

Stories from the brainreels August 3, 2017 Transcript

Introduction

[theme music]

Welcome to Stories from the brainreels, a podcast about brain injury, disability, and neurodiversity, with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride.

My guests tonight are media makers and educators Devin Febroriello and Kat Meow Garcia, here to talk about the collaboration between [XRAY TV](#) and [Open Signal](#) for a [camp called Reel Voices](#). And this is a camp for female-identified and non-binary youth held at Open Signal. We'll also hear from Kai Tillman, another media maker and educator who's working on piloting a new program that's a small, personalized filmmaking workshop for women and trans people. Music by Blue.Sessions.

CHERYL: So I am here with Devin and Kat Meow, and we're gonna be talking today about the....

KAT MEOW: XRAY Reel Voices Camp for young women.

DEVIN: My name is Devin Febroriello. I'm a filmmaker. I've been working in film and television production for about 15 years. I run my own small video production company called Serpent Power Productions, and I'm the creative director of XRAY Television. I'm a media arts educator at Open Signal. So I kind of wear a lot of different hats and do many different things within media art and filmmaking.

CHERYL: Those sound like beautiful hats. Any of those hats have cat ears?

DEVIN: Of course. Always. Everywhere.

CHERYL: Just checking.

DEVIN: [laughs]

CHERYL: Just wanted to make sure that I get the logistics straight.

DEVIN: Yeah [chuckling].

CHERYL: And Kat Meow?

KAT MEOW: So yeah, I'm Kat Meow Garcia, and I am the education manager at Open Signal. I've been working in the Portland Metro area with youth around different arts for about seven-plus years doing anything from mural making to creative reuse art projects to teaching about different kinds of technologies and media literacy. I also consider myself an activist. I went to college studying social justice. So all my hats have social justice ears on them, I think, or at least I try to incorporate social justice in the work that I do.

MISO: [meows]

KAT MEOW: And apparently, the cat agrees.

CHERYL: We should probably do intro for the other guest in the room?

DEVIN: Sure, yeah.

MISO: [meows]

DEVIN: That's Miso. She's coming over to get closer to the microphone, apparently [chuckles].

CHERYL: She has a really good sense of timing, 'cause we were just doing intros. Hello, podcat! All right.

Getting into activist art and media

CHERYL: I'm super interested in how each of you got into these areas around arts and media and activism.

DEVIN: Sure. Well, I would have to start in my childhood, honestly. I have always been involved in art and performance on some level ever since I was very, very young. I began really enjoying performance art and expressing from the place of using the body through storytelling and dance and acting and all of that. That was a really big part of my childhood. And then, when I became a teenager and more aware of the world in different ways that were challenging, I kinda withdrew and got really deeply into visual art and writing and more introspective works and didn't want to perform anymore. It was around when I was 18 and similar, also started to get a lot more involved in wanting to figure out ways to do something with my life that would be integrated into culture in a way that could impact and reach and be part of discussion in new ways besides just art. I was really moved by films throughout my life in ways that I felt were truly impactful. I kinda had this epiphany around 18 years old where I realized that filmmaking was this really incredible intersection of all these different ways of communicating and sharing stories [Miso meows] and performance and writing and visual art. And it's all there; it's all part of it in this one medium.

Also too, just the power of the medium and how the media, in my opinion, can be a very negative aspect of our culture. And sort of waking up to this realization that we need to, as a society, work toward producing and creating films and television and commercials and all these things from maybe some other vantage points and with different types of voices and stories and recognizing that the industry itself is very set up in a certain way where it's difficult to do that. So very early on in my life, I became interested in pursuing this path of filmmaking from the perspective of kinda pushing back against the way that things are currently set and feeling dedicated to taking the long, hard road of that. 'Cause it's certainly not been easy to figure out how to integrate myself into an industry that is not always easy to participate in, depending on your background.

So yeah, that was kind of in my early 20s. I went to film school and have been working in different ways in the field ever since. So it's a combination of a lot of things. I'm definitely a dreamer, highly creative person. So there's that aspect of it for sure. But then also, the part of me that really saw the power of the media and how it needs to be balanced much more at this time.

CHERYL: Yeah, definitely. We're gonna loop back around exactly to what you're saying about balance in the industry and finding your way in. You didn't use the term "media literacy," but you really were talking about media literacy. So Kat Meow, you had mentioned that. Do you wanna talk a little bit about how you got into this work?

KAT MEOW: Sure. When you say, "How did you get into this work," I can answer that on two different levels. There's the bare bones how do you get into the industry, and I'm gonna say that honestly, I went through a period where I couldn't find work in Portland. And I started volunteering everywhere that I found to be inspiring. So I volunteered at KBOO, I volunteered at the tool library, I volunteered at the actual library, I volunteered at SCRAP, I volunteered at then Portland Community Media now Open Signal. Through those connections, I was given a lot of different opportunities to do different work. I met all kinds of different educators and started pursuing that path. My mother is an educator and really provided me with the foundation of understanding what true education is, which is actually learning. A lot of people don't know that if you're a really good teacher that you learn from your students.

DEVIN: So true.

KAT MEOW: And that's from a really good teacher, who was my mom. So that's the bare bones how do you get into this industry on that side.

Then on the personal side, on the what I was feeling and thinking side, was as a youth growing up, I grew up in Idaho. It was a really repressive, oppressive place to grow up, especially as a kid with mixed parents. So I grew up hearing, "Go swim back home," and all these kinds of slurs about my Mexican heritage and just dealing with a lot of internalized oppression as well as this external oppression. And in the media, I did not see myself represented unless it was a story about isn't it great that this Latina Mexican girl can get her nose fixed at age 16 now? And it was really sad and painful to grow up not thinking that I was a real human almost. It was as though I didn't exist. As I went further along in high school, I started to really resent the corporate imagery of people--not just beauty, but people in general--because I wasn't present. And a lot of my friends and family weren't present. I wanted to change that. I wanted to be present.

And I have become a very outspoken person, but at that time, I was really teetering on should I open my mouth? And I found art and media and performance a way that I could do that almost in disguise until I was comfortable opening my mouth loudly and seeing it with eyes wide open, looking right directly at people. So that was more of the personal side of why I got into it.

The media literacy part was learning how to, I was slowly learning how to--deconstruct these images and reconstruct them in a way that represented me and my feelings and my stories. I literally would go to the corner store and the grocery store, and I would turn around magazines that I didn't like. I mean, I was doing this at a very young age because I found them to be violent toward me. I really, really did, and I still believe that to this day. It really bothers me that these images are being shown to youth.

If you go to the stores and look, the magazines are all the way to the floor. So there are very, very small people looking at these images, possibly not seeing themselves or their friends and family represented. So that was my first taste of media literacy and trying to deconstruct this stuff and reconstruct it in a way that was more equitable, I thought.

CHERYL: So you two are here together right now because Devin, you're the lead educator at the camp, and Kat Meow, you are staff at Open Signal. Is that right?

KAT MEOW: Mmhmm. That's correct.

CHERYL: [chuckles] Have y'all worked together before? You seem like a perfect match.

DEVIN: Well, we'll be working together on the camp.

KAT MEOW: Yeah.

DEVIN: Yeah. That's gonna be our first experience of fully collaborating, but we've been working together at Open Signal in various ways, just not in direct partnership.

KAT MEOW: Yeah.

CHERYL: Oh, I think a star will be born. I wish I could go to your camp!

DEVIN and KAT MEOW: [laugh]

CHERYL: Just to have you two combined!

DEVIN: I mean, she's supported me a lot. I've taught a couple other classes at Open Signal, and she's an amazingly supportive person. I don't think I could've set up my first class without her help.

KAT MEOW: Thank you.

DEVIN: So she's, yeah. We've worked together in different ways, and we're gonna be going pretty deep in this camp process together.

CHERYL: And I think that you're gonna take the campers pretty deep too.

Reel Voices filmmaking camp

Let's just go over some of the logistics of the class: when, where, time of day, that kind of stuff for anyone interested in enrolling.

KAT MEOW: So it's XRAY's Reel Voices, a camp for young women ages 14-18. It is for female-identified or non-binary youth looking for an opportunity to get inspired, looking for an opportunity to learn some digital filmmaking, share their voice and their stories with staff, which is Devin from XRAY and staff from Open Signal, which is me, Kat Meow. There will be five sessions. It's gonna start on the 31st of July. There's gonna be another one August 1st, August 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. And these are gonna run from 10:00 am until 3:00 pm. Campers, make sure you bring a lunch.

DEVIN: [laughs]

KAT MEOW: Because lunch is not provided. We will have some snackies, but you definitely wanna bring a lunch. It's a long day.

So it also certifies those youth that they can check out equipment afterwards, for life. They will become certified producers for Open Signal. So they'll be able to check out field production gear, laptops. They have industry-standard editing software, which is really exciting and a huge lift of an economic burden for sure.

And I believe there is still a spot open for scholarship. Part of Open Signal's mission is to allow folks who maybe aren't in economic standing where they can afford that kind of camp the opportunity to still participate. Because it's part of the mission is that marginalized voices are being heard and support. So we definitely have that scholarship opportunity.

CHERYL: That's awesome. I go to a lot of conferences, and there's a lot of artists there. You look around, and you think, all the people here have the means to produce the work and then pay for their ticket to come here and register and show their work. Sometimes I think there's a little bit of a feedback loop class-wise.

KAT MEOW: Mmhmm.

DEVIN: Yeah, absolutely.

KAT MEOW: Definitely.

CHERYL: Who gets to get in? And because the people who go through this camp will be able to check out the equipment and use your facilities, that they can continue to make media and distribute it. So that is great.

DEVIN: I think it's one of the most amazing things about Open Signal. I say this over and over again, but it's really unlike any other media center that I've seen in my lifetime in terms of the ability to gain skills at a very affordable price and then have access to incredible gear, I mean things that you don't get anywhere else for free, technically, once you're done with the training. And then you can just keep creating and creating. It opens up this totally other potential for people to make work. Yeah, I mean, a C100, which is a camera that we're gonna be training the students on, at most rental houses, it's like \$150-200 day rental. So for a lot of people, if they wanna make a short film, if they didn't have access through something like Open Signal, they would have to save a good amount of money in order to make their project on a camera that's that nice. So it's very, very incredible and really exciting. And it makes it possible for so many more people to make work that has that professional look and feel, which does make a difference in terms of making those moves into these, you know, if somebody is trying to get into film festivals and wants to go more that route. Granted, at the end of the day, what's always gonna be most important is telling a great story and all of that. But it is also very helpful to have it shot really well and look great and edited well. That helps you be more competitive or more seen within the field. So I think that it's so important for the skills and tools to be available to all people in this kind of a way.

CHERYL: Yeah. I took the studio production class there and have done camera for a few projects and done one show. What I love is the networking that happens there and the way you can just call someone, "Hey, I need help with this." "OK, I'll just help you with that." I have made some connections and partnerships that have continued outside of Open Signal. So I can't imagine how exciting it would be to come into that space as a young person. Very awesome.

Will everything be filmed at Open Signal, or will you maybe do shoots on location?

KAT MEOW: When folks sign up for the camp, there is a little bit of paperwork to do, of course. And one of the forms is that it is a possibility that we will leave Open Signal. There's a few parks nearby. It is a possibility that we can go somewhere else to collect footage. That's a possibility, and it's a really fun possibility.

Gender imbalance in representation and who's creating media

CHERYL: Tell me a little bit more about who can apply to be in this camp.

KAT MEOW: So it's open to youth who identify as female or non-binary. Because we find that as women in this industry, and even if you're not a woman in the industry or woman-identified, it's a sad truth right now that [very few women are producing in the mainstream media](#). Very few women are directing in the mainstream media. It's some abominable number below 10%.

DEVIN: I think it's 5% of top box office films. At least that's one statistic that I'm positive of is women. So 5%.

KAT MEOW: Which, if my liberal arts degree math isn't gonna fail me here, that's not in correlation with our actual population.

CHERYL: No, it's not.

KAT MEOW: I do believe that female-identified folks are 51% of the population. So there should at least be half and half, if we're really reaching towards equity in this field. If we're really reaching to hear all voices represented equally as best as possible, below 10% is abominable. That's ridiculous if you're thinking about equity.

DEVIN: Absolutely. And well, I mean back to kind of talking about the earlier inspirations too of why wanting to go on this path, is it's also not having the right representation with how powerful these aspects of the culture-- I mean, so many people, especially nowadays with smart phones and everything--and not everyone has smart phones--but just the amount of media that people are consuming, to have it only 5%. And not just women; there's all sorts of people that are not being represented, voices not being heard.

KAT MEOW: Exactly.

DEVIN: And it's a really unfortunate problem that I feel very strongly about needing to help balance because it is such a powerful, ever-present aspect of the culture at all times. And it's absurd that it is only being created by this small, small, small percentage of people. And it's a huge system too, right? There's the whole aspects of how it is funded and all of that. That's a whole other topic, but yeah.

KAT MEOW: But it's definitely one of the main reasons that we're offering this camp to not just female-identified, but also non-binary, because not only is there many, many barriers to non-binary folks, but there's also extreme violence to non-binary folks in this United States culture.

At Open Signal, when you walk in the doors, there's a sign up that you may see at lots of different Portland businesses about Open Signal being a safe place. And by offering this camp, we're hoping to show that to youth who don't identify as this weird binary gendered thing that is part of this culture for now [chuckles]. And so we're trying to uphold that value of safety because we've found, as educators and as producers, that when you feel safe, your ability to create is times-ed by a million. It just is such an incredible amount of freedom when you feel safe somewhere. So that's another reason that we're offering it to non-binary youth as well.

CHERYL: It makes me think about what you said at the beginning about seeing magazine covers, seeing different media that you're not in. If you're not invited in, and nobody indicates to you that your message is gonna be received and appreciated, few people are going to have the

motivation or the resources even to reach out and make that media if it's not going to be well-received.

KAT MEOW: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: So I really appreciate the safety that you're talking about and how that does open up creativity. 'Cause people will know that they're gonna be appreciated.

KAT MEOW: Yeah. I mean, you can have a C100, and you have great lights, and you can have a great set design, but if you don't feel comfortable, you're gonna be stifled. And your work isn't gonna be the best that you can create.

Sexual harassment on set and the need for safe training spaces

CHERYL: [sighs] I'm having memories [chuckles]. Sorry.

At this point I shared a story about someone in the film industry laughing and cracking jokes about how I was being sexually harassed on set, and I ended up crying. I don't want to repeat on air what they said to me that day. Even though that person told me years later they felt bad about the fact that their jokes led me to break down crying on set, I never heard they were sorry that I had been repeatedly sexually harassed. So yeah, I cut the details of that story today. But here's where the conversation continued.

DEVIN: Oh yeah. I mean, I have so many stories from my career of just treatment on sets and experiences that it's one of the main reasons I started my own production company, is that I was really just so tired of the discrimination and yeah, having these different circumstances where I'm being completely disrespected and treated like I don't have anything to offer ever anyone. And clearly because of my gender. That I really reached a breaking point with it, and I was like, I'm not gonna do this anymore. I'm gonna start doing my own thing and find a different way and have been doing that ever since.

And it's not the only, I mean, that is part of the reason, a big part of the reason. There's other reasons I wanted to start my own company, but that was a huge part of it for sure. Just so many 10 years working in New York City stories [laughs]. I'll just leave it at that.

KAT MEOW: Well, and unfortunately, even in Portland that exists. And I forgot to plug my production company too, For Crying Out Meow. But that's another reason why I started that because it's basically a collective of friends who have the same values where jokes about sexual harassment, they're just not funny. They're not. They never have been to the folks that are getting sexually harassed. It's a real interesting question to ask is who has the power in that situation? It's a really good question to ask when that stuff's going on if you have the wherewithal to do so. Because it really does put it in perspective. Do you have the power? Are you making the joke? You obviously have the power in this situation. Is that appropriate at all, ever? No.

CHERYL: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: Yeah, but I agree. That's another reason why Open Signal is maintaining that this has to be a safe place. Because it's not appropriate, and it really stifles amazing, incredible voices--

DEVIN: Mmhmm.

KAT MEOW: --that are necessary for us to have a complete look at our society. And art is looking at society.

CHERYL: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: So we're being disingenuous with our art creation if we're not including those voices.

DEVIN: Absolutely.

CHERYL: Hey, I'm popping back in here again because I was too moved by Devin's and Kat Meow's responses to even continue speaking on the topic anymore during the interview. So this is me, in the comfort of post-production land thanking both of you for sharing what you did about creating your own spaces and interrogating power in matters of power tripping. Being in the presence of Devin and Kat Meow's fierce and gentle souls somewhat shocked my system at the moment. So thank you, y'all for your validation and camaraderie! For anyone curious, Miso was sleeping soundly through the whole exchange. OK, back to the interview.

What will the campers create?

CHERYL: Do you already have in mind what kinds of topics or film genres the campers will work on, or is that open once they get there?

DEVIN: It's still open. I haven't fully structured every single thing that we're going to do in the camp yet. I mean, we're gonna be working on producing films and getting skills and talking a lot about different aspects of women in film and women-identifying people in film. And I do wanna say though, something that's very, very important to me, and it's a much longer conversation too, is that I also feel like I'm personally really interested in allowing all people to create whatever types of projects they want from their own voice and heart, spirit, whatever and whatever that means. Because I also feel like there's this trend toward--and it has sort of bothered me 'cause I personally, as a filmmaker, like to work in lots of different themes. They're not necessarily women's stories or has anything to do with the fact that I identify as a woman. So I feel like there's also this kinda thing going on that I see maybe within the industry where different groups are trying to be like, "Well, we're supporting women, and they're doing their women's stories." Don't get me wrong: I'm open to that too if that's something that somebody wants to tell as a very specific story that feels like a woman's story. Great. But to me, it's really about being fully open for people to express in whatever way and whatever way that means, and their gender is sort of it doesn't really matter on this level when it comes to the creative aspect of it to me.

So when I think about structuring a camp or teaching or leading people in filmmaking or any type of creative work, complete openness is 100% essential to me. It's sorta this gray area between yes, wanting to give people access and ability based on these things that are discriminated against, but then on the artistic side, what that means? I really wanna hear from people's hearts, and what that really means for them could mean anything. And that's really important to me. So structuring it as a specific creative output is not gonna be part of it. It's gonna be a part about authenticity.

CHERYL: That's so awesome. I'm so glad. I'm really glad to hear that, actually. Because I like the way you said that in the creative decision, maybe gender doesn't matter. What matters is that you've made the space for people of specific genders to have access to the resources to share their story--

KAT MEOW: Mmhmm.

DEVIN: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: --whatever it is. And to tell people you have to do a feminist because you're female-identified, talk about, I mean--

DEVIN: And they can. But that's not a requirement, yeah.

KAT MEOW: If they want to, that's fine. However, I think what I'm hearing Devin say, and I'm definitely echoing is we don't want it to turn into a coopting of a movement camp. That is terrible and is backpedaling in the wrong direction. It's not going towards equity in that way because you're taking agency away from folks if you tokenize their situation and have them, "Oh, what's it like? Let me put the mic in your face and ask you, 'What's it like to be like you?'" That's weird, uncomfortable, and it's not authentic.

DEVIN: Mmhmm.

KAT MEOW: I like the word "authentic." So I think that's why it's not completely structured, as this is gonna be the end product, apart from some technological skills because you have to get certified on the equipment, obviously. It's about their voice, whether it's eclectic collection of images that they create, whether it has to do with their gender identity or not, whether it has to do with their cat!

DEVIN: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: Whether it has to do with roller-skating, whatever.

DEVIN: Exactly.

KAT MEOW: It's their story, what they wanna tell.

DEVIN: And if there's-- Sorry to interrupt you. But also, I would never wanna discriminate against men. That's also really important to me too. I was just speaking to this group the other day, and somebody asked me that about with my company with hiring: Do I only ever hire women? And I always say I hire the best person for the job. And when I can hire a woman, 'cause there's women who are available and have the skillset, then I will lean towards hiring a woman. I love working with men. I think men are incredible too, and I also feel like that's a gray area that's important to make sure is not, I don't know, getting into this space where it's like it's only this way! I think it's all about openness. Yeah, so that's important to me too. I just wanna put that out there.

KAT MEOW: Definitely, definitely. It's not gonna be a slew of work with no men in it.

DEVIN: Yeah, I mean if they wanna tell a story that the lead character's male, and we're gonna get male actors. Whatever. That might be what happens. I don't know. That's where it's all about openness and authenticity and whatever people wanna bring forward.

CHERYL: I like that. Because you're also open to the well-roundedness of people's experiences. If we say because of your identity, we're gonna do films that are only on that piece of identity, then we're perpetuating the message that you're a niche kind of person.

DEVIN: Yeah, yeah.

KAT MEOW: That's all you are!

CHERYL: That's all you are.

KAT MEOW: That's all you are, is your identity.

DEVIN: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: That's, ugh. It's gross [laughs]. It feels gross.

CHERYL: It does when it's forced that way.

Picking your own representation in your media

CHERYL: People want to see themselves and experiences themselves represented in the media. So being open to them representing whatever part of their story or their imagination they want to, that is fantastic. I love it.

DEVIN: Yeah, it's super. It's really important to me 'cause that has been something as a woman and a filmmaker, if I wanna make a movie about something to do with being a woman, great. But maybe I don't. Maybe I don't at all, you know? I don't know. It's always gonna be filtered through what it means to experience life as this gender, but yeah. It's a trend that I've noticed that's really almost as frustrating to me as the imbalance. I'm like, no, that's not the right way either.

KAT MEOW: You're getting it all wrong!

DEVIN: [laughs] Yeah.

KAT MEOW: I've had that experience too, identifying as Latina, where it's OK to tell your story if it includes these aesthetically pleasing parts of your culture that we like.

DEVIN: Sure, yeah. It's like this packaging of or stereotyping.

KAT MEOW: Like, if you put some sugar skulls in there and some Mexican dresses, that's fine. And it's like, "Well, I also watch Netflix and stuff" or whatever.

DEVIN: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: I also love David Bowie and metal music.

CHERYL: Well, it sounds like some of it--and let me know if this resonates--it sounds like some of it, "Hi, I'm white. I'm familiar with the sugar skulls. Will you provide me with more reinforcement for the part I'm comfortable with? 'Cause I don't really wanna learn more about it."

KAT MEOW: Yeah. I don't really wanna see you as someone that I can identify with parts of your actual life. I just wanna identify with the parts that make me feel warm and tingly. That's weird.

CHERYL: It is weird. It's objectifying.

KAT MEOW: It's definitely objectifying. So we're trying to stray away from that.

DEVIN: Yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah!

DEVIN: 100%.

CHERYL: I get that around disability. I'll have people, when I say I have a disability, they'll just ask me what it is. I'm like, "Oh, that actually isn't the topic that we were on." "Oh, well, I'm sorry. I just thought since you mentioned it, that's how you identify, and that's what you'd wanna talk about." I'm like, "I wanna talk about precisely what we were talking about before this came up. And it only came up because this space is inaccessible, and I just needed to mention that to you." But like, no.

DEVIN: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: I'm just as well-rounded of a person as you thought I was before you found out I'm this weirdo.

DEVIN: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: On that note [chuckles]. I know that Open Signal, when you did this huge renovation and upgrading, you made the space even more wheelchair accessible. I know like some of the editing stations are now at a height that are ADA compliant.

KAT MEOW: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: Yay, height!

KAT MEOW: Yeah.

Disability access and students with disabilities

CHERYL: On the website for this camp, there is a notice that it's wheelchair accessible. And thank you for putting that. So many spaces are accessible and don't advertise it. And then you have a note that students can request reasonable accommodations. So they'll contact you to let you know what accommodations they might have, and you'll be able to tell them whether you think you can meet them or not. But I'm wondering, are you doing any recruiting of campers with disabilities? 'Cause they're often not invited to apply to activities that are not specific to disability.

KAT MEOW: I know that we're talking about ways in which to do that. So if you have any resources for us, that would be awesome. Because that is really important. We have a few volunteers and a few producers that identify as having disabilities, and that's great. But we would love to reach out to more folks.

DEVIN: Yeah, absolutely.

KAT MEOW: For sure. It's really important!

CHERYL: Thank you. 'Cause I mean, and we were talking about, oh, you're female-identified. Let's do women's stories. It is so pervasive in disability community, people don't-- And I have talked to other people, not at all affiliated with any organizations y'all are with, totally separate, where I've talked to people and asked, "Are you gonna recruit to youth with disabilities?" "No. I don't really wanna deal with all of that extra work." It's the issue of you heard the word "disability," and all you could think was trouble, burden, stuff that I have to do. And it's not about you. It's about opening your access to more people. So we'll talk offline more about that.

DEVIN: Yeah.

KAT MEOW: Thank you, yeah.

CHERYL: But thank you for bringing it up.

KAT MEOW: I think for folks at Open Signal, when somebody approaches about any kind of need or accommodation, it's more received as an opportunity to grow and to be more in line with our mission. So that's actually beneficial, honestly.

CHERYL: I'm gonna cry!

KAT MEOW: I wanna learn.

CHERYL: I'm really grateful. I'm super grateful to hear that.

Final screening after camp

CHERYL: Is there gonna be a showing of the campers' work for the public?

DEVIN: Yes.

CHERYL: And will there be cats in the audience?

DEVIN: [laughs] Yes, hopefully.

ALL: [chuckle]

KAT MEOW: After each camp, we compile all their stuff into one reel, and then we compile all those reels and have a viewing. For the youth summer camps at Open Signal, the final projects are gonna be screened at our youth summer showcase. That's gonna be on Wednesday, August 23rd. It's gonna be at Open Signal at 6:00 pm. The event is always free, open to family and friends of the youth producers.

CHERYL: Great, great. And then, will the films be captioned or audio described?

DEVIN: That's definitely something that we could work toward, for sure.

KAT MEOW: Yeah, I think that that would be a really great idea to incorporate that this year.

CHERYL: Is this the first year this camp has happened?

KAT MEOW: We have had female-identified camps twice in the past, but this is a different take on it because we are utilizing XRAY personnel!

Collaboration with other local filmmakers and following the students' lead

CHERYL: Is there anything else about the camp in particular and the work around the camp that I have not asked y'all about?

DEVIN: Well, I do wanna mention one thing that I am planning for the camp that I'm really excited about is that I have a pretty strong community of female-identifying filmmakers in Portland. And I'm hoping throughout the week of the camp, I'll be having a lot of really amazing guests come through to help inspire the students more. 'Cause I also think that there's this whole thing of if you see people doing it, then you know you can do it. I think it's super important for young folks to see people that are at a different point in their life showing their work, talking about their process and how they got to where they are, and all of that, that is especially inspiring. So I'm definitely planning on integrating professional people who are working in the field to come through and talk about different aspects of their work.

We talked about this a little bit earlier: Something that's really important to me as a teacher, and to Kat Meow too, is also allowing things to be open to the people that end up coming. So being able to see who are these people, what are their goals, what would be most inspiring for them? And then helping shape how the week unfolds after that initial coming together. So also be thinking a lot about if it ends up that we have a lot of students that are super interested in documentary, then I would pull a lot of documentary filmmakers to come talk to them. So really tailoring it to a individualized experience for the people that are present.

Obviously, structuring and planning ahead too, but having some aspect of it open to make sure that we're serving the people in the best way that we can that are present for the camp.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DEVIN: [I'm a member of Film Fatales](#), which is this really wonderful female directors' group. So it's definitely some of the people from that group I would contact. And then just through, we have XRAY Film Collective. I know a lot of wonderful people through that who I think would be great to come in. And just the community in general. One thing that's very exciting for me,

coming here from New York City, is that even though Portland's a much smaller city in a lot of ways, the community's really strong here. There's a lot of people that are working in various aspects of media arts and film production. People are genuinely supportive, and I really feel like their heart is in the right place. It's really exciting 'cause I came from a city where I can't say that necessarily. People are much more competitive and just kinda trying to get to where they wanna get to in the bigger cities. And it's something that I've really loved about Portland. I think that's really exciting too is that overall, most people are genuinely interested in sharing their wisdom with youth and participating in the community and being part of something bigger than just their own goals for their life and work. So I think that's really cool.

What's next for Devin and Kat Meow

CHERYL: Do either of you wanna talk a little bit about what's next for you and your collectives or cooperatives outside of this camp?

KAT MEOW: Excitingly enough, I've had several requests from youth to start a video collective. I am really excited about that because a lot of the youth started at Open Signal very young and then gotten their family members involved. So we've got this generational thing happening, which is really neat to watch. I've been asked to just kind of head this in a kind of giving more access to resources kind of a way and doing more of the administrative parts of this until youth feel comfortable taking over that role. So I'm gonna be more of a mentor in that position until the youth feel comfortable taking that over. That's gonna be starting up here soon. So that's really exciting. We're hoping to partner with organization [such as KBOO](#) and maybe other ones like [Outside the Frame](#) or something like this or [NAYA](#) to do more outreach to diversify our youth video collective.

I'm currently making an animation for a very funny new show that's being produced at Open Signal. So I'm designing the animation for the intro, and the show is called Tea Time. That's gonna be a show with folks drinking cool.

DEVIN: Oh, cool.

CHERYL: [laughs]

KAT MEOW: Having conversations over tea.

Also in the works is another Dance and Resist show. I don't know if you made it to the very first Open House, but we had a live broadcast dance party that was linked with social justice with dancing and resisting. By coming together in large groups and having fun, that's a way to stand up to oppression. That was kind of the theme going with that show. So I've been doing some more outreach, and I'm trying to get more organizations involved in the next production of that. So I'm excited that that's gonna be coming up here in the future too.

DEVIN: Well, I don't have anything that exciting!

DEVIN and CHERYL: [laugh]

DEVIN: I am getting ready to release a new music video that I created with a band called [Clawfoot Slumber](#). We're having a video premiere party Friday, May 26th at Bunk Bar. Should be a really fun night. The band's gonna play, and we'll screen the video. And then with XRAY Television, we're in the middle of Season 1. We're releasing all sorts of original shows. We have a four-hour block on Open Signal's channels 329 and Pop 29. It's from 10:00 pm to 2:00 am

every Saturday night and then also online: XrayTV.org. You can see the original shows. We have some XRAY sessions, which are live recordings of musicians. This is a really exciting partnership between Open Signal and XRAY FM that's ongoing. So for the next few months, there will be more and more shows and working coming out, and the whole project is supported by the XRAY Film Collective and people who are involved in this big community of people that are creating these different shows and supporting one another's projects. And it's very much made possible because Open Signal has partnered with us and allowed us the ability to help people get discounted and free trainings, to have access to the gear and studios. And then our team helps support people in whatever ways we can in their productions while also giving them total freedom to be creative and make what they wanna make. So that's always happening too.

And then I'm just finishing post-production on a dance film that I did with a few dancers that I shot with a C100 from Open Signal. I'm really excited for when that's finished to start to probably send that around to some dance film festivals. And yeah, continuously working toward some new project ideas for short films, and I have a web series idea I'm working on. So kind of always something, many irons in the fire.

CHERYL: This is exciting stuff.

So tell us again how folks can find the information about this camp and enrolling in it.

KAT MEOW: All right. Well, you can always go online to Open Signal's website. It's OpenSignalPDX.org. We also are excited that our summer programs catalog came out. So you can look for that at different coffee shops around town. You can also, of course, always come down to Open Signal. We're at 2766 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and check out our summer catalog there. We've got plenty to hand out to you, and you can find out about all kinds of different classes and workshops that are going on, not just for youth, but also for adults alike. And if you have any questions about any Open Signal media education, you can always reach out to our Director of Education or Director of Programming. So the Director of Education is Elisa Barrios. It's gonna be EBarrios@opensignalpdx.org. Or Taylor is our Director of Programming, and she can be reached at Taylor@opensignalpdx.org.

CHERYL: Great. I am so grateful for both of you. And the stuff that you're doing outside of this camp and this camp all sounds completely amazing. It's really quite an honor to talk to y'all. I'm glad that we could do it here in the presence of Miso, who appears to be napping now. Yeah, so thank you both so much.

DEVIN: Thank you so much.

KAT MEOW: Thank you.

DEVIN: It was really lovely speaking with you.

KAT MEOW: It's an honor to be on this program, honestly.

DEVIN: Thank you.

Kai Tillman on filmmaking and his filmmakers workshop

CHERYL: I'm working on a short video series with local filmmaker Kai Tillman right now. I was lucky enough to keep him for a few minutes after our shoot to interview him about his work in the field. I told him about the REEL Voices project and my conversation with Devin and Kat

Meow that you just heard. After talking about a workshop that Kai's designing and piloting right now, he wraps up with some words of wisdom for any youth taking that class at Open Signal.

KAI TILLMAN: My name is Kai Tillman. I'm a Director of Photography. I work making images pretty. When I went to school, I studied both film and audio engineering. Originally, I thought I was gonna be a sound designer and then moved over into the field of cinematography.

I've taught a few workshops with Outside In on video production and audio engineering, and this year I'm gonna teach a class on audio engineering for the same workshop. Recently, I started coming up with a workshop for women or people identify as women and trans people, but particularly I did a little sample with two women. The idea of the workshop is to create an environment that's safe, that people from various levels can feel comfortable asking questions, and not being intimidated to show exactly where they're at and their weaknesses. And then also, for someone who's advanced, those different levels can co-exist in the same place and that everyone can learn something and feel comfortable. It was just like a test class that I did with two women. Both of them had different levels, and it was really interesting to see how to create that environment for people to, particularly women, to feel safe.

Oftentimes when you take these technical classes, either they're taught by men, or it's an environment that it's not safe to show your lack of skill and where you're at. So oftentimes, people don't ask questions or feel like everyone else knows what's going on, and they're the only one who doesn't. I'm trying to critique why the film industry is so dominated in the technical roles, in the direction roles by men. From which level can that change? Does it start education? Is it also mentorship? Is it safety to even feel that women belong, or non-cisgender men belong in the industry? So that's kind of the idea. So it's just kind of a pilot class.

We were learning a Canon C100 and going over, very technically, the menus, how it operates, dynamic range, a lot of things. I'm not gonna go into them because that would bore people. I tried to go at a pace that was very slow and also thinking about different learning styles. So I know some people are kinesthetic learners. They need to touch it and push buttons. So I tried to limit how much I would describe something before I'd hand over the camera. Also, I know some people are visual learners, or they need to talk things out. So I allowed for a lot of interaction, not just going through everything and then handing the camera, but actually kind of having a dialogue.

So for me, this is just based on my experience of going through audio classes that were taught by men and were extremely alienating for me. I'm a trans person, and so before I transitioned, I was living I guess perceived as a woman. And it was really hard to be in those classes and feel like I could take up space, voice where I was at, and learn. It just was very, very hard to learn. And it made me feel like I didn't belong. It also made me feel like I wasn't able to learn. Now that I'm a professional, and I work all the time with very technical equipment, I think that is unfair, and it is alienating for people who are socialized as females.

And actually, to be honest, I think it's alienating for everybody, but the way men interact with it is that's how they were socialized: fake it till you make it, to show that you're more skilled than you actually are, show that you're at a higher level than you actually are, and to take up space in the professional world from that place. So that is hard for someone who's female-socialized where we're taught to show our vulnerability and to be judged all the time when actually, we're exactly in the same place as the men that are working alongside us. So thinking about education and how to create an environment that allows people to truly learn something and feel safe. I don't know if that always means excluding men, but it's definitely a beginning framework that I think is

important to be an environment that, for people who are either female-identified, female-socialized, that type of demographic. It's not easy [chuckles]. It's not easy.

When I was genderqueer, I dealt with a lot of discrimination. A lot of jobs that I didn't have the opportunity because I wasn't a man. And ever since I transitioned, I have a lot more work and a lot more opportunity. I think a revolution needs to happen. I think it needs to happen from allies, to be honest. A lot of men in the industry need to stand up and offer positions to minoritized people and to have awareness: If your production company's all white men, you need to have a moment and think about what that means for the future and what that means for your company and what you're representing and your values.

So for young people starting out who are coming from a minoritized community and don't necessarily have the access that they would have if they were white, cisgender male, I think maybe finding someone that could mentor you, someone who's a professional, and working from a position that's basically going to teach everything in the field. So starting as a production assistant and just getting your hands on everything. Just find that person, send a lot of emails, cold call people, and just say, "Hey, I'm new. I took this class, and I'm looking to get more practical experience. I'd love to work in any capacity with your company that would allow me to have that opportunity and experience." I'm very sure that people would be extremely receptive to that. I don't think it's that important that it's all women. I think it's a great thing to have if you wanna see someone who's like you and see that it's possible to work with someone who's a female-- I always trip over the language to say "women," 'cause it's hard to be binary as a trans person.

I think it's really important that we create space for the new generation of filmmakers that are not cisgender white men. I just hope that when someone finishes a program like that, they could have the tenacity to work through the struggles that they might come across in an industry that's extremely dominated by men and just to keep going. There's gonna be a lot of failure. There's gonna be a lot of rejection. But you can be successful, and it is possible. I think don't just submit to the roles that aren't technical. If you are attracted to let's say camera operation, cinematography, go for it! When you get around a bunch of white cisgender men, and they talk only about gear, and they seem like they know everything about the industry, don't get intimidated by that! I mean, this sounds judgmental, but a lot of people don't know as much as they say they do. So just be strong, and there's always a starting point, and there's always room to grow. There's never an end point.

I'm always looking for interns or people who are interested in getting more technical experience, and I'm always welcoming people to come and join the work that I do and also teach the knowledge that I've gained over the years. I'm very, very generous with that, and I feel like it's part of my role as someone who navigated this space that's very hard as a non-binary person.

My production company is called StoryTank Media. The website is storytank.com.

Closing

[music]

Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture and transcripts of all podcast episodes at WhoAmItoStopIt.com.

