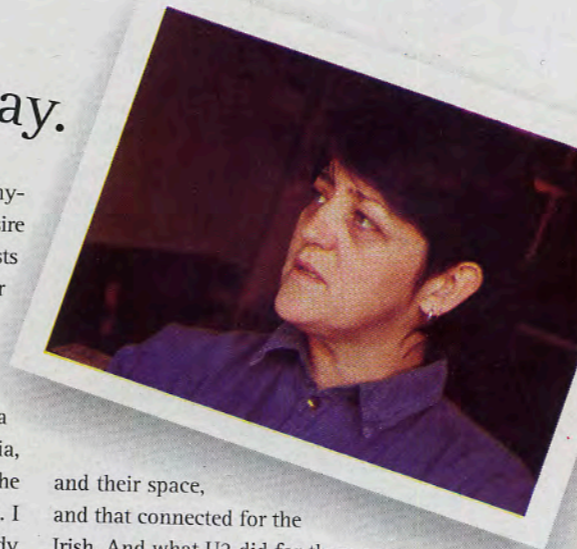




I do sing like Julie Andrews in a way.



It's Monday morning in Long Street and I'm sitting in front of a row of coffee-dubbed computers, passive smoking without shame. I'm listening to Nodi Murphy, (part-owner of the icafé and co-organiser of the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival) and Heather Mac (ex-Ellamental vocalist) interviewing each other about the music industry, the film industry, and the cultural boycott that almost destroyed them both.

**NODI:** Are you into cyberculture?

**HEATHER:** No, but I'm learning a lot, I spent half an hour with my daughter's headmistress today and she was telling me how she's fallen desperately in love with some man whom she's never seen. Last night they e-mailed each other from half past eight until eleven o'clock... and she told me this whole bloody intriguing story about this romance over the Internet!

**N:** We've had a couple get married. For six month's they corresponded... I remember asking her, 'have you ever touched him, what about body chemistry here?' But she just said 'he's nice, he's wonderful' and they got married. It's the classic zipless fuck isn't it?

**N:** Anyway we're supposed to interview each other, so what do you know about me and what do I know about you?

**H:** Nodi, I don't know enough about you.

**N:** And I don't know enough about you either, so we'll find out.

**N:** Where were you born?

**H:** Here, Cape Town. I only left here when I got whipped up by Ronny Domp... He bought me a bass guitar and I started to teach myself to play. And then Ballyhoo were doing their *Man in the Moon* tour and they asked Ronny to support them and he said come with us... and that's how I met Tim [Parr], who I worked with in Ellamental and beyond that had babies and got married and have since divorced...

**N:** Didn't you ever have aspirations to go to Michaelis?

**H:** No, I had just finished my Teachers' Speech and Drama at Trinity College when I met Ronny, so it was something that was in me already, performance, but it was more theatrical performance. I'd always sung because I'd been in musicals, and I still do sing like Julie Andrews in a way.

**N:** Oh I love that! I have to say. There is nothing better than perfect diction.

**H:** Do you still hear the words I sing?

**N:** (long pause) I'm hearing impaired.

**H:** (laughs) Is that a kind way of saying you don't!

**N:** No it's not, truly I struggle. I'm a great rumourmonger, because I hear things imperfectly... Can you hear it though? Standing there with everything belting out, whether or not the bass guitar is loud or not? I can never understand why they put mics on the drum, I can always hear the drums, doef doef doef, that's what I hear all the time...

**H:** (bemused) They put the mics on the drums, Nodi, because it would all merge into some muddy mixture in the background; against strong loud bass, vocals and guitar, the drums would be like tiddly, tiddly,

tiddly in the background. But I do think that drummers in bands now play fuckin' loud.

**N:** They do. Except for... Karen Rutter.

**H:** Yes, she's amazing to watch.

**N:** At the time of Ellamental there were not many South African bands...

**H:** There was!

**N:** Okay who was there?

**H:** There were so many fantastic bands, I was living in Johannesburg at the time and when we were taking off, eVoid were really happening, Via Afrika, Tribe after Tribe, Petit Cheval, The Helicopters, Bernoldus Niemand...

**N:** But what's happened to all of them?

**H:** I don't know.

**N:** Can you make a living from this?

**H:** No. We got a huge break, I got to taste possible success... But you get to a place where you think it's all happening and suddenly you're in the power of a whole lot of other people.

**N:** Did you ever make a living?

**H:** We made a lot of money while we were living overseas, but we didn't see it through to fruition, because tempers flare... We had a great manager in South Africa, Roddy Quinn who started Big Concerts. He was like this bull terrier, he'd nag at people sufficiently to open doorways for us. And when we got to Ireland, Billy Gaf would put money in our account every month... but then there was this huge rentboys scandal with Elton John, and the paparazzi were chasing Billy from airport to airport, so when we arrived in Dublin we didn't see him for the first six months.

**N:** Why did you go to Dublin?

**H:** Because our impresario who happened to come out here with *Limahl* of all people - you know, who sang that corny song with Kajagoogoo, *Too shy shy, too shy-y*

(accompanied by hand gestures) and

Andre Tripp, of London EMI, saw us at Xenon in Woodstock, and said 'Fuck it, I want this band.' I thought it was kind of shit actually, one of these typical come-in-here-stinking-of-money-make-all-these-great-promises... I was terribly cynical.

**N:** Why did it fall apart?

**H:** Because our manager, Billy, had a huge fall-out with Warner Brothers and a huge fall-out with my husband at the time - Tim. Clash of the Titans.

**N:** Do you see much of Tim these days?

**H:** Well, he's now planning on moving to Cape Town so that he can spend more time with his kids. And of course he's still living out his rock 'n' roll dreams. He's got his own CD out now.

**N:** And you? Are you performing regularly, are you with a band?

**H:** No, I'm not with a band - I think I've lost that frantic desire... What I'm excited by is the work that I've done with the Jazzart and the possibilities for me to impart some of the things that I've learnt... at one time it was a selfish journey, me just wanting to experience, now I'm getting much more of a kick out of seeing other people experience.

**N:** And that comes with age?

**H:** I suppose so.

Does it? I mean I'm not saying I don't want to be up there and perform anymore, I do, it's just that that driven desire has mellowed a bit. It's like the Buddhists say, you have to lose your desire in order to attain the right space.

**N:** What do you think your time in Ireland did for you?

**H:** Healed me. Of a lot of things. I had in a way lost sight of things, through media, through circumstances, I mean I was still the same person, but I was never anonymous. I could never go anywhere without somebody coming up and saying 'I think your music's great' or 'you fuckin' piss me off.' You become this public figure and therefore you are public property. I used to leave my house in Berea and walk to Hillbrow and in that time at least one person would screech to a halt in their car, or somebody would pass by me and *gaup* (imitates a *gaup*).

**N:** (Laughing) Well you're terribly tall, you do kind of stand out...

**H:** What I loved about the people in Ireland was that even if David Bowie walked past in the street it was unspoken law that you would not interfere with his space. In their interviews, U2 would always express very emphatically how much they appreciated their autonomy

and their space, and that connected for the Irish. And what U2 did for them was that suddenly the world started to focus on Ireland... and it's a bit like that with South Africa. Who knows, Springbok Nude Girls might suddenly crack it internationally. We wanna show them our rock sub-culture, that it is thriving, not necessarily financially, but that isn't everything...

**N:** I don't know, my third eye is blinded by a dollar sign at the moment. I'm tired of getting things off the ground.

**H:** Now it's your turn. I'll tell you what I do know about you, you went to school in Pietermaritzburg...

**N:** I went to university there, and by the time I arrived on campus, which was very small, probably about 1200 students, my two elder sisters were running campus. They

## Interview

ran every club, they ran the SRC - so it was a little bit hard. You walk in on a previous act and you're expected to perform.

**H:** What did you study?

**N:** I started off doing a BA and my main focus was on performance, I was in the drama school... but I lost patience after a while... Maritzburg, 1978... it was the wrong place to be.

**H:** How'd you get from drama school to here?

**N:** I didn't finish drama school, I came to Cape Town and did an ordinary BA... I got involved with film festivals, I made a film - once upon a time, a feature film. The first film festival I started off with was the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* film festival. They were wanting to bring it down to Cape Town and I was getting a little bit bored of my Honours...

**H:** Honours in what?

**N:** Honours in English. I thought I'd get my revenge on the English Department and go back. I'd made a film... we'd had five million rand to make a film, in 1987, it was shot in Craddock under enormously adverse circumstances and I got quite depressed after I'd made it... I felt reasonably happy, but I slept about 18 hours a day. And then a friend tried to get me out of my lethargy and suggested that I come back to university.

And then I ended up doing the film festival with the *Weekly Mail*, and after that I met James Polley and did film festivals with him. Then I did the Gay and Lesbian film festival, because I was quite certain that gay and lesbian films would do well...

**H:** Certainly in Cape Town.

**N:** Everywhere. I'm of the opinion that 35 percent of the population is homosexual or bisexual.

**H:** But definitely more so in Cape Town...

**N:** I don't know, I think there is as large a gay population anywhere... I think maybe there is something about the aura of Cape Town that makes it appear to be a larger profile. Look at PAGAD, I think their name is very well chosen, they could just change it to People Against Gays and Dykes, once they've gotten rid of the gangsters and drugs they'll just refocus.

It was while I was working for James Polley that I met up with Jack Lewis. We started with R35 000 and put on our first festival and now we're on our third. Jack owns this building, and Stephen Garratt approached him about taking over the premises down here for an Internet café.

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**H:** What's your opinion of the Internet?

**N:** I'll tell you what I think: if the internet had arrived in this country ten years earlier, then the government would have changed ten years ago. Really. (Heather looks dubious)

**N:** I hold an unpopular opinion - when I was dealing with the film festivals with James Polley we were still working with Apartheid and the films we wanted to show, which had anything to say about the human condition, were generally made by sensitive people who would not allow their product to come here.

For me the cultural boycott was the single most devastating thing for this country.

In my opinion, Woody Allen should have loaded up all of his films and videos and flown over here in a bomber, 20 bombers, and dropped them all on the country. They should have bombarded us with opinions and ideas that would have broken through that blinkered, shuttered, inward-looking sphere and forced us to look outwards.

**H:** But the whole point was that it was damaging for people who weren't gaining from...

**N:** But who was gaining? Science didn't diminish. Military science wasn't diminished. And what happened to us? The sensitive filmmakers didn't come here and there was this huge gap which the insensitive Americans filled. We had a solid diet of Sylvester Stallone... movies filled with this subtle racism, which just compounded opinions which were so prevalent here already.

**H:** We had a very difficult situation just before we left the country, we'd been asked

to support this big group that were coming out from England... at Sun City. But literally months before this, we'd worked with Steve van Zandt, who produced our album *30 Million Lonely People*, which was about exactly what you're talking about, that sense of isolation... But we signed an agreement in May 1985 to do this concert and in June, PW declared the next State of Emergency. At the same time, Steve, whose solo career was flagging, decided he was going to do this whole South African story and the one song was *Ain't gonna play Sun City*. So this huge conflict of interest suddenly arose...

**N:** And you compromised?

**H:** And we compromised, which led to us, who had been the *daahlings* of the media, to suddenly being the fuckin' rat-arsed dogs with no social conscience. At all. I understood what the UDF were saying to us, but it was a very difficult situation.

**N:** How did you find your latest production? (At the Take 4 Bistro, Longkloof Studios)

**H:** I worked with my husband for a long time and to work with someone like Roger Lucey was so much more relaxed - as a heterosexual woman, it's a very fine line to deal creatively with a man. There's always the potential that something could go down...

**N:** Did you get come-ons all the time when you were performing?

**H:** Yes, but my safety net was always that I was married... I'm still like that, a one-man woman. I haven't yet discovered the merits of recreational sex.

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*This seemed as good a place as any...*

# women on the edge of time

WITNESSED BY KATE WILSON CAPTURED BY ALEXANDRA MURPHY