

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's episode is a conversation about performing and coming back to God. Quite a range, huh? The transcript for this episode is available to members of *Easy Stories in English Premium*, who also get this episode early. You can join *Easy Stories in English Premium* for just a few dollars a month to get ad-free episodes and bonus content. To join, go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Support. Then you'll get a special feed with all the bonus content, where you can also find the transcript for this episode.

So recently, I've been doing lots of performing. I mentioned in a previous episode that I performed at a sauna. I did Queer Tales for Queer Folks, which was a night of improvised storytelling in a sauna in, well, Royal Victoria docks. But if you've never been to London, you probably don't know where Royal Victoria docks are. And honestly, even if you have been to London or even live in London, you may well not know where Royal Victoria Docks are. It's a kind of a strange part of London.

If you've seen London on a map, you'll know that the River Thames flows through it, and it's quite straight in the centre, but then there's a part where it gets very wiggly. It makes these little kind of curves and loops, and Royal Victoria Docks is inside one of those curves. It's in the wiggly bit. It's also right next to the cable cars.

So cable cars, um, I guess you could call it a form of transport. It's not particularly efficient though. Basically you go in a little cabin, a little vehicle, and you are carried in the air over the river. And to be honest, it's mainly a tourist attraction. When they built the cable cars, they tried to pretend that people would use it to commute to work every day. But actually, very few people use it now. So they're just desperately trying to get anyone to go on the cable cars.

I have been on them, and it was only when we got into the air that I remembered I'm afraid of heights. So, was it a fun experience? Not entirely sure.

But the sauna storytelling was really lovely. It was quite small the first time. I'm actually going to do it again, on the 29th, so when you listen to this that will be a few days afterwards. It's on Good Friday. If you don't know, Good Friday is part of Easter. It's two days before Easter Sunday and I'm looking forward to it again. I think it'll be really nice.

It's very different to do storytelling and performance in a sauna. Obviously, I have to think of a lot of factors. I have to make sure that I don't make the stories too long so that people can take breaks and cool off outside. Some stories feel more appropriate than other stories because of the sauna nature. And generally, it's a very relaxed experience, which is nice, because normally when I perform, I'm very high energy, so it's nice to have a change of pace.

So yeah, I do improvised storytelling, because that's what I'm kind of used to from teaching. Right, now I'm okay with that. I'm also getting into different kinds of performance though.

So I also performed at Tales at the Tavern. A 'tavern' is kind of an old fashioned word for a pub or an inn. Tales at the Tavern is an open mic night for storytellers. So an open mic night – mic is short for microphone – an open mic night is basically an evening at a pub. Traditionally, it's for music where anyone can come and perform. So you sign up, you get on

stage, you maybe have 10 minutes to perform. And then sometimes there's a prize for whoever's best.

It's a great way for new artists, for people who don't have so much experience, to get performing experience and just to have some fun and maybe win a bit of money. But obviously this open mic is quite unusual because it's for storytellers and it's really lovely because the storytelling community in London is quite small. It's quite a niche form of performance, but they're really lovely, really friendly, welcoming people.

So I performed at Tales at the Tavern in February, and I did some more improvised storytelling, and I'm hoping to perform again this month, which will be the day after this episode comes out, except I need to email to actually see if they have any places left still, so please, uh, cross your fingers for me. I've just been very lazy.

And, this time I'm actually planning on performing a story I've done already. So you may remember an episode of the podcast called *The Path of Pins and Needles*. I took that story and I rehearsed it a lot, and I actually already performed it at the London Esperanto Club.

If you don't know, Esperanto is a constructed language that was made in the 19th century by a Polish eye doctor designed to be the international language. There's actually a whole episode of the podcast about that history, which is *The Boy Who Hoped*. I think it's EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Hope.

So the London Esperanto Club is a very different performance space because it's a lot of old people, um, Esperantists – a lot of them are quite old generally, especially in the smaller local clubs. And it wasn't people who were maybe so used to that kind of traditional storytelling. It was also challenging because obviously I had to translate the story into Esperanto and rehearse it in Esperanto. And I'm good at Esperanto, but it's not my native language, so there was an extra element of challenge there.

But I really enjoyed performing the story. I'm really happy with how it went. If you follow me on Instagram, you probably will have seen some pictures of that. And I'm probably going to perform the same story at this open mic night, Tales of the Tavern. I also – God, I've been doing so much! I also helped out a bit at Talkaoke

So Talkaoke, that is a portmanteau. So a portmanteau is when you put two words together, into one word. For example, the countries Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg are sometimes referred to as Benelux. So Benelux is a portmanteau of the three names of those countries. And Talkaoke is a portmanteau of the words 'talk' and 'karaoke', as in singing when you're very drunk, singing very badly, and uh, everyone's too drunk to care, fortunately. That's what karaoke is, generally.

So, Talkaoke is something that an organisation called The People Speak does. It's a community-based organisation in London. My friend works there. Hi, Margot, if you happen to be listening to this! And Talkaoke is kind of like a talk show, but for the public and for communities. So they often do it at festivals.

They have a circular table and in the middle of the table sits the moderator and they have a microphone. Everyone else sits around the table. And the moderator guides the conversation topics and everyone just kind of gives their opinions. So it's like that kind of talk show you would see on TV, but anyone can get involved.

And the topics, they change a lot because people just talk about whatever they want. But it's really interesting. It's really fun. And I think it's a great way to have Discussions across age boundaries, and class boundaries, and people from different walks of life, people from different backgrounds. It's basically just a great way to have discussions in a very open context where normally maybe these people wouldn't be talking about these things together.

So I went to Talkaoke a few weeks ago, and I actually had a go at moderating. Again, if you follow me on Instagram, you might have seen the picture of that. So, I had a little headset and I had my microphone and I looked like a news reporter or something.

But it was actually really stressful being a moderator because I'm used to being a teacher, right? And when I'm teaching, I talk slowly. I listen very carefully to my students and I make sure they know that I'm listening. I try to let them say everything they need to. Sometimes you have students who talk a lot and you have to kind of cut them off. You have to interrupt them so that they don't take over the whole class, but that's usually not a problem.

But when you're moderating, you have to keep the flow going, so you have to kind of literally be looking around you 360 degrees, seeing if other people want to say something. Making sure people don't talk for too long, asking different people. It's a very difficult role. So that was really interesting to try.

The other place I've been performing, I don't know if you could really call this performing, is my church choir. So this year I started going to church regularly, to a Christian church, specifically an Anglican church, and I joined the choir. I haven't been in a choir for about 17 years, but I love singing and I'm so glad I joined. My experience has been pretty evenly divided between really enjoying the singing – singing with other people, it just gives you so much joy, and I love singing in the mass and just hearing all of our voices harmonising together. It's a wonderful feeling. It's really very good for your health, I think. There's a lot of research about the benefits of singing with people. So that's like 50 percent of my experience.

And then the other 50 percent of my experience has been frustration, mainly at myself, because I played the saxophone years ago. And so I know some stuff about music theory and reading music, but it's been such a long time, and it's a different instrument, so I've forgotten a lot of it, and so I'm having to learn and relearn lots of things about reading music and doing harmonies, and it's frustrating. I really want to be better at it, which is good. I'm very motivated, so I think I might start singing lessons, if I can afford it.

I've really wanted to take singing more seriously for years, but I never was really sure what my voice was. Like I was singing types of music and I was singing in keys that just weren't right for my voice. I was trying to sing like a pop star, like, oh yeah, that kind of stuff. But what I've realised is, I have a deep voice. Um, shockingly, I discovered at the age of 30 that I actually have quite a deep voice! Who would have thought?

So I realised, actually, I should sing with a lower and kind of bassier voice. And especially with church singing, you can go really kind of open and wide and deep. So now, I sing more like this, you know, like more operatic. I guess. But obviously, we're singing in a church, so it's more kind of church hymns.

Anyway, so on the note of the church choir, I've been connecting with religion quite deeply, you know, since the beginning of this year, I would say. Well, it's been a long, slow journey. So I was raised Catholic, Roman Catholic, which is not the most common denomination, it's not the most common type of Christianity, in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, the most common denomination of Christianity in the UK is Anglicanism, or the Church of England. If you don't know the history, basically we had a king called Henry VIII who had six wives, and he was only able to have six wives because he divorced two of them. So actually we have a rhyme that we say to remember what happened to the six wives of Henry VIII.

We say divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived, which means he divorced his first wife, he beheaded his second wife – that means he had her head chopped

off – his third wife died, he divorced his fourth wife, he beheaded his fifth wife, and his sixth wife outlived him. He died before her.

So: divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived. But the Catholic Church generally doesn't allow divorce. He wanted to divorce his first wife because he needed a son, and she couldn't give him a son. So, he tried to get an annulment, which is basically when the church allows you to separate from your husband or wife, because maybe they've cheated on you, or they've done something very bad, but the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, wouldn't allow this.

Long story short, Henry VIII created his own form of Christianity, i.e. the Church of England. That's a very simple history.

But anyway, the Church of England is the biggest church in the UK, but I was raised Catholic, and if you know anything about Catholicism, you know it's quite a serious form of Christianity. Catholics are not known for being very fun. And I went to Catholic school and let me tell you, they were pretty serious about some things. My Catholic school was actually quite relaxed and liberal. But, uh, a lot of Catholic schools and Catholic churches are not.

So, I became an atheist. I stopped believing in God when I was about 13. Basically because I realised I was gay, and I didn't feel like I could be gay and Catholic. At the time, I really thought I was being very rational and it was all about, you know, believing in God doesn't make sense rationally, blah blah blah blah. And so I chose to be an atheist.

But looking back, I think it was more about this crisis of sexuality I had. Because if I was straight, I don't know if I would have left the church. It's an interesting question. So anyway, since I was 13, for a long time, I was atheist, but I definitely felt at certain points in my life a lack. I felt this spiritual hole that I needed to fill. And a few years ago, I had this big health crisis, and I had to take a break from the podcast, and I just felt so sad and alone and weak that I needed God. Like I needed someone I could rely on, who I knew loved me unconditionally. And, you know, God ticks all those boxes. God is all those things. So I kind of came back to God.

It also helped that by that point I knew other LGBT Christians. I realised that I could practise Christianity without being part of the Catholic Church or even, you know, the Church generally. And I began to build a personal relationship with God again. And then this year I started going to a church called St John's in Waterloo and they are, ah, they're amazing! It's honestly the best church I've ever been to.

So it's an Anglican church, they're very welcoming of LGBT people, they are very diverse generally, they get involved with politics when it comes to fighting like racism and climate change. Generally it's just such a wonderful accepting place.

So really going to St John's, joining the choir, having this regular contact with God has just really given me the sense of comfort and safety and deepened my connection with God. I've been doing a lot of praying and studying the Bible, and I've finally got to that point where I pray in a very intuitive way.

Like sometimes I'm like, oh, I'm just going to like close my eyes and speak to God, basically. And I don't overthink it. It's not some like ritual thing where I do it at the same time every day. It's very spontaneous and, yeah, it feels powerful. And I really do think it's changing my life because I do get very stressed with work sometimes and with the world generally, and I've had moments recently where I've really broken down and lost hope.

And in the past, I would have sat with that feeling of despair and sadness for several days, maybe a week. But now, I'm really able to turn to God and just release all of those feelings and submit to that higher power to both thank God for what God has given me, to thank God for sending me these challenges, because I truly believe that God would not send

me challenges that I am unable to overcome, but also praying and asking for strength and to see the reason behind all these things.

I'm aware that this very spiritual language may not resonate with all of you. It may not be something that all of you recognize, understand, or like. If you're an atheist, you might hate what I'm saying. But statistically, there are more religious people in the world than non-religious. I think also recently I've really begun to understand, well, I've been studying a lot more of the history of Christianity and the Bible, and really learning a lot about, well, the historical links between Christianity and Judaism, because until about 300 AD, most Christians were Jewish and Jesus was Jewish, and all of the Old Testament is essentially Jewish texts.

So I think it's really important to recognize that Christianity has been used to oppress Jewish people, it's been used against Jewish people in recent history, but that ultimately these religions have so much in common and they have a strong shared foundation. I know there's also a lot that's shared with Islam. I don't know as much about this, but like the other day, I was reading about the understanding of Jesus within Islam, that Jesus is considered to be a great prophet, but that just, you know, he wasn't the son of God, but he was a great prophet. And I find that really interesting.

So, um, I'm becoming a bit of a religion nerd. I've been watching loads and loads of YouTube videos about like, Bible history and things like that. Oh, it feels weird to be talking about this stuff because I think for people my age, it's quite unusual to be very religious, especially if you're queer, especially if you're LGBT, but I'm meeting more and more LGBT Christians.

My church does Open Table, which is a mass for LGBT Christians once a month, and that's really cool. This is not what I expected from moving to London. I expected a lot of things. I expected artistic opportunities, and that's definitely happened since I moved, but I wasn't expecting to develop my spiritual life in this way.

But it feels good. It feels correct. I think we live in such a cynical world right now. So cynicism is when people don't want to see the positive in anything. They just want to focus on the negative and cynicism makes it very hard to enjoy things genuinely with an open heart.

I really struggle with how cynical our world is, especially, I think, if you spend a lot of time online on social media, it makes you very cynical. And religion is kind of the opposite of that, right? Like, you have to be very earnest, very open hearted, and anti-cynical to really deeply engage with any religion, and I like that because I feel like it brings me closer to myself, closer to God, and closer to the people around me.

Oh, okay. I think I'll stop there because, um, I've already committed enough violence against my voice so far! I have had a cold for about almost three weeks. It's really annoying me, but there you go. That's life.

Anyway, if you want to say anything about what I've talked about in this podcast, if you have any comments or questions, or just anything, do send me an email at Ariel@EasyStoriesInEnglish.com. Unfortunately, I realised that I had a problem with my email program, where it was just deleting a lot of emails people sent to this address. So I fixed the problem. If you sent me an email within the last month, it's possible it got deleted and I couldn't save it, but I think I managed to save all the messages that got deleted. So if you emailed me and you didn't hear anything, please do email me again and I will reply to you.

Thanks for listening to today's episode and supporting my work. I really appreciate all of you. You are just wonderful. I'm not going to advertise anything today. I just wanted to say

thank you. And remember, language learning is a marathon, not a sprint. As in the story of the tortoise and the hare, slow and steady wins the race. Chill out, relax, and listen to this podcast! See you soon.