

## **Transcript: Freedom in the City: Festival of Learning - Prof Shawn Sobers**

1

00:00:27,440 --> 00:00:29,960

In the next 10 minutes,  
we're going to be having a live performance

2

00:00:29,960 --> 00:00:32,399

right here inside the marquee.

3

00:00:32,399 --> 00:00:34,840

So can you kindly make your way forward, please?

4

00:00:34,840 --> 00:00:35,600

Thank you.

5

00:00:36,000 --> 00:00:38,880

(music plays)

6

00:00:47,439 --> 00:00:49,439

My name is Professor Shawn Sobers,

7

00:00:49,439 --> 00:00:51,880

I'm an academic at the University of West of England

8

00:00:51,880 --> 00:00:54,840

and trustee of Fairfield House Community Interest Company.

9

00:00:55,240 --> 00:00:57,799

I'm in my late 40s, a black male.

10

00:00:57,799 --> 00:01:00,359

A short beard and dreadlocks.

11

00:01:00,799 --> 00:01:04,840

A big part of my practice and research  
over the past few years

12

00:01:04,840 --> 00:01:09,280

has been Haile Selassie and the connection  
with Bath City on one side.

13

00:01:09,280 --> 00:01:15,439

And in Bristol, which is where I live now,  
Colston transatlantic slavery and that history in Bristol.

14

00:01:15,439 --> 00:01:18,120

Another aim of the festival has been about Fairfield House

15

00:01:18,120 --> 00:01:23,560

and sharing what Fairfield House is,  
And what we do beyond the walls of this building.

16

00:01:28,560 --> 00:01:30,680

I'm Pauline Swaby-Wallace.

17

00:01:30,680 --> 00:01:32,200

I work at BEMSCA

18

00:01:32,200 --> 00:01:35,840

and I've been the project manager for 27 years.

19

00:01:35,840 --> 00:01:38,000

I'm of Caribbean heritage.

20

00:01:38,000 --> 00:01:39,640

About five foot seven.

21

00:01:39,640 --> 00:01:42,159

Dark skin and I wear my hair in plaits.

22

00:01:42,439 --> 00:01:44,760

You're at Fairfield House in Bath.

23

00:01:44,760 --> 00:01:47,159

The house has about 25 rooms.

24

00:01:47,159 --> 00:01:52,480

The essence is just the warmth of it  
and the fact that his majesty lived here

25

00:01:52,480 --> 00:01:55,480

and to many, God lived in this house.

26

00:01:57,719 --> 00:01:59,079

Hello, my name's Jennifer.

27

00:01:59,079 --> 00:02:01,400

I'm the Freedom in the City Festival producer.

28

00:02:01,400 --> 00:02:04,680

I am a woman in my late 40s.

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00:02:04,680 --> 00:02:11,400

I have curly brown hair with grey bits at the front,

and I am a black woman.

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00:02:11,400 --> 00:02:15,199

So when Shawn approached me about doing this project,  
I was very keen

31

00:02:15,199 --> 00:02:18,120

because I still felt there was this relationship with Bath

32

00:02:18,120 --> 00:02:24,919

that I wanted to push the the other stories that  
were part of this really quite exciting heritage city.

33

00:02:27,520 --> 00:02:32,719

Shawn had broken it down to religion,  
brought it down to the emperor.

34

00:02:32,719 --> 00:02:36,800

He brought about talking about Ethiopia.

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00:02:36,800 --> 00:02:40,560

We've had discussions around  
Rastafari theology.

36

00:02:40,560 --> 00:02:44,000

We've had discussions about Rastafari  
contemporary arts.

37

00:02:44,000 --> 00:02:47,240

Stories like Sylvia Pankhurst  
who we know was a suffragette

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00:02:47,240 --> 00:02:48,759

was good friends with the emperor.

39

00:02:48,759 --> 00:02:50,560

There's just so many stories.

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00:02:58,120 --> 00:03:05,560

What we wanted for the billboards was to  
get a sense of the wisdom of Haile Selassie through his speeches,

41

00:03:05,560 --> 00:03:09,520

but also the importance of Hailie Selassie  
and Fairfield House,

42

00:03:09,520 --> 00:03:13,560

what that means to people locally in the city of Bath.

43

00:03:20,360 --> 00:03:27,599

And then we had resident musicians who also  
thought about the history and reflected on that.

44

00:03:29,360 --> 00:03:33,639

So Chloe Rose Laing, like she's Jamaican Welsh heritage.

45

00:03:34,360 --> 00:03:39,680

... They tried to conquer my soul ...

46

00:03:40,039 --> 00:03:43,840

And her husband, Mohammed Errebbaa,  
He's Moroccan.

47

00:03:45,960 --> 00:03:48,840

(Chloe sings ...)

48

00:03:52,439 --> 00:03:55,919

... they tried to conquer my soul ...

49

00:03:56,759 --> 00:03:59,960

We didn't want to micro manage them or stifle them.

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00:03:59,960 --> 00:04:02,680

It was very much an arm's length relationship.

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00:04:02,680 --> 00:04:06,199

You know, just engage with the festival,  
engage with the history.

52

00:04:06,199 --> 00:04:09,639

Talk to different people in the community,  
come and visit Fairfield House.

53

00:04:10,280 --> 00:04:14,479

(Musc plays. People clap a long)

54

00:04:15,039 --> 00:04:22,319

I wasn't expecting to feel quite so emotional about  
the Ethiopian Orthodox Church service at Bath Abbey.

55

00:04:22,680 --> 00:04:28,399

(Singing)

56

00:04:28,600 --> 00:04:31,360

It was done for Blattengeta Herouy,

57

00:04:31,360 --> 00:04:34,160

who was a close adviser of Haile Selassie.

58

00:04:34,279 --> 00:04:37,920

(Singing)

59

00:04:40,079 --> 00:04:45,879

It felt like in some way we were breaking down  
some barriers within Bath institutions.

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00:04:46,240 --> 00:04:49,879

(Singing, playing drums and bells)

61

00:04:50,360 --> 00:04:54,199

We're suddenly now getting a sense of  
how massive the project has been

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00:04:54,199 --> 00:04:56,839

and how varied it's been as well.

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00:04:59,839 --> 00:05:04,759

The closing event was a celebration  
really of the whole festival.

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00:05:04,759 --> 00:05:08,560

So we were able to show the film  
that Yuko Edwards made.

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00:05:09,000 --> 00:05:12,879

We commissioned her to make a film  
about the musicians and the poet,

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00:05:12,879 --> 00:05:15,319

but also to tell the story of the Pianola.

67

00:05:17,920 --> 00:05:23,000

When Haile Selassie left the house,  
all the items were again dispersed.

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00:05:23,959 --> 00:05:26,079

But this was the one item that was indigenous.

69

00:05:28,439 --> 00:05:33,680

We've opened it up and we've seen all the bits  
and pieces that makes it a pianola,

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00:05:34,079 --> 00:05:37,199

but nobody's ever even then tried to play it.

71

00:05:37,879 --> 00:05:39,920

So we had the pianola restored.

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00:05:42,839 --> 00:05:47,160

A specialist repairer worked on it.  
We got it moved back.

73

00:05:47,160 --> 00:05:50,720

What we didn't anticipate was the  
excitement and the joy

74

00:05:50,720 --> 00:05:55,399

that actually having the item working  
would add to the festival.

75

00:05:55,399 --> 00:05:58,560

And then will add to the legacy of the house.

76



00:05:58,879 --> 00:06:01,879

(Sound of pianola playing)

77

00:06:03,000 --> 00:06:08,160

And just to hear the poem that was written,  
how strong that was.

78

00:06:12,399 --> 00:06:19,839

Before them I stand and raise my hand towards  
the loaded limbs swaying in the gentle breeze.

79

00:06:20,199 --> 00:06:23,800

And with a sense of ease I breathe.

80

00:06:24,839 --> 00:06:29,120

Trees in these fair ground frame my view ahead.

81

00:06:29,120 --> 00:06:35,040

At the forefront houses and rooftops,  
streets and roads.

82

00:06:35,040 --> 00:06:38,680

Pavements and pathways that know ..... (fades out)

83

00:06:42,000 --> 00:06:46,680

(Sound of animated chatter and music playing)

84

00:06:48,720 --> 00:06:50,639

And really there's so many experts.

85

00:06:50,639 --> 00:06:54,639

I work in a university,  
but I'm under no illusion.

86

00:06:54,639 --> 00:06:57,959

I believe knowledge doesn't really sit inside the university.

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00:06:57,959 --> 00:07:02,079

Particularly knowledge like this sits in people in the community.

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00:07:02,199 --> 00:07:03,920

They're the ones with the deep knowledge.

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00:07:04,319 --> 00:07:06,680

(Clapping)

90

00:07:07,439 --> 00:07:09,319

And I think on that closing day.

91

00:07:09,319 --> 00:07:13,120

Everybody who were involved was able to share their story.

92

00:07:13,120 --> 00:07:14,519

Share their journey.

93

00:07:14,720 --> 00:07:16,480

(Music plays)

94

00:07:16,560 --> 00:07:20,240

What I love about these kind of things is the things that are not planned.

95

00:07:20,360 --> 00:07:24,480

So one of the really beautiful moments  
when Chloe was performing and singing

96

00:07:24,480 --> 00:07:27,319

that her dad, he was a reggae artist.

97

00:07:27,519 --> 00:07:33,800

(Singing)

98

00:07:34,000 --> 00:07:37,079

As soon as he came up  
and he just asked for the microphone

99

00:07:37,079 --> 00:07:41,519

and you could just hear that deep roots in his  
voice and his performance.

100

00:07:42,480 --> 00:07:45,480

... he's woken up your joy ...

101

00:07:46,079 --> 00:07:49,959

We've had people reflecting on it creatively.

102

00:07:49,959 --> 00:07:52,759

People reflecting on the history Intellectually.

103

00:07:52,759 --> 00:07:58,800

We've had billboard campaigns,  
musicians responding to the history.

104

00:07:59,519 --> 00:08:06,120

So hopefully that will bring it out of history if you like

and take it on to the future.

105

00:08:06,120 --> 00:08:12,720

(Clapping)