

**BBC Radio Sheffield Interview with Ciaran Alexander Stewart and Emily Howlett on Monday 17 July.**

**PAULETTE** Good morning to you. So the Crucible Studio Theatre is currently hosting a production which is called Tribes. Billy, the main character, is deaf as is Ciaran Alexander the actor who plays him. I've been talking to him as well as his co-star Emily Stewart. She's also deaf. They join me in the studio along with their sign language translator David Hutchinson, and I started my chat with them by asking Ciaran about Tribes. What's it all about?

**CIARAN** So, the story is about a young man called Billy who's deaf and he was born into a hearing family, and he struggles with communication because the family is really loud and they're egotists, and they're always arguing and Billy feels like his voice is not being heard, and he's struggling to get his voice. Then he meets Sylvia who teaches him sign language and he finds himself in the deaf community and ...

**EMILY** Drops a bomb into the family.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**PAULETTE** So how much is this a story about the barriers between being able to hear and not able to hear? How much is it a story about that?

**CIARAN** Yeah, it's a story about barriers, but it's not just about barriers, it's about communication, it's about love, it's about family and also identity as well because that's a big thing, isn't it, identity.

**EMILY** I think it's massively about communication, but it's not just about communication between deaf people and hearing people or even deaf people with deaf people. It's communication with other family, communication when some people just don't want to listen or even just how, you know, you can really love someone but the way you treat them is not how you think you are treating them. Does that make any kind of sense?

**PAULETTE** It really makes sense. So the title, Tribes, then, are there tribes within tribes?

**CIARAN** Yes, absolutely. There's a tribe in the family, there's a tribe in the community like the deaf community that Billy kind of falls in love with and, you know, the whole thing with Sylvia because Sylvia is deafened, so she's going deaf, that there's also a story about her tribe and where you belong and where I belong, and where, you know, characters like

Dan who's my brother, where he belongs and it's a really interesting play.

**EMILY** Through the rehearsals there was a lot of ... sort of the groups happened naturally and we discovered them naturally so even within the family there's kind of ... we were talking about the three kids in the family, well they're all grown up, but the two sons and the daughter and they're like the cubs of the family and so they're like a little tribe within the tribe of the family, and Sylvia kind of ... she obviously has her own tribes out in the world. There's the deaf community, but there's her own family and she's been hearing all her life with deaf parents, so she's got this whole identity of being an interpreter as a job and for her family and the status that that gives her, and she's losing that now, and Billy's losing his ... sort of his identity within that family as the deaf one, but he's fine and he's now becoming the deaf one who actually has got this whole identity and culture that he's just discovering, and his family can't really cope with it.

**PAULETTE** So what about you two then, how much can you hear? How much can you hear Ciaran?

**CIARAN** I can hear quite well ...

**EMILY** More than me.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Yeah.

*Laughter*

**EMILY** As we've discovered ...

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**EMILY** Several times over during rehearsals, but it's fine.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Yeah, like, I can hear quite well but I'm still deaf at the end of the day, but ... yeah, like, I don't hear as well as a hearing person would.

**EMILY** Take your CI batteries out and see how well you hear then.

**PAULETTE** Oh she's a right one her isn't she? We're going to have to keep an eye on her actually, TAKE YOUR BATTERIES ... that attitude.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** I know.

**EMILY** We're not becoming our characters and becoming competitive at all.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** No, no, not at all.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** How much can you hear Emily?

**EMILY** So, I only got my cochlear implant a couple of years ago, so I'm still sort of getting the benefits from it ... my brain is still learning how to work with it, so not very well.

**PAULETTE** How would you explain the difference then to someone like me who can hear quite well? how would you explain the difference between not being able to hear and being able to hear with a cochlear implant?

**EMILY** There's a line in the show where Billy's mum says 'it's really hard for Billy to explain how it is because he's in it' and there is that because I didn't hear anything for so many years. I could hear a little bit when I was younger, but I don't really remember it that much now and what I hear now is obviously amazing but it's electrodes you know, and I think it's something like I've got eight electrodes ...

**PAULETTE** What do you mean by electrodes?

**EMILY** So, when you have a cochlear implant they put electrodes in your cochlear, so like, people who can hear have, like, thousands of hairs and they all have different sort of connections with nerves, and then your brain works out how the hairs move ... the brain works out sounds. So like, a hearing person has thousands of those whereas we have ... I think we have eight electrodes or something, so we're never going to have the richness of sound that a hearing person does.

**CIARAN** And also, I don't know if it's for you, but we don't have a sense of where the sound is coming from.

**EMILY** Yes, it just arrives in your brain.

**CIARAN** It's just there.

**EMILY** It's in your brain.

**CIARAN** It's like a car. I can hear a car coming by, but I don't know where the car is coming from because I'm only able hear from one ear. Like, for example, my mum does this all the time, she would be in the house and she'll be like 'Ciaran can you come here', and I'll be like 'where's here?' and she's like 'here' and I'm like 'I don't know where that is', because I don't have a sense of where here is, so I'll end up in the kitchen but actually she's upstairs in the bathroom.

**PAULETTE** I hope she doesn't do it to take the mickey.

**CIARAN** She loves to take the mickey.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** I've got Ciaran and Emily with me they're both actors in the production called Tribes that's currently on at the Studio in Sheffield so with Sheffield Theatres, and we've got David here who's supposed to be signing. Is David doing that much?

**EMILY** He's being kind of chilled about it.

**PAULETTE** He's signing now, he's being quite chilled.

**EMILY** He's being kind of chilled, step up David.

**PAULETTE** I notice that you're looking at him quite a bit Emily, but you're hardly looking at him at all. Is that to do with how much you're used to being able to hear then?

**CIARAN** Well ...

**EMILY** It's just that David's really hard to look at, that's what it is.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Awkward.

*Laughter*

**EMILY** He's just so stunning, he's so stunning, it just distracts ...

**PAULETTE** I've never known such disgraceful behaviour in a studio Emily.

*Laughter*

**EMILY** I said it's because he's stunning.

**PAULETTE** Oh, OK then.

**EMILY** He's been working with me for six weeks now, and he's probably used to me.

**PAULETTE** And in terms then of the next generation then, if you are going to help ... say you were deaf and you had a child that was deaf, would you want that child to sign, lip read? How would they communicate then, what would you want to teach them, what would you want them to learn?

**EMILY** Well, I think all children should be learning sign language generally to be honest.

**PAULETTE** Whether they can hear or not?

**EMILY** I really do. My son, he's hearing ... there's no reason to think that he will go deaf but he signed from like eight months old and he just ... I loved it and he loved it, and I really think there's something in children, especially babies, because ... they don't speak because their tongues aren't developed, it's not because they don't have the capacity to communicate, so if you can sign with your babies there's no frustration. They can tell you what they want. They don't have to wait until they're two and they can speak, and it's just such a great language, you know. It's good for you to learn other languages. Sign language is so widely used, you know. If you learn French you're going to talk to people in France with it and, you know, many other countries that speak French.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** Well you can order a baguette.

*Laughter*

**EMILY** I'm very geographically knowledgeable but, you know, sign it's not universal, but if you can get into understanding say BSL, British Sign Language, you get that mind frame of visual language and it's so much easier to go and, you know, sign internationally because you've switched to that visual frame and ...

**PAULETTE** And it's about communities as well, I suppose, isn't it because then we're all part of a community whether we can hear or not.

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**EMILY** Yeah.

**PAULETTE** And that's quite beautiful isn't it?

**CIARAN** Absolutely.

**PAULETTE** BBC Radio Sheffield. You're listening to Paulette, I've been talking to Ciaran Alexander and Emily Stewart. They are actors who are deaf and they're in a production called Tribes. We'll hear a little more from them after this.

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**PAULETTE** Good morning, you're listening to Paulette. So, I've been talking to Ciaran Alexander and Emily Stewart, two stars of a new production called Tribes which is currently on at the Studio Crucible Theatre in Sheffield. They're also deaf and we got talking about how being deaf affects their work as actors.

**CIARAN**            Actually I'm still in training at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland so I've been fortunate for getting work. Obviously I'm in a different position ...

**EMILY**            Generation darling, yes.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN**            Yeah, yeah.

**EMILY**            Just say it.

*Laughter*

**EMILY**            I'm very old yes.

**CIARAN**            But I strongly believe that even though we're deaf we should play Harry Potter in the Cursed Child and, you know, parts that aren't necessarily written for deaf people.

**EMILY**            They need their minds opening ... like the Casting Directors and stuff. We need to get to a point where ... I mean, it's great that, sort of, deaf and disabled parts are being written more now because the more representation there is ... you see one deaf person on telly or on stage they're not going to represent everyone in the deaf community because it's so diverse.

**CIARAN**            Absolutely.

**EMILY**            So the more we have of that the better because more people can go 'oh, yeah' and connect to it, but at the same time and I think we are starting to get there with this, but it's, you know ... it's a process not a revolution ... of casting directors seeing deaf and disabled artists even if it's not specifically for a deaf or disabled role and then being, like, actually you could bring something extra .

**CIARAN**            Yeah, absolutely.

**EMILY**            And maybe even there's no reference to it, and if the audience notice that this actor's deaf it's just part of life, you know, because my life is my life and I happen to be deaf ... maybe it could be the same for some characters.

**PAULETTE**        That's very much more inclusive. Does that mean then that somebody who can hear could play a part in this production then, which is about deafness largely.

**EMILY**            So like a hearing person playing a deaf role or ...?

**PAULETTE**        Yeah.

**EMILY** I really think it's who's best for the part and I do think that there is a lot to be said for casting deaf and disabled artists in deaf and disabled roles, but that is massively just because there is so few of them, there is so few opportunities for deaf and disabled ... if we can get a more level playing field for everyone ... it's the same with all the different minority groups, get it completely level and then you really can cast whoever's best.

**CIARAN** Yeah, yeah, exactly. So, I think, like, we need to have, like, a process where we need to introduce more deaf and disabled, so letting them play the deaf and disabled roles as a way of kind of going 'actually why don't you play this part and you come into my play and do this' and it needs to be a case of we need to get there first, and then when we're there and we're up there with the best, then that means we're not bothered whether ... it's about who can play it better.

**PAULETTE** You know what's interesting about you, Ciaran, you've got a Scottish accent.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**EMILY** Yep.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** So how does that work then?

**CIARAN** Well, I got my cochlear implant when I was three years old and have grown up with it, and you know my family is Scottish and I just kind of ...

**PAULETTE** Yeah because I just thought that if you were deaf, but obviously if you had it younger, if you'd had it years later maybe the Scottish accent may not have been there. Do you know what I mean? I was just thinking about the perspective of what you can hear.

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**PAULETTE** It's not a strong one it's a very soft beautiful one. I love a Scottish accent anyway.

**CIARAN** No, it's interesting because there's a guy, my friend, who's deaf and he's Irish and he uses sign language, but when he speaks you can tell he's from Ireland because the lip pattern is different in Ireland than it would be in Scotland, so ... I don't know if you agree with me on this but ...

**PAULETTE** What for lip reading then you can see that he's ...

**EMILY** Oh, yes.

**PAULETTE** REALLY? You can see an accent?

**CIARAN** Yeah.

**EMILY** Yes, I mean you can see, like, the difference between a Birmingham accent and a Newcastle accent. Maybe sometimes you don't always know what it is, but you can tell. I mean I'm from Derby and I can see that everyone here has got these Sheffield and Yorkshire accents.

**PAULETTE** What do we do then with our mouths then? What do we do that's different with our mouths?

**EMILY** It's where your tongue is and it's where you keep the words going. I'm not really sure of the terminology.

**CIARAN** Yeah, like, for example, for Irish they say I is oi, so the lip pattern for I ... so I'm Scottish I'd say 'I 'but for oi, the way their mouth is shaped, that you can pick up.

**PAULETTE** That makes sense.

**EMILY** It's the same in sign as well.

**CIARAN** Yeah, totally.

**EMILY** Because Ciaran's signs are all Scottish, so I've had to beat him during this play to stop him signing Scottish.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** I hope you have not lady. She's shocking isn't she? She must be a nightmare to work with and you've loved her.

*Laughter*

**CIARAN** Yeah, like, but it's true. With sign language there's accents in sign, so my sign for mum is different from Emily's sign for mum.

**PAULETTE** Do them then. Do yours Emily, mum.

**EMILY** So my sign for mum is M on the head, so it's the four fingers of your right hand tapping on your head.

**PAULETTE** And what's yours?

**CIARAN** And mine is three fingers on the palm of your hand.

**PAULETTE** And why would that be so different then?

**EMILY** It's just regional. It's like regional accents, and just because, you know, you get groups of people who are talking together a lot and you get different variations. It's just like a regional dialect.

**PAULETTE** Well it's been an absolute delight to meet both of you. Thank you so much for joining us on BBC Radio Sheffield. Good luck with the next week of Tribes.

**EMILY** Thank you.

**CIARAN** Thank you.

**PAULETTE** And we need to give David a round of applause for all the signing he's done.

**CIARAN** Oh yeah! David!

**PAULETTE** He's been all right hasn't he? All right ...

**EMILY** I mean he's put up with me for six weeks so, you know, he does deserve something.

*Laughter*

**PAULETTE** What an interesting discussion. Ciaran Alexander and Emily Stewart. They are both currently starring in Tribes in the Sheffield Crucible Studio Theatre and it runs until this Saturday, and incidentally David Hutchinson was in the studio with us, as well as translating some of my questions into sign language for Ciaran and Alexander, although he was very, very quiet.

**END**