The Hum Podcast

Episode 20: “We Think Of Our Racism As Out Of The Ordinary”

[Theme music begins]

[Syrus’ voice begins to come in over top of music]

Syrus: And then when you hear about the sort of more horrific things like the unprecedented killing of black mad people, like Abdirahman Abdi, Andrew Loku, [indistinct], you know, those are all moments where people can get involved and get active and you need not wait for black activists to say hey this is a problem, stop killing us; hey this is a problem, stop brutalizing our children; hey this is a problem, you know, stop erasing our history on the fland, you know. Getting involved in organizing is a sort of a huge kind of, I think a huge demonstration of solidarity.

[Music increases in volume]

Male voice: You’re listening to The Hum.

[Music decreases in volume]

Gilad: Do you wear jewellery that tells your story? Delane Cooper is an incredibly talented studio jeweller and has a fascinating process of creating custom luxury pieces. Her design process includes an interview on why you want a piece created. Research, meditation and

dreaming allows her to create a distinct piece of jewellery, and not only do you get a one-of-a-kind piece of art, but a unique story where the design feels authentic to the wear. I met Delane two years ago when she designed my partner's engagement ring and I can't recommend her enough. Connect with Delane at delane.ca for your story to be told through your next piece of custom jewellery.

[Music fades out]

Simona: We'd like to welcome today Syrus Marcus Ware with us. Syrus is a Vanier Scholar, a visual artist, a community activist, a researcher, youth advocate and educator. For over twelve years, he has been the coordinator for the AGO youth program. Syrus is currently a facilitator and designer for the Cultural Leaders Lab in Toronto. He's also the inaugural artist in residence for Daniels Spectrum. Syrus is a core team member of Black Lives Matter Toronto and we are so happy to have him here today.

Syrus: Hello.

Gilad: Thanks for joining us. We've been trying to do this for a year, we're here.

Syrus: It's a busy city. It was the right time.

Gilad: It was the right time, exactly. A hundred percent. So we were talking earlier about all the worlds you navigate through: activism and you're a person of color and the queer community and the trans community. Do you ever find that you're code switching when you're navigating

through these different communities, meaning you change the way you engage or speak, depending on who you're around?

Syrus: Yeah, I think that that's kind of natural, that's just part of what it is to be living at the intersections, you know, of a bunch of different experiences. But I mean for the most part, my life is set up in such a way that I am who I am in most places, like people kind of know that what you see is what you get with me. So I mostly am a hundred percent Syrus kind of, in most situations, I found that having to leave or remove parts of myself to fit into any given situation was actually becoming a painful practice, and so I would rather just be all me all the time if I could be. But having said that, there absolutely is a certain amount of code switching that is part of my life. As an academic who is very involved in activism and in community organizing, I don't want to talk like a term paper when I'm talking to human beings, but I still have to be able to talk like a term paper in order to get through my PhD program, you know. They need me to do that, so I have to be able to do both, and it's like learning multiple languages and being able to access them when you need them. It's kind of a fascinating thing. I would definitely say recently I had the experience of being part of a play company that was putting on a play about the killing of Otto Vass. It's a play that's written by Liza Balkan and it was directed by Sarah Garton Stanley and Tanisha Taitt. And the play was about mental illness but it was also about police brutality, it was about living in Toronto, it was about the way that the court system and the court injustice system sort of eviscerates women when they go through the system. So it's a really complex play and I felt very comfortable with the company and I felt very comfortable in my role, I was drawing these large portraits in the play. But then one of the last days of rehearsal, this all mad musical choir joined us, because they were gonna be part of the play, but they had been off rehearsing on their own and this was their first sort of dress rehearsal where we were all

together, and I immediately felt different. I felt more relaxed, I felt more like myself, I felt like my people had arrived, I felt like the ways that I am constantly trying to, I guess, I wouldn't say appear sane because I'm not really that interested in that, but there are ways that you have to behave in sort of a quote unquote normal society that when you're around mad people, you kind of can relax that a little bit and you can be weird and you can be different and you can be yourself. And I felt that when the choir arrived, it's the Bruised Years Choir through Workman Arts and I just completely relaxed, so that reminded me how much I had been code switching I suppose throughout the experience of being in the play. It's as if here I was the mad person, you know, but trying to just sort of fit in with everybody's everyday and it was such a relief. It was such a joy when they arrived, you know, and they were sort of doing things that was to me very familiar and I really appreciated that.

Simona: I think that's an incredibly important feeling, especially in the everyday that we live in and you embrace your blackness at every corner of not only your personal life, but your work, which is - it's interesting to me where we know that communities of color have had a hard history with accepting the LGBTQ, also the new acronym of LGBTTIQQ2SA. What was it like embracing your real self, your true self as you started your transition as a black trans man?

Syrus: Well I think that, you know, for me when I started my transition, it was many years ago so it's a very different - it was a very different moment to be a trans person in the late 90s and early 2000s, because access was different, you know, sort of public familiarity with trans issues was really different, it was just a really different time. I mean people were still going to the gender identity clinic and still being coached to like make up a fictitious life and move to another city and cut off your friends, like this was the kind of terrible advice that the gender clinic used to

give out, so I was coming into my transition right around that time period when people were just starting to be like, wait a minute, we don't actually wanna go to the gender identity clinic and is there another way, and people were just starting to try to figure that out. But for me, you know, my experience was being in a queer women's community and organizing through the Center for Women and Trans People at U of T, which at the time had a different name, and this sort of - the kind of phrasing that we heard about was that when you transition from a woman to a man as if it was that simple and as if everybody maybe even ever identified as a woman in the beginning, but you know if you were transitioning F to M, as they used to say, you were sort of gaining a whole bunch of privilege and that was something to sort of talk about. And for me transitioning to become a black man, I in a lot of ways was gaining a lot of sort of heat score, you know, I was more likely now to be carded, more likely to be stopped by the police, more likely to be seen as threatening in public space, more likely to be just unwelcomed in that way that black masculinity is seen as always already a threat or a problem in public space. So to me that was a real challenge, trying to communicate how that was different for me than say from my white trans guy friends, who were having very different experiences after they transitioned. But I would say that I grew up and grew out of a community of trans people of color and a community of black queer people. There's a really super active and really kind of massive but deeply underground black queer community in Toronto, that is you know thousands and thousands of people who will all come out a block around, and you're sort of like where do you hang out during the rest of the year?

Simona: Where do you live? Where are you staying?

Syrus: Cuz it's like this very underground kind of community, but it is a vibrant and thriving community and I came out into that, and so my experience of being within LGBT2QQSA communities was that I was in this community of black people who were queer and trans or intersex, and who were also very much about being black or black from the Caribbean or being from the continent and embracing all of themselves, so I felt like I hit the jackpot because I came out in this community that was - that allowed for blackness and transness to be in the same conversation. My partner for many years was a black trans - is a black trans man, we ended up having a kid together, so also being partnered with someone who had such a similar experience to mine was a really beautiful thing to get to have for many years and you know. But there still are these exchanges and interactions with white LGBT community in Toronto, and when we have those exchanges, when we have those moments of meeting, whether it's at Pride or you know through some of my VLM organizing, I got to have some spicy meetups with white queers in Toronto, you know, you do see that there really is quite a deep rooted anti-blackness and racism problem within queer communities and that's something that has yet to be addressed.

Simona: And it's really funny because Pride was built off the experiences and the work of queer communities of color, and then as movements grow and have been catalysed by people of color like Marsha P. in - during Stonewall in NYC, we start to see that more that they, these movements start to become whitewashed and becomes about refinement and becomes about kind of showcasing to the world that the LGBT community is so inclusive and so open, but the reality of it is that, it is sometimes it's a dangerous place still to be a queer person of color or a queer black person.

Syrus: One hundred percent. You know, and we hear about the stories of the Compton Cafeteria Riots in the Tenderloin district in ‘66, ‘67, we hear about Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera and the Stonewall Riots, but in Toronto, you know, we had the bathhouse raids and there is still this prevalent mythology that that was a largely white experience and a largely white movement. But then when you look at archival footage like Nancy Nichols’ footage of the bathhouse raids and the rally afterwards, most of her footage is of the activism rally afterwards, you see this very fascinating scene where after, you know, people sort of gathered at Church and Wellesley and marched in a rage down to 52 division, they decided that they weren’t really done organizing or protesting and so the organizers sort of have them steer up, you know, towards Queen’s Park. And then they go and there’s this very dramatic moment where someone runs up the steps and rattles the doors of the legislature in like this ultimate rage, like how dare you have done this to us. And that person is Billy Merasty, who is the person who started Two-Spirited People of the First Nations and is an Indigenous organizer, and if that’s our culminating moment and that moment was made possible because of Indigeneity, because of this Indigenous man running up the stairs and saying enough, you know, how can we still have this be a completely white story? How come Indigenous - you know, how come there still isn’t Indigenous programming at Pride, if our Pride supposedly grew out of the bathhouse raids and at this moment in the bathhouse raids aftermath, you know, this sort of Indigenous person is taking the dramatic stand, so we have a long way to go here in terms of sort of undoing the whitewashing of the LGBT community in Toronto.

Gilad: You brought up earlier that you’re a parent of a beautiful daughter and I’m curious to know if you can guide us through the process of becoming a parent as a trans individual. What was that like for you and how much of that plays a role in how you parent your child?

Syrus: I have to say being a parent is the greatest thing of my life, it's the best decision I ever made absolutely. My daughter is really everything to me, but she was very hard to make, I would say. It was a very long process. I went through a fertility clinic and my partner, then partner at the time, we you know had our applications referred to the specialists at the fertility clinic, and they immediately sent it back and said how can two men be in need of insemination, obviously you've sent us the wrong file. And so luckily our doctor's office was very supportive and so they wrote back and they were like, no they're trans men and you know they're like, insemination is a possibility and this is, you know, maybe a little bit of pre-visit advocacy for us. By the time we actually went, they were moderately prepared to meet these two trans guys in their waiting room. Fertility clinics are super gendered places, so my experience as a person trying to get pregnant, everything was woman, woman, woman, woman, woman, and very very gendered and I found it very challenging to be in that kind of an environment, and it's such a process to go through a fertility clinic. You're going every day for something that's called psycho monitoring, so you're really enmeshed in that world. So yeah, that was my process and then eventually after going through the fertility clinic for a while, we decided to use a known donor, which is when you use somebody that you know to be a - to be your donor, and that was a wonderful experience and totally kind of transformed our experience of babymaking and it made it a lot more fun and a lot more relaxed and a lot less stressful. Being in a fertility clinic is a very stressful kind of environment and then - and then now we have this wonderful seven year old. So I would say that my experience of going through the fertility process made me very much an advocate to support trans people's right to become parents and trans people's right to become pregnant, and I've done a lot of organizing and advocacy around that because of my experience, because I was like I think it actually could be a lot better than this. I think we could

do a little better. We could just have washrooms that are marked as, you know, washrooms, rather than the women's washroom. It doesn't have to - everything doesn't have to be so gendered in those environments. As a parent, all of the things that we prepared for, we were so ready for questions about our gender, we were so ready for questions about our child's gender, we were so ready for all things gender-related in terms of parenting we prepared for. We read books, we got like organized, but we didn't really talk about the other sort of boring, mundane parenting things and those by far are the things that take up the majority of your time, like where are you gonna send your kid to school, do you send them to French immersion, what about discipline, what about bedtime, are you strict about it or are you not strict about it? So we didn't actually talk about any of the things that probably actually matter a lot more in our day to day lives. I mean in the end, gender has been relatively insignificant to Amelie.

Simona: You're an artist and that is - I'm like sitting in your living room just absolutely blown away by the energy in this space, but just the visuals in this space and art is such a powerful tool in any social movement. What does your art aim to say to the world?

Syrus: My art practice is the second best decision I ever made, aside from having Amelie. Becoming an artist was a really good decision, I love being an artist and my practice is very much about activism. It's about my experience as an activist, it's about my experience watching people put their lives on the line and sometimes burn out, so a lot of my practice is about nurturing and supporting the lives of activists. I've been doing this project for a couple of years called "activist love letters", where I get strangers to write love letters to activists and their communities, which is very much about survival and sort of nurturing of people who at their lowest point really need to get a love letter in the mail, saying keep going, you know, keep doing

the work that you're doing. I've been doing these very large portraits of activists as a way of trying to understand and get to know them better. To understand their organizing, I interview the people that I draw and I ask them questions and sort of yeah, get more of - it's a sort of way of researching and understanding them, asking them questions and then drawing them larger than life, and that's a way of celebrating and kind of giving them an act of reverence I guess. So my practice is very much about activism at this point. I don't know if it will always be about activism, but as an activist now, you know, it's such a big part of my life, of course it would make its way into my artistic practice. Having said that, I've been working on a bunch of speculative fiction. Writing lately, which is very different, it's a big departure for me and that is not ostensibly about activism, although in my futuristic narratives, people are remembering this moment of activism, but I mean - so I'm already kind of venturing off into slightly different territories and deeper waters, so we'll see kind of what I continue doing, but for right now, activism is a big part of it and I want people to want to care about the lives of activists. I want people to recognize that social change-making is labor, to understand the impact of organizing on the human body and how much we need to rejuvenate and sort of refresh and renew ourselves after putting ourselves on the frontline, and that you know as community members, whether you're on the frontline or not, we all have a role to play in supporting social movements and supporting the people in social movements, and so that's what my practice is largely about at this point.

Gilad: I'm so glad too that you called out the importance in recognizing the need for self-care or taking care of yourself when you're working in the intersection of arts and social justice, or arts and human rights. I had no idea until maybe three years into doing JAYU, how much of what I was doing or hearing or being around I carried around with me, until it knocked me off my feet and burnt me out, and I still - I think I'm still burnt out. I think I'm coming out of it now after about

three years of living through it, but question for you is how do you - how do you find time to take care of yourself? Self-care is very buzzy right now, I feel like self-care is like the buzzword of this year. How do you find time to take care of yourself while carrying around all that weight, you know, through your art and through the work you're doing in social activism, what grounds you?

Syrus: I would say, you know, for me, I feel very lucky that my art practice is very cathartic, so drawing for hours and hours a day is very cathartic for me. So I have found a lot of - that I have built in just through my work practice and self-care in, cuz getting lost in a drawing is just like heavenly, being able to just sort of you are focused on what you're doing and I'm definitely like thinking about the person while I'm drawing them, but I'm also thinking about all of these other things and it's very renewing to be able to do that. But I would say that I also take my mental health very seriously. You know, for me, as somebody who experiences depression and anxiety, like I really need to be well to be able to do this work, so I, you know, I spend a lot of time debriefing with my twin, we have like a - we talk to each other like seven times a day and that's a big part of my self-care practice is just sort of having a touch base. We call it giving each other pep talks, so we'll just lay out the situation and then my pep talk question mark, and then the other person will immediately come in with like here's why everything is gonna be great, and we just kind of do that for each other. And that's been really helpful and then spending time in the out of doors. I started going to Banff when I started teaching through the Banff Center and I met an elder there, Corleigh Powderface and she taught me a lot about the power of going for a walk in the woods and what you can do when you - what's possible when you offer up your problems to mother nature and to mother earth and, you know, what happens when you lay some of those things down in the grass and just sort of are able to kind of walk away. And so the last time that I was in Banff, I was carrying around a lot of grief from a relationship that had

ended and also just grief from some of the ways that our activism is so full on, and there's been some really hard things that have happened. I love being part of Black Lives Matter Toronto and I'm so thrilled to be involved and organizing activism, but like the stuff that happened with Pride was very taxing and very emotional, and so I've just kind of been as you say, you realize that you're carrying it around and you don't realize that you've been carrying this kind of heavy bag of stuff around. So when I was in Banff, I went for a walk in the woods and I kind of put it down, and I like literally felt the weight of putting it down and walking it down and being lighter and being more free afterwards, so being able to be in a natural environment is also a huge part of how I take care of myself.

Simona: So I'm sitting here across from you as a woman of color, my parents are originally from the Caribbean and I've kind of always, I think as we start to see the narrative of Black Lives Matter grow from what Patrisse Cullors and Alicia Garza kind of envisioned, kind of sitting in this space, I was like well I'm definitely an ally of course, I'm a person of color, I was born with that kind of badge of solidarity and that's not - that's bullshit, that's actually not true, because anti-blackness is practiced heavily in non-black communities of color. So when we're having these conversations of like how do you dismantle that type of, that type of anti-blackness and racism, the default is well that's a white person's job, that's the white community's job, when it's all of our job. So my question is what can our communities do, not you know, non-communities of color, what can - what's the work that needs to happen there that's not putting the work on the shoulders of black people, but actually doing the work ourselves?

Syrus: It's such a good question and I think that it's true, anti-blackness is really prevalent in all - it's pervasive, you know, it's pervasive. It's like, you know, Canada, Turtle Island, this north

part of Turtle Island. There's so much deeply entrenched anti-blackness that in fundamental ways that is rooted in this mythology that there aren't black people here. You know, so we're like so invisibilized that there is the perception that Canada doesn't a) have a lot of black people, that it didn't have slavery - it did, that we don't have as much of a problem with anti-blackness as in the States, for example, and that's just completely fictitious. So anti-blackness is really pervasive in Canada and as a result, it is pervasive in a lot of communities. I think where we see the need for solidarity and support is for people to, particularly in communities of color, to talk within their communities about anti-blackness and to actually make anti-blackness visible as a way of beginning the process of dismantling it, because if there's a denial that it's even happening, it's really hard to begin to think about how to dismantle it. I think also the - there are some very real steps kind of that people can get involved in that don't require the direction of black people. For example, when you hear about a five year old being handcuffed before detention in Peel region schools, that's a problem. Please take action to help us, to let the world know that that's unacceptable and that should never ever be happening, there's nothing that a five year old could ever do that would require you to handcuff them. When you hear about, you know, children being sent home from school for wearing their hair natural, when you, you know, hear about pervasive carding and sort of policing practices that specifically target black communities and black people, and then when you hear about the sort of more horrific things like the unprecedented killing of black mad people, like Abdirahman Abdi, Andrew Loku, [indistinct], you know, those are all moments where people can get involved and get active and you need not wait for black activists to say hey this is a problem, stop killing us; hey this is a problem, stop brutalizing our children; hey this is a problem, you know, stop erasing our history on the fland, you know. Getting involved in organizing is sort of a huge kind of, I think a huge demonstration of solidarity. Tiffany King writes a lot about the fungibility of blackness and how

that kind of relates to the kinds of brutality that black bodies experience on Turtle Island and I think a lot about that, you know, about how we were seen interchangeable and replaceable, and so anything that you can do that interrupts that process of fungibility, that interrupts that process of replaceability, that says actually black people your lives not only matter, but it matters to me that you exist and so therefore I'm willing to put my life on the line to ensure that we get through this together, that we make it to the finish line together. Those are really beneficial things for our cause, because we need black people's lives to matter more than just to black people. I mean it's really just frustrating in Canada, you have over-policing and targeted policing of black people, and black people are overrepresented within the prison system, you know, you see these sort of disastrous and deadly anti-blackness practices through the education system. It's just such a moment where to be black in Canada is to be such a target and we need everybody involved in this project. You know, we need everybody involved in this project for the liberation and the freedom of black people. If we are going to win, as Assata Shakur says, you know, we have to organize an act as if we are going to win, so that then again if we fall a little bit short of that, we're at least further ahead. If we're gonna actually get there, we need everybody involved in challenging anti-blackness on all fronts. But I do think it does start with talking within your own communities and addressing the anti-blackness within your say family of origin, at those awkward Thanksgiving dinners, talking about Indigeneity, talking about blackness, talking about black and Indigenous solidarity, and having those conversations I think are really key.

Simona: Definitely.

Gilad: What is it specific about Canada though that we just do not acknowledge this? When we see something happen like a video goes viral, a) people act shocked as if anti-blackness is

something that's brand new, but secondly we discredit it, we say this is not Canada, this is not happening.

Syrus: So whenever anti-blackness presents itself, it's seen as an exception to the everyday, so that's the "this is not Canada", so when someone goes off in a supermarket and screams obscenities, racist obscenities at somebody, people are like that's an exception, that doesn't happen here, even though it's happening every single week, every single day. It's just that those are the few moments that it gets recorded. We like to think of our racism as exceptional or out of the ordinary, when it's actually let's just call it the Great White North for a reason, you know, there is a deep-rooted white supremacy in Canada. So one of the things that can kind of make anti-blackness present itself like a magic trick is to say the phrase white supremacy exists in Canada, or to say the phrase there was slavery in Canada, people will freak out. People are very invested in saying that there wasn't slavery here, that this was a haven, that everybody was coming on the underground railroad. They don't talk about the fact that there were people who came on the underground railroad and then went back. Like that actually happened, there were people who came and were like fuck this, no way, I'm not staying here. This is actually just as bad or the brutality is a little bit different, but it's you know equally brutal, it's still brutality. And when you look the work of Dr. Afua Cooper and her writing about the hanging of Marie-Joseph Angélique, for example, you know, in that whole case you see about the way that anti-blackness was rooted in early like sort of colonial periods here, and that's something that people are just denying up, left, right and centre. You know those Heritage Moment commercials?

Simona: Uh.

Syrus: So they have one about the underground railroads, or they have one - that's the story that people want to believe, that we're the …

Simona: The romanticized version of white women caring so deeply about helping to free slaves.

Syrus: And if you believe the narrative, everybody's families were helping with the underground railroad. Everybody has a relative who was helping with the underground railroad, and that's just not possible. If that were true, there would have been millions of people who would have made it out of the, like through the system, not hundreds of thousands. You know, in the same way that everybody says that they went to the March on Washington and everybody says that they were at the Million Man March and everybody says that they were involved in stopping anti-blackness because it's - that's what we want to believe, but in real life no, some of your relatives were actually -

Simona: Snitches.

Syrus: Yeah, were totally in support of this system that was benefiting them. In the same way that, you know, in contemporary moments, there are ways that you benefit from anti-blackness and so therefore you don't challenge it, and when you can accept that that's happening, then we can at least start to talk about how to dismantle that and how to take that apart.

Gilad: Thanks for sharing that. I wanted to ask one last thing. I don't think we've ever talked about why we've named this podcast The Hum, but we named it The Hum because even in

silence or in any situation, but in silence too, there's always a hum in the background and it's supposed to be a metaphor for human rights injustices in general, like even when we're walking down the street, there's human rights injustices all around us, from the things we're wearing to the people that we're connected to just whatever's going on. So part of that too is language and I wanted to get your thoughts on language that is meant to oppress, like we use the words like "crazy". And I did this, I was talking about our wedding which is coming up soon, and I was like man it's crazy, it's crazy, it's coming up, it's crazy, and then I caught myself. But how prevalent is this oppressive language in our day to day, and I mean this is a tall question, how do we check ourselves, how do we move beyond that?

Syrus: It's huge, it's a huge question, but I mean I think that, you know, the mental health language like that's crazy, that's insane, that's you know, that is so so unchecked and so prevalent, and I think that there are other slurs and other kind of can sometimes be more checked than those are, but people talk about that all the time and so, you know, I as a crazy person, I'd like to reclaim that word but it's really frustrating to me because I actually don't think that the wait in line for your concert tickets was comparable to my experience of psychosis. I'm pretty sure it wasn't actually crazy in the lineup for Bruce Springsteen tickets or whatever. It was probably frustrating, it was long, but it wasn't, you know, you wandering alone in the backyard talking to buildings, which I have done, you know, when I have been at my most crazy, so the way that people kind of use those words can be really frustrating. I think how we check ourselves is just through little daily actions. It's impossible to remove racist language or homophobic language or sanist language from your vocabulary overnight. It's the kind of thing that is a process, and so I'm somebody who exists at the intersections of a lot of things. I'm somebody who experiences mental illness, I'm somebody who experiences disability, I'm

somebody who's a trans person, who's a black person, you know, I'm a queer person. There's lots of things that I am and I still mix up my words and jumble up my language and say the wrong thing all the time, but it's about recognizing in the moment when you say it, addressing it in the moment when you say it and then making a plan of how you're gonna avoid saying it again in the future and building that into your routine, rather than this false expectation that we'd just be perfect all the time and never say anything wrong, and that is kind of an unrealistic and it's a setup, you know, it does kind of make it worse. For me, as somebody who has anxiety, if I were to try really hard to do anything I guess, you know, the anxiety alone of trying to be perfect at it would make it a sure failure, so I feel like that's what we do when we try to expect ourselves to be perfect in the way that we speak and the way that we are with each other. Rather, we could just sort of have the goal of trying to be respectful and loving and supportive of each other's human life, and when we make mistakes, we make mistakes and we continue in the process of trying to support each other and ensure that each other are thriving in our human lives, and that's sort of like a different goal than I'm just never gonna say anything sanist, I'm never gonna say crazy, I'm terrible for saying that. No, rather you know, that's something that I was taught to say and I'm gonna work on saying bananas, but you know, it is what it is.

Gilad: I was so fortunate to have met you just over a year ago. We talked about how we've been trying to get you on the show for a year. And I just wanted to take this time to say just how much I admire about you.

Syrus: Thank you.

Gilad: You were a facilitator when I was in the Toronto Arts Council Leaders Lab. A lot of the times when I am facilitating workshops myself, I think to myself, and I think I've told you this, what would Syrus do right now and if I can channel whatever you would do, I do it and it usually turns out pretty well.

Syrus: Thank you [laughs].

Gilad: But I do wanna say the thing I admire most about you is how open you are, how open you are to talking about your experiences, your struggles, and also your successes, so I wanna thank you for taking that time to be open with us and our audience and for sharing about yourself.

Syrus: Thank you, thank you so much. I really am like very - I've listened to The Hum and I'm totally enamoured with this idea of bringing activism into people's daily life through listening to a podcast. It's such a great way to kind of have people get connected to organizing or to I guess the lives of organizers. I think it's such an interesting thing.

[Theme music fades in]

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson**.**

Gilad: This podcast is edited and produced by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani. Our associate producer is Ron Ma.

Simona: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

[Theme music fades out]

Gilad: Support us making more podcasts like these by donating at jayu.ca/donate.