevie Wonder.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: So, I want to get your opinion on things ... So where does passion come into all of this? Because I ... sometimes people say ... you hear this a lot ... "But I want to do something I'm passionate about."

Philip: Hmm.

Whitney: And, I- I- I have a contrary view on this a- or maybe it's not contrary, but it's a matter of like, how are you actually defining passion?

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: So, I'd love to get your thoughts on ... how those two intersect and what you think about it, and just riff a little bit.

Philip: That's a really good question because I think- people will use passion as an excuse for doing something crappily and as- through vanity.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And I think that's dangerous, that's the kind of Etsy school of business, as in-

Whitney: But we love Etsy, so let's not diss Etsy-

Philip: No, I love ... no I love Etsy.

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: But, there's a meritocracy in things being good that will survive, and sometimes when things aren't good they shouldn't.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: Um, now, one of the things I wanted to talk about, because I think it's important, which really cuts into this is ... I don't have a job, I really don't have a real job, and there's a security in the insecurity.

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: The fact that I don't have any form of regular employment whatsoever makes my life very secure. So I've had to- sometimes artificially generate, let's call it passion, for what I'm doing because if I don't believe in what I'm doing, nobody will. If I don't appear to love what I'm doing nobody's going to buy it, and- and I'm selling all the time-

Whitney: Is there an example?

Philip: Um, okay, well, it's all really about ideas that people didn't know they needed so, let's think of a really specific example. If I'm writing music for a mov-... if I'm pitching to write music for a movie I can go and say to the director, "Okay, I can translate your lead character's vocal patterns into the theme that will become his tune throughout the whole show," and they go, "Oh, yes." Now I- I don't

know if I can do that, but in selling it to him, him kind of going, "Oh yeah, I have goosebumps let's do that, that's a great idea." It then gives me the- the license to then to go and try and do that, I've no idea how I'm going to do that.

Whitney: But you had the idea, so you must be able to do it.

Philip: Yeah and- I must be able to have the idea, I'm a great believer that in- in both deadlines an idea in creating pressures where you have to learn how to do those kinds of things.

Whitney: Yeah, and I'm not sure that you actually ... I- I- I've been thinking a lot about this: I'm not sure we have ideas like that kind of persist, that we're not actually capable of doing, somehow somehow.

Philip: That's really interesting, I- I ... I think that all of my ... if I've had any achievements in my life they've all come from me being um, from being the imposter and actually having to learn how to do things that I cannot possibly do, but under the pressure of ... of glorious failure.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And, the moment ... I mean it's cliché, but the moment you embrace the potential for failure, you- you probably won't.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: And where- coming back to your question, where passion comes into it is- I- I'm a believer in, in a goosebump economy, that I believe if something is going to move you, and move somebody else then it's worth doing. And whether they- a- and believe me, I'm a great one for writing- I can write melancholic music till ... it's easy, I'm English, it's what we do, uh, which makes me very happy cause I can inflict my melancholy on you or someone else watching a movie that I've written music for and it's, you know, I'll never need therapy cause I'm basically imposing my misery on other people which makes me very happy. Um, I'm being sarcastic.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: (laughs) Kind of. But it means-

Whitney: Not really.

Philip: Not really, um, you know, it- particularly in working- working with moving pictures there's- there ... you've got the ability to surreptitiously, um, move- move somebody from the position they're in before, and that- really I think that's the same in business your- your job is to effect a change, and if what

you're doing won't effect a change, won't create a change, you shouldn't be doing it.

Whitney:

Agreed.

Philip:

So, I resisted the urge to join an orchestra because I knew that actually my involvement in orchestra ... and this isn't ego, this is just- this is just kind of of currency ... I knew that my involvement in orchestra would have no beneficial effect on the overall result. Whereas if I went and played with a rock band, I might be able to change the bassline of a particular t- tune, and I can point to certain ones where that's happened, where my rerouting that chord has maybe created a goosebump at that point, and then I'm always proud of that.

Whitney:

Hmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip:

That's kind of for m- and ... that is ego, but I think it's good ego, inasmuch as- I know I'm better placed in that position-

Whitney:

Right, right.

Philip:

... as being the person that can maybe-

Whitney:

You're serving the greater good.

Philip:

Yeah, and also I can be the- and it's part of being British, it's sort of this kind of, that's what we're talking about before, I can say to the person who's surrounded by yes men, actually we can do something much better- you can do something much better than this.

Whitney:

So what was the movie where you said, "We're gonna take the person's vocal patterns-

Philip:

Mmm.

Whitney:

... and duplicate that into their theme?"

Philip:

So I did that in um, it was in a series for PBS called [God in America](#) where we were having to make ... One of the films was about Lincoln,

Whitney:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip:

And ... it was Chris Sarandon playing him, who's amazing, and I realized of course he was the prince in *Princess Bride* and I start- I got to know him after we made the film, he was amazing- he has beautiful vocal delivery, and it was- it was one of those diary entries that- that Lincoln had written around the time of the ... towards the end of the ... of the abolition of slavery, and everything I

wrote for this scene was so clichéd because it was going to be kind of, you know, liberal and heart wringing-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... you know, just worthy. In the end I got sent the- the recording of Chris' voice, and it was so beautiful, the cadence and the pitch, that I just started playing it back on the cello, and it- and it worked.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: So then, recorded an orchestra around that, and it meant that there was sort of ... I wasn't playing at the same time as him saying it, but there was a ... an imprint of his voice distinctively there, and it was the same pitches as well. I've done this recently, actually with a friend of mine who's an actor called Stephen Tobolowsky, who's the most amazing- he's got the most amazing voice- it's actually lovely [a podcast where he just tells stories weekly](#) it's up to now he does it 90 minutes of these actually scripted stories that he tells- and he was actually, he was in, um, *Groundhog Day* he's-

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: ... he's the guy who gets punched in *Groundhog Day*, and he's also in *Glee* and stuff ... he's this cha- ... you, you know, you'd know him, he's one of those character actors-

Whitney: That we all know.

Philip: Yeah, but he's got this lovely voice and I won't do it with an American accent - where it sort of goes sort of like this: and it will cadence down. Wh- it's musical (sings), now if I copy that, I sound very musical. And it's funny, 'cause I started writing music by practicing along actually with some of his- with his tapes, and I think I completing freaked him out cause I went and ... turned it into a piece of music and sent it to him. Um, and it is funny when someone holds a mirror up to what- what are actually your ... vocal habits, particularly for an actor, it'll either freak them out or they'll be flattered and hopefully it was ... a mixture of the two I think- but, but I do that a lot and that- for me that's a disruption technique, that's saying, okay, uh, um, here, here's- here's the problem I have, I- I've written 60 film scores, I'm not a composer. As in I haven't trained to be a composer, and I've only been writing for the last ... ten years I suppose-

Whitney: But that's rubbish, as you would say.

Philip: Isn't it? Nice. Good use, that hurt.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: Yeah (laughs), it is rubbish isn't it? I know. Um, no but, yeah I'm being disingenuous but, um ... I sometimes have to write an unfeasibly huge amount of music in a short time, I can give you an example: I got delivered a film called [Love, Marilyn](#) which was a- a, a beautiful documentary about Marilyn Monroe by Liz Garbus who's a brilliant film maker, she won the Oscar for her documentary about Nina Simone.

Two weeks before the movie's due to debut at the Toronto Film Festival I get a phone call saying, "Um, we kind of need you to write some music." "Oh, uh, okay." "And you've got two weeks." "Alright, two weeks to write it?" "No, two weeks to write it, record it, mix it, and print it onto the film." 80 minutes of music. Do you know what? That's the easiest job in the world because ... two reasons: under that kind of pressure, I will make fast choices and I will make binary choices, um, and also the people I am sending the music to will be purely binary, it will be yes or an absolute no. Where it's difficult is when it's a 70% yes, and my advice to anybody- I think actually in business or in music is, if something's 70% right you should start again, you should just throw it away.

Whitney: If it's only 70%?

Philip Sheppard: Yeah, because that will never- you can never pull that out.

Whitney: You're never gonna love it.

Philip Sheppard: No, the DNA of it- well and also the DNA of it is fundamentally wrong.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip Sheppard: Whereas actually, I mean, the piece of the music that paid my mortgage for years was something I wrote in six minutes flat, and really didn't think about recording-

Whitney: What was it?

Philip Sheppard: It was just a little piano piece called um, what was it called? [Crystallised Beauty](#), and it ended up getting used everywhere, and then copied and- you know people say, "Oh gosh, aren't you annoyed that there are sound-alikes of it." I think it's the greatest thing in the world, I- I did recently wrote ... [some music of mine was used for a Star Wars trailer](#), and then Tina Fey and Amy Poehler did a parody of it when they were promoting their film *Sisters* and at that point I thought, my work here is done. I'm so happy, they've actually ripped off my music and done a- a parody of it ... I'm...

Whitney: You've arrived.

Philip Sheppard: Drop the microphone-

Whitney: You've arrived.

Philip: I'm very happy at that point, yeah.

Whitney: Do you have any composers that you just love?

Philip: Yes, so Monteverdi, who was probably the most radical innovator-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... Um, of the last five hundred years, so Claudio Monteverdi was part of a group of composers and artists, um, kind of around the Medicean times so, were talking 1600s, and in 1607 he- he wrote what was really one of the world's first operas which was [L'Orfeo](#), or the Orpheus myth and there are probably 50 or 60 operas since, about- about Orpheus.

But, because there wasn't a certain way of doing music, he looked at St. Marks Venice and rather than say, "Oh, we'll just put an orchestra there and some singers there," he thought, right ... He Walt Disney'd it he- he basically thought- right, multi-multimedia so, lighting, sets, antiphonal things- they had choirs at the back of the- of the- you know they did surround sound performance, this is in 1607.

Whitney: And people hadn't done this before?

Philip: No, no they've not done anything. I mean singing to an orchestra, at that point was, you know in a secular- to do a secular piece in a religious building? And do it in 5.1 ... not 5.1, about 28.1 sound. I mean it's like ... that's one of ... I love him so much. To me, he's in the same vein as someone like, I don't know, Paul McCartney, who constantly questions what he does, he's never ... he never rests. Y-you mentioned Stevie Wonder ... my God, I mean, people who basically, exude music, and are, are, are restless. I love, I love-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... musicians, composers, who- who are restless.

Whitney: So what music of Stevie Wonder's do you especially like?

Philip: Um, I think [Songs in the Key of Life](#) is one of the greatest things ever written, I went and heard- heard him sing that entire thing live in, in London, uh, in a summer concert, and what I loved about him is, he- he ... I- it was a four hour performance, and it ... I just wanted it to last another four hours, and I-

Whitney: You heard him do the entire-

Philip: The entire thing

Whitney: ... thing.

Philip: And I was in the front. I pushed my way to the front, I was ... I'm- I'm ... I'm his biggest fan. I'm, I'm, calm-

Whitney: No, I'm his biggest fan.

Philip: No, no, no. No.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: No, no. And he's on my list, he's on my new bucket list of- of people I'm desperate to work with. And it was...

Whitney: So how are you going to make that happen?

Philip: Oh, oh, make it happen? Uh, my ... I did my entire last bucket list by telling people everything on it.

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: And, people have a way ... and I- I- I've done a talk about it actually, and- and it was ridiculous things like, y'know, get music played in space ... I don't know, work on *Star Wars* ... things that-

Whitney: And you've done those?

Philip: Oh, I've done every single one of them. And- and I-

Whitney: So now Stevie Wonder's on your bucket list?

Philip: Stevie Wonder is absolutely on- on my bucket ... the- the actually, the ... I finished my first bucket list and it was a very ambitious bucket list-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... it was things that would never happen ...

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... I wanted to write music for Cirque de Soleil, I end up getting cast in one of their shows! (laughs). It was a- it was-

Whitney: Can you put your leg over your-

Philip: No!

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: No, I was the fattest person on stage, it was fantastic, but I had to actually, like everyone does, I had to actually train in Las Vegas with the entire company, and I learned so much from that, the idea of the tapis rouge, which is-

Whitney: So you did the music for-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... Cirque de Soleil-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... and you were cast in it?

Philip: I was cast in it as- as a decomposer. (laughs). So it's just kind of ... (laughs).

Whitney: Okay, so ... (laughs).

Philip: Yeah, sorry, that was a very tangential thing ... coming back to Stevie Wonder, though.

Whitney: (laughing) Yes.

Philip: He did the best thing ... he's sitting there playing the grand piano on the Hyde Park stage ... it's a bit like playing in Central Park coming back to passion, he will do that, whether he earns money from it or not.

Whitney: Right.

Philip: Will I write music if someone doesn't pay me? Hell yes, I will. Will I run a business that's going to change the world if I don't make money from it, hell yes I will. Because if I care about it, and if it gives my pleasure doing it, then, then that's ... I think defini- definition of passion is, would you do it if you had no vested interest, economically, in it-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... would you still do it?

Whitney: And I think often times when people talk about passion, it's actually a synonym for, they have a crush on something.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: "I've got a crush on that right now."

Philip: That's true, and that doesn't last.

Whitney: "I want them to be my boyfriend."

Philip: That's-

Whitney: "I want them to be my girlfriend."

Philip: That's amazing.

Whitney: And it not ... but passion, is really what- what w- we're talking about.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: Where you would do it no matter what, you must do it, and you will persist, and you will persist, and you will persist.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: That to me is passion.

Philip: Would I write music if nobody listens? Well, yeah.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: Cause if I start worrying about how people'll listen to it, I'll write ... I'll, I'd just be vanilla, it'll-

Whitney: Right.

Philip: ... you know, it'll be bland, and it-

Whitney: So, let- let's talk about this c-composition.

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: So, how did you take the step from going ... going from being a- a player to a composer? How would you say that musical innovation is like other kinds of innovation?

Philip: Gosh, those are two big questions. Okay, so, how I went from being a- a, yeah, a performer to being a composer was, it was a frustration with ... do you know that music's the only art form you can study where you don't have to create anything at all apart from replicating music by dead white people? So I studied music academically at school for my O levels, as they were then, and A levels, and we ... there was no compositional element whatsoever.

Whitney: Right.

Philip: Can you imagine studying theater or dance, and actually just replicating other people's work. It just wouldn't happen. Or, or art. Or ...

Whitney: Right.

Philip: There's always improvisation built in. Improvisation's a dirty word, and actually, I-

Whitney: What? No, it's a beautiful word, what are you talking about?

Philip: In this country- in this country ... I love it ... but in this country improvisation for a long time is associated with jazz, and jazz has more rules than classical music.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And, you know, inasmuch as it implies ... there's a right way of doing it-

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: ... and a wrong way.

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: So I was actually working with a very famous jazz pianist when I was about ... 17-

Whitney: Who?

Philip: Uh, he's called Keith Tippett-

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: ... in this country he's kinda ... he was in King Crimson, and ... amazing guy. And, I, I was playing in a night club weekly, where, I'd realized that actually it's more fun to turn up and just, not know what I was gonna play. And I did some concerts with Keith, and he said to me, "Y- You should ... make- make things up." and he said, "Don't- don't ... " and he's from the West Country, so, he, so he would talk ... he talks like this, and he's like, "You know, don't call it improvisation, i- it's spontaneous composition." I said, "Why- why'd you call it that?" He said, "Because then you can invoice for it."

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: (laughing) I'm like, "Oh, okay, that's interesting". But actually his point was true. If you say, "I'm composing, on the fly." What you're actually doing is you're self-editing things that you might then sit down and write later. Now, every single

classical composer improvised, because the ink was wet on the page at some point, and actually every composer was a performer, often about 100 years ago, and every performer was a composer. And there was this big schism, I think happened around the time of the Great War ... and the Second World War ... where-

Whitney: And the Great War, for American listeners, is World War I.

Philip: Yes, that's what I was calling it that, rather than World War I, absolutely.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And, (laughs), not the War of Independence.

But what happened was there was this weird schism where somehow, and I think it was because of people being ripped away from their environment and then suddenly cast into different roles, music somehow separated off ... and it was to do also with recording-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... that once you started recording music, and then ... we can blame Edison for this ... and then marketing it, the composer suddenly became a static entity, rather than ... someone like Liszt would have had the tour around playing his music because he was the broadcast system for it, and no one else could play it, so, therefore, he was ... And it's weird that now- now the recording industry's completely broken, it really is screwed, because of greed and because technology, and actually because people have realized, "Um, we should not necessarily have to pay 2000% of the cost of what a CD actually costs to produce." For instance. I ... anyway, side note. But there's come a point when actually live performance is the thing where musicians can economically be very successful.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Philip: Which means, as a beautiful result of that, everything in the Billboard Top 40 is from people who can actually play and sing.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: Now when I was in my 20s, nobody could play and sing. And I was working with a lot of them, I knew, uh, they couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, as we'd say, because it didn't matter, it was all being recorded and tweaked and there's other people coming in and doing the voices, I won't say who, you know them.

Um, whereas now that's completely changed. And you were asking me also about- about the business implication of- of this as well, um, like how does that, you know, what's the parallel?

Whitney: So backing up a little bit-

Philip: Hmm.

Whitney: ... I mean I do think it's really interesting hearing you talk about music and, and, um, I think I may have told you this, but I studied music in college.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: And, um, I think that, to your point, where, all the music I was doing my entire life was I got put into this system where I was playing classical music,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... and not learning how to improvise-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... because no one suggested it, or taught it, or expected it.

Philip: Yes.

Whitney: And only discovered jazz-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: And I know you say there are more rules, but at least then you're improvising.

Philip: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, for sure.

Whitney: In college, which at that point the train at some level had kind of left the station-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... in terms of what I was going to do.

Philip: Oh, that's interesting.

Whitney: And so I- I do ... I guess the question I have for you ... and if we're kind of building on that is, so, if you think about innovation, it's taking pieces and looking at them in new ways,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... um, coming up with, maybe, in disruptive innovation, a silly little thing-

Philip: Yes.

Whitney: ... that can take over the world,-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... um, what do you ... w- when you're thinking about innovating around a piece of music ...

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: What do you do? What is that process for you look like?

Philip: It's really close to what you're saying actually, and it's funny enough I was writing about it this morning for a lecture I'm doing next week, um, about (laughing) artificial intelligence, weirdly enough, but, it's about taking a nugget, and it could be something by someone else, or it could be a theme that is already in the back of your mind or that someone else would be familiar with. And it's taking that and thinking, "Well, that's- that's a little ... that's a pack of goosebumps, right there. How can I as an artist frame that, present it, and light it in such a beautiful way that you, the listener, are going to be moved by it? H- and- and ideally? How can I render myself invisible in that process but get the most from it myself?"

Whitney: Mmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: You know, I- I will sit and write music till ... like I did last night ... four in the morning, because I love doing it so much, and it's the best drug in the world.

Whitney: It's the creative process.

Philip: Yeah, it's ...

Whitney: So, what's a piece of music that you recently listened to, or heard,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... that you thought, "Wow, that's good, I ... " and- and it inspired you, in terms of something else that you're working on.

Philip: Wow, that's a really hard question, and this is gonna sound terrible.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: I don't listen to much music.

Whitney: So where do you get your inspiration from?

Philip: Reading. Um, I go, I- I do a lot of work in Silicon Valley, uh, a lot of my friends are, I'd suppose, creative characters within Silicon Valley companies,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... so they're people I hang out with and talk to, because they, they do with ideas what I do ... try and do ... with, with, with music. Uh, And- and a lot of my friends do crazy jobs, I- I, I, well, this isn't a plug but I wrote an album about ... yeah, every- every piece of music I tend to write it about a friend who lives far more on the edge than I do.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And by living on the edge I mean that they will take an idea to it's very limit. Sometimes to a point when it's not appropriate for society at that point, or where it's physically unsafe.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: Um, I'm very lucky in this ... the work I've done, I've got, I've got a number of friends who are astronauts, or who are magicians, or who are technologists. And they're all doing things that, certainly for two thirds of their careers people around them said, "You must not do that."

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: That's really where I get my inspiration from ... if I told you what was on my desk, as in, I've got as ... I have a shelf next to my desk which is my-

Whitney: So tell us what's on your desk.

Philip: Okay. It is a [graphic novel by Chris Ware](#).

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: It is a book about [Athanasius Kirchner](#), who is ... I think was the greatest inventor in history. He was basically da Vinci, above da Vinci. And not as well known. He invented the cat piano, he invented kind of the internet meme, he ... I mean so many things, I'm being...that's true, he ... so many ... so many of his thinking ... he was a proper Renaissance man, he was a musician, an inventor, a technologist ... kind of, one of those people who the state both loved and were terrified of.

I've also got a [book by Erica Dhawan](#), who's a friend of mine, about-

Whitney: Oh, I know-

Philip: ... big ideas, yeah.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: I love that book-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... it's so good. Uh, and then I've also got ... there's so many things on there, but that ... it's a mixture of- of ... oh, the [Bletchley Park, um, uh, uh, quiz book](#). So, I love, I love doing, sort of, puzzle things just before I start writing, I generally will do something that'll make my brain hurt. I've got a great one for you. Uh, and this I go into businesses and do, and I can prove to any CEO, that they are not as smart as they think they are. And it's really simple, we're gonna do this now.

Whitney: Okay. Let's do it.

Philip: I know you're quick, but

Whitney: Let's do it.

Philip: And you-

Whitney: Let's do it.

Philip: I want you to do this in one of your talks, okay.

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: We're gonna count to three. I'm really good at this, okay, I'm gonna say one, you're gonna say ...

Whitney: Two.

Philip: And I'm gonna say three. You're gonna say one ...

Whitney: One.

Philip: Two.

Whitney: Three.

Philip: Right, let's do it. One.

Whitney: Two.

Philip: Three.

Whitney: One.

Philip: Two.

Whitney: Three.

Philip: Now, you're really worried about what I'm saying, yeah? You're- you're, monitoring what I'm saying,-

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: ... so as a manager, you might ... you're really ... I'm- I'm okay. I can, I can do this, I can count, let's do it ... don't worry about me, worry about you.

Whitney: (laughing).

Philip: Okay? One.

Whitney: Two.

Philip: Three.

Whitney: One.

Philip: Two.

Whitney: Three.

Philip: Fluent, lovely. That was much better.

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: Okay, now in England, we've actually banned the number two.

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: It's part of Brexit,-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... it's very complicated.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: Are you able to snap your fingers?

Whitney: (laughing), I'm able to snap my fingers.

Philip: Okay, some people can't. So, instead of saying two in the UK, we- we, we snap, or we clap, okay?

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: So we're gonna do it again but you're not allowed to say two-

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: ... you have to just like...Okay, so, one.

Philip: Okay, we're clapping, that's fine.

Whitney: Oh, oh, I'm sorry.

Philip: No, no, let's clap, that's good, that's good. Okay, ready? One.

Clap, let's do the clap, ready? One.

Three.

Whitney: One.

Three.

Philip: One.

Three.

Whitney: One.

Philip: W- What's wrong, you've forgotten one? What's going on?

Whitney: (laughs).

Philip: Do you know what's going on?

Whitney: No, tell me what's going on.

Philip: So, you're able to clap, you're not breathing, you're sitting there like this, and you've forgotten the number three!

Whitney: (laughing).

Philip: What's going on, right? It's crazy. And it's actually the um, motor- motor action and the simplest thing of counting to three, because we're doing two ... both at the same time, and you're, even now, you're worrying about what I'm doing, you're managing me.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: It's weird, it's ... and ... as, once you get above the age of ten, this becomes impossible.

Whitney: Interesting.

Philip: And then, to- to, to change-

Whitney: But if we were younger than ten we would be able to do it?

Philip: Oh, we'd do it in the first time. First time.

Whitney: Interesting.

Philip: It's because we overthink. And often, what we're doing is we're thinking, "what are you ..." it's a bit like being in a play with someone,-

Whitney: I was thinking

Philip: ... and you're feeding their line.

Whitney: I was like, "You're gonna trick me."

Philip: Yeah, yeah.

Whitney: "How are you gonna trick me?"

Philip: I'm not ... why would I trick you? We're just playing a game.

Whitney: I don't know.

Philip: We're just playing a game.

Whitney: Isn't that interesting.

Philip: But you do that, you do that with a CEO, and it freaks them out.

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: Because, they should- they're so used to actually feeling ... "I'm so worrying about you clapping, that I've forgotten what number I was on." There are only two numbers to remember, isn't that ridiculous?

Whitney: Yeah, that's fascinating.

Philip: Now that's two sides of the brain.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And actually the answer to it, is a computer technician will look for the pattern, and the pattern is just one, three. One, three. And then you just let them intersect and then suddenly it's fluent, that's their musical. And the equivalent in music is if I'm playing first violin in a string quartet and you're the second violin,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... I'm sitting and I'm looking at what you're doing, and I'm, I'm sucking at what I'm doing.

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: Right?

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: And it's, it's a ... and you can also, I mean it's quite fun doing this in a, in a, in a group, because actually the people who manage, generally are terrible at this.

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: And then you start changing languages, "Okay, you're Japanese, so it's ichi, san, is what you're gonna say."

Whitney: Okay.

Philip: But I'm Ger- I'm only gonna speak German-

Whitney: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip: ... and it starts to get quite complex very quickly.

Whitney: Wow.

Philip: But I do a lot of these exercises with companies, where they are actually, they appear to be games but there's a really serious point behind them.

Whitney: Fascinating.

Philip: That simple processes,-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... are, you know, we're running sophist- ... I mean, I'm running, I run a business,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... you, you've, we both run businesses. Way more complicated than that.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And yet, something we can do when we're six, we can't do it. Because we think about it, we don't have that ability to float, now, as a musician, the one thing I can teach someone in a company, is how to trust systems. If I'm playing the cello, and improvising, and also working an audience, I've probably got 11 processes going at the same time.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: All of those I need to render them to appear to be simple and beautiful, to you. Inside, my ... terrified turbulence. I might be thinking, "I don't know what I'm doing!" But, actually my hands know what they're doing, I'm sort of picturing where it's about to go, I know that the person sitting in the sixth row at the back is slightly disengaged, so I'm playing to them, I'm trying to get to the point where my in- my instrument's not failing, I'm playing a tune, hopefully the foot pedals I'm using are, are functioning right, and I know I gotta finish in 12 seconds because there's a countdown clock in front of me. All of that comes from practice, from rehearsing, from self-training.

And I'm always looking ... now I'm running a business as well ... I'm running two businesses ... I'm always looking for, "Okay, I can do that onstage, and I have no problem with it. Why, why, do I have this problem with going into existing business systems and accepting them?" When actually, they don't necessarily teach you to delegate,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... to trust, and to float.

Whitney: Right.

Philip: That's the critical thing.

Whitney: Yeah. Interesting.

Philip: And I, I love going into businesses and doing that.

Whitney: Interesting.

Philip: Cause I can-

Whitney: Interesting.

Philip: ... I can do it in an English accent and get out.

Whitney: Yeah, exactly.

Philip: (laughs).

Whitney: Um, okay, so ... so on the ... I wanted to circle back to this composition question,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... because you said you've got these, these things on your desk.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: So, if I think about the process for me with writing,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... I'll have lots of different ideas, things I'm reading, disparate disciplines,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... et cetera, and then ... But I have some kernel of an idea, like around personal disruption, and then I'm trying to make sense of it.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: But I use all these different influences to do that.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: So I guess my question is, I mean, that, that's always the written word, so for you musically, what you're saying is that, you're not at this point getting inspiration from other musicians per se.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: It's other just, ideas, out in the ether,-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... that are informing-

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: ... the music that you're creating.

Philip: There's two reasons why, I mean, I ... saying I don't listen to music ... I love music so much.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: I'm terrified of listening to it and then writing someone else's stuff.

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: And, I mentioned Paul McCartney before, but, famously, he, for years ... uh, went around playing people "Yesterday" ... it was called "Scrambled Eggs" when he first wrote it ... so, who's this by? And in the end, George Martin sorta said to him, "Paul, it's by you." He said, "No but i- it came to me fully formed, it must be someone else's song." I've done the opposite of that. I've stood, in a big recording studio, with an orchestra, conducting the music for a movie that I'd just written, to take it to Sundance, we're all ready to go, you know,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... last minute, putting the sound on. And I'm standing there conducting it thinking, "This sounds alright, I mean, I know I wrote it last night, it sounds alright, it sounds okay." My lead cellist looks at me with the eyebrow raised. "What's wrong?" She said, "Nothing, nothing's wrong, nothing." And it got ... I could see her look more and more wide-eyed, like, "Really?" And I realized, cotton cold, flash up and down... I'd written the entire theme for Close Encounters of the Third Kind, note for note, harmony ... identical. No wonder it sounded good, it was by John Williams!

So, I, "Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen." Move on. Went home. That night, I had to say to the director ... I couldn't tell him the truth ... I said, "Y'know, that piece, it really wasn't giving me goosebumps."

"No, it worked really well!"

I said, "N-no, no. No, no, no, I've multi tracked you something else, I'm sending it now, it'll be much better." I was gonna get sued by one of my heroes. (laughs). But there're only 12 notes.

Whitney: It was par- ... yeah.

Philip: You know?

Whitney: That's fascinating.

Philip: So, there's a reason for that, and, the problem is, if I hear music, I will fall in love with it.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And then I will try and, however consciously or not, I will try and write it.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: So, what I also didn't say is actually my ... so, th- the shelf is full of books, on my desk ... It's covered in Post-it Notes, it's call- ... covered in what Americans call bumwad, I think, so, friends of mine who are architects ... you know, it's, it's like tracing paper-

Whitney: Oh, yeah.

Philip: ... that I pull across the entire desk,-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... and I just, I will splurge ideas down every day, and I'll clean my, clean my desk every morning I- I will, have this thing I have to kind of, polish the desk, it's a bit like making your bed in the morning, it's like a thing that, of a discipline. Pull this across, I will ... and I journal frantically ... I will write, you know, [bullet point journal](#), I've got a very strong routine every morning, get up, habit stack, basically,-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... you know,-

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: ... with stuff. And that for me works, I ... Because I don't have a real job, I have to-

Whitney: But you've got notes when, what happens when you get fragments of notes in your head.

Philip: Um ...

Whitney: How do you record them?

Philip: I will then chase where it's going, it's- it's this Paul Klee idea of, you, "take a line for a walk".

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: Sometimes if I have one note,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... "Oh, I know where that's gonna go, I can feel where that's gonna go." And then it's also having the courage to, to use rests as well.

Whitney: Hmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And, I, I can't turn 'round to a client and say, "I'm sorry, I can't think of a tune."

Whitney: Yeah.

Philip: I just can't do that.

Whitney: Right.

Philip: You know. Um ...

Whitney: So you come up with something.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: But you, but ... okay, so it's interesting, you get a note,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... and then you chase it down.

Philip: Yeah. I chase it down until it, until it, concludes and it rests.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: So I'm doing a, I'm doing a talk next week, about Marvin Minsky, who was a friend of mine, who invented artificial intelligence.

I first met Marvin probably about ten years ago, and ... full imposter syndrome. You know when people say, "Can you imagine the perfect dinner party what it would look like?" I've had it.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: I mean, I was, I was-

Whitney: With him?

Philip: ... the person who shouldn't've been there. It was him, and some astronauts, and a guy who invents things for Penn and Teller, you know, a wine grower ... Royal Family member who I can't mention ... I mean it was just, that, "This is crazy, what am I doing here?" Marvin was so lovely, and I knew about him from the fact that Stanley Kubrick had- had, had, you know, named a character after him, and then of course, started to read a lot more about his theorizing.

And, um, he was a great musician, I became friends with him, he's- he's a lovely, lovely man, and I'm still very close to the family. And, Margaret, his daughter, last year, gave me his ... she- she, she sent me a load of recordings that he had made ... he was a very good composer ... where he'd done all reel-to-reel tape, and he would slow the tapes down and play things then slowly speed them up and then cut them with razor blades and join them together. And it was just the most gorgeous little piano piece, and ... it was like ... one of them particularly stood out, and it was, it was like Bach.

And now, when you get given something that is actually someone else's musical ... gestures, they're these little goosebump packets, and they are ... his have got this lovely ... interrogative nature where they... th- ... in ph- ... purely phrasing terms they sound like they're asking questions. (singing) and (singing) oh, there's the answer. Very scientific, very much, here's a question ... I'm not sure about my question ... here's another question ... here might be a solution. And it's all in the music.

And, long story short, I- I took one of these recordings and I ... I just ... it kept getting to me, I couldn't work out why I loved it so much, and at the same time I was [working on a PlayStation game](#), um, which is coming out soon, about artificial intelligence, weirdly enough, and ... it's a bit of a secret, but um, I then took Marvin's piano recording, and took it into Abbey Road, recorded it with my orchestra framing his playing, and we've buried it in this game as an unlockable treat. As an Easter egg. So, rather than leveling up and winning a gun, you- you unlock (laughing) Marvin Minsky which seemed appropriate.

But to me, the idea of that then gives me goosebumps,-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... cause like, well, I heard it, I got goosebumps, so then wrote something around it, and then, knowing that it's going to get in front of a 13 year old at some point who's going to go, "Who's Marvin Minsky?" That's then, my job fully

done. And you remove yourself from the equation, but my job is to transfer, what I felt, and put it into the hands of someone who didn't know-

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: ... and wants to hear it.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mmm. That's fantastic. So, um, as we start to wrap up,-

Philip: Mmm.

Whitney: ... is there any music, that you brought with you that you'd like to play?

Philip: I think I'd really like to play the Marvin Minsky piece, actually.

Whitney: Let's do it.

Philip: So, this is a little piano piece, recorded by Marvin Minsky, and, it's never been broadcast before, and what you're hearing is the original tape recording, and then, with a full sized symphony orchestra framing it. And we're using the Beatles' microphones, we're in Abbey Road Studio One, where Star Wars was recorded, and this is the end of 18 hours recording, and I just stuck this in front of the orchestra and said, "Can we do this? This is for a friend of mine." And ... they put ... my- my orchestra put everything into it, and I think you can, you can hear it, and it's that lovely point when you can hear ... one musician, one thinker, talking to other people. And for me this is one of the happiest things I've ever been involved in, it was an honor to, to, t- to have the chance to do it.

"The Minsky Tapes" by Philip Sheppard

Whitney: Mmm. Mmm. Thank you. It's beautiful. Just a couple more questions. What else is on your bucket list? You said you've made a new one.

Philip: I want to work with JJ Abrams.

Whitney: I though you already did?

Philip: Uh, yeah, well he's used my music for a [Star Wars trailer](#), but I actually want to sit in a room with him and, and you know,-

Whitney: Work with him.

Philip: ... riff. Work with him, yeah. I want to, I want to work with Stevie Wonder, um, there's ways of doing that. Uh ... trouble is, I, my first bucket list I did everything on it, which is terrible. I mean, it was great-

Whitney: And you're still young. You've got to come up with other things.

Philip: Oh, thank you I'm much older, much older than I look.

Um ... I- I will there- there's, there's lots of things I really ... I want to play at Coachella, I- I nearly had the chance this, this year, but ... you know a band that I play with were, were playing there but that- that didn't quite happen this time. Um, I want to um ... I want to completely disrupt the recording industry, and I think I've got a way of doing that.

Whitney: Is there anything else that you would like to share, as we wrap up? Where can people find you? Um, I think ... they're probably going to be equally entranced or in your thrall as I am, so I'm excited for people to be able to know how to find you.

Philip: Well, I've got a website, um, which is philipsheppard.com, the Philip is one-... with one L, and Sheppard is S-H-E- double P- -A-R-D, and there's lots of stuff on there, um, I- I have a lot of, kind of correspondence with, with people, and I tend to like, if people like music I tend to send it to them for free, to be honest with you, I- I, it's one of the things if people like what they hear, then ... yeah. There's, there's, there's [quite a lot on, on there](http://philipsheppard.com).

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And, um, and for me I'm, I'm interested in kind of moving to the next stages of seeing how ... music and business really intersect, and how, I mean, I'm- I'm fascinated by the business world, in- inasmuch as I see it as a creative industry.

Whitney: Hmm.

Philip: And, I think entrepreneurship is the same whether it's in music, or whether it's in a start-up, it's really the same kind of ...

Whitney: So that, that brings up an interesting point, and then we really will wrap.

Philip: Yeah.

Whitney: You- you've mentioned some musicians that you'd like to collaborate with, but you didn't mention any business people that you'd like to collaborate-

Philip: Oh, oh, absolutely. W- ... it's cause I'm (laughs) it's cause I'm already-

Whitney: Cause you already are.

Philip: ... collaborating. Yeah.

Um, I- I, I don't have any aspirations to be a, a ... a wealthy business person, but I do have great aspirations to ... maybe make the business of music fair? And, by which I mean ... that ... people who're- who, who listen to music should be able to find it easily, make their own, but also the people who create music should be directly rewarded by people who are passionate about hearing what they do.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And I think there is a case for removing a lot of the industry that built up through the '80s and '90s ... that was basically, built for profit.

Whitney: Mmm.

Philip: And I'm a great believer in, you know, you should always make profit ... but it shouldn't be 95% ... it's unethical.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: And really what's happened with ... kinda farm to table movement, for instance, can be done with music. And it's started to happen. And that's really great to see. Uh, but there's a lot, lot more work to be done, and it's-

Whitney: And you wanna be part of that?

Philip: Well, I- not for any ego reason it's just I think I've got ... I think I've got the ... I've think I've got the head to do that, in some ways.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: Or to certainly maybe make people think about it. And also ... musicians that I care about, I want to be able to one day help them ... you know, sponsor them.

Whitney: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip: I want, I want, you know, I'm, I'm more interested in ... I'm more interested in other people's music than I am in my own. Because, selfishly, I want goosebumps from what other people do. You know? I- I, I'm the great believer in, in sharing it ... I've been very lucky, and as much as, yes I work very hard ... but I've ... pe- people have been very kind to me, particularly within the technology industries, and have put me in the right places, and really my job now is to pass that on. I think.

Whitney: Hmm. Well, Philip Sheppard, thank you so much for your time.

Philip: Thank you.

Why? Is the sound so bad? Well, before I left for London to speak, I thought, “I need to make sure everything is in order with my recording equipment.” Reluctantly, I checked the batteries. They were fine, so instead of doing a full check, I thought, “The batteries are fine, everything else I’m sure is fine.” I didn’t listen to that little nudge. I ignored it.

So, I get to London. I pull out the equipment to record the podcast with Philip Sheppard an award-winning MUSIC producer... and not only am I missing a microphone. But once we start to record, the memory card fills up. Quickly. Which I can’t back up because I don’t have my computer. Hence the phone and the poor sound quality. Which we will come back to in the tip.

For now, here’s what I learned from Philip.

Creativity. Don’t get mired down. It’s not always glorious. Sometimes you just gotta get it done. Produce a finished product. We often think of creative people lounging around all day until they get inspired to create brilliance, but more often, it probably looks like making the decisions you need to make to completely score a movie in two weeks.

Philip has a bucket list. He says what he wants and then it happens. He now has to make a new bucket list. So I’m gonna conjure some of Philip’s magic. On my bucket list--[Build an A Team](#), a Wall Street Journal bestseller. Phillip – I’m looking at you!

Interesting that he doesn’t like to listen to other composers. It’s good to read or study the work of people in our field, at least to a point. But as we learned from Philip it’s a risk.

Finally, “I’m a believer in, in a goosebump economy. If something is going to move you, and move somebody else then it’s worth doing.” Ooh. I love that.

Speaking of goosebumps, our outro today will be a snippet from [one of Philip’s latest albums](#). It’s titled “[Chosen Road](#).” We’ll also include a link in the show notes.

Now for the practical tip – you saw it coming a mile away. Here it is: If you have an idea of something in your head that you need to do, it’s pestering you, and you don’t want to be bothered. Well, then be bothered. It will save you a lot of grief and a lot of embarrassment. You won’t have to come on the podcast and tell them how silly and foolish you were. For just a brief moment at least.

Thank you to MarilynJVT leaving our review of the week on iTunes. She said -

Love the theme of this podcast, as I also believe that disruption is crucial to moving forward. Just went to a Tom Peters event this weekend; your recent chat with him was priceless.

Thank you so much, MarilynJVT! Send us an email at wj@whitneyjohnson.com, and to say thank you, we’ll send you a copy of my latest book *Build an A Team*.

For those of you that would like to try before you buy, you can download the first chapter at whitneyjohnson.com/ateam.

Thank you again to all of you for listening, for Philip Sheppard for being our guest, to sound engineer Whitney Jobe, manager / editor Macy Robison, content contributors Emilie Davis and Libby Newman, and art director Brandon Jameson.

I'm Whitney Johnson
And this is Disrupt Yourself.