

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MORGAN GUS

Interviewer: Julian Honkasalo

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Transcribed by George Richardson

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Julian Honkasalo: Hello, my name is Honkasalo and I will be having a conversation with (Morgan) Gus For the New York City Transit Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Libraries Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is the 20th of May and this is being recorded at Jackson Heights. So hi Gus, how are you feeling today?

Morgan Gus: Good, how are you?

Honkasalo: I'm good thanks, it's good to be here with you.

Gus: Yea.

Honkasalo: So, you are from New York, you are a native New Yorker.

Gus: Yes.

Honkasalo: Can you tell a little about what it was like to grow up in the city?

Gus: Umm ... it was, I mean it was definitely ... you know, for me it was very much of a community feeling. Is the thing I remember most about it. You know, I grew up in Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn, which for those that don't know about Carroll Gardens, it was very much an Italian neighborhood. We were ... my family is Scottish and Irish, so we were kinda like the Scottish family in the middle of all these Italians. Umm but it was definitely a lot of families a lot of people hanging out and spending time together. I remember, every summer, riding my bike up and down the block with a bunch of other kids that went to the public school or went to school with me. Umm you know, playing in the park. It was very much of like, you knew who your neighbors were. And funny enough I lived two blocks from Smith Street. Which now, is totally unrecognizable compared to what it looked like when I was a kid. You just didn't walk up Smith Street, there was nothing there. And now there's a Starbucks and restaurants, and the neighborhood has definitely changed. But uhh, the feeling that I always come back to is you know I was very much part of the melting pot when you were growing up.

Honkasalo: And do you think that has changed? You mentioned that gentrification, I mean to a certain extent Happened to that area.

Gus: Yea! I mean, I can't afford to live there anymore. [laughter] But umm, part of the reason why I like the neighborhood I'm living in now, is it has a very similar feeling. In that I know the people that own the restaurants on the block, and the bodegas that are right here. Everyone knows me and I know them, I know my mailman, I know my UPS guy! You know, like these are important connections, I feel like we've lost a little bit with technology and the way so much of our lives are online instead of actually living in reality with other people.

Honkasalo: And so when you were growing up, was gender a part of your growing up? Like when did you start hearing about trans stuff or the term trans, or the trans communities was that a part...?

Gus: I'm 37 and I didn't hear the word "trans" until I was probably 30 or 31. Which, you know, thinking about that I don't know how that was actually possible, but it was. Because I ... I thought that, you know, because I identified as a butch lesbian for a really long time. And I thought that that was my only option, I thought that I had to go through life living as a masculine woman, being unhappy about it. And that there was no other avenue for me. Umm, so that word was not on my radar. I did not have a lot of trans friends. In fact the first trans person I knowingly met, umm, was best friends with the girl I was dating at the time. And, you know, it's very interesting because he and all of his friends used male pronouns for me, even though I didn't say that was ... what I was doing. It was like they saw something in me that I didn't see yet. And I still think about that, think that that's really funny that like, how could they have known before I knew. But maybe they did I don't know. [laughter] So, but in terms of growing up with gender: there was no ... I basically feel like my mom raised me in a genderless household, whether or not she knew she was doing that. There was never any push back if I was, if I didn't want to wear a dress, I didn't have to wear a dress. You know I was basically allowed to just be myself, no matter what. Not a lot of kids get to grow up that way. So ... yea.

Honkasalo: So you went to a catholic school. How was that growing up?

Gus: Besides the uniforms? [laughter] You know religion was always a daily focus of that school and my family went to church on sundays kinda thing. We weren't crazy church goers but we were there enough. And I just remember catholic school feeling very restrictive because like it wasn't—I don't know I have a very complicated—I would say that I am a recovering catholic because I have a very complicated relationship with it. I was a devout catholic when I was a child. Like when I was three, four, five years old I loved church. I loved the whole thing. And in fact I remember this one time, it was the christmas eve mass, and my whole family was there. And I must have been two or three, and I got away from my mom, and I ran up to the altar. On the side of the altar where they had the nativity scene. And I just ran, because I wanted to be close to it. And the priest was in the middle of the sermon, and he actually stopped and went "Look at the power of God. This child just running up..." Whatever it was, I don't remember what he said. But uhh, I was really into it when I was little. And I was baptized catholic, and I went to my first communion. And I didn't end up getting confirmed because they told me I had to wear a dress. And I went "No." And I went home, and I told my mom. I said I'm done, I'm done with religion, I'm done with the church. This is not me, it's too restrictive, I'm not doing it. And she went "All right, fine."

Honkasalo: And how old were you?

Gus: Uhh, I was sixteen or seventeen at that point. But, you know once we had moved to New Jersey from Brooklyn, which happened when I was about 10 years old. We didn't go to church

nearly as often as we had before, so it wasn't that big of a shock that I didn't want to continue on with C-Catholicism ... that's a hard word to say. (laughing)

Honkasalo: So you were saying that you had the feeling that the only option for you was to be a masculine identifying lesbian? So how did you find the other ... did you find the gay community in New Jersey or how did ...

Gus: Yea! Actually that's when I .. once I came out, which I came out at 18... and I didn't come out ... I actually came out because I had found a relationship. And in order ... my mom and I had always been very close so I didn't want to keep this big secret from her. So when I finally came out to her, it was only because I was in a relationship. But then, you know, I wanted to obviously be around more gay people and figure out who my community was. So I started going out a little bit more. And at that time there were a lot of clubs that would do like, an underage night, like an 18 You'd get your hand stamped or your bracelet or whatever it was to say that you were underage so they wouldn't serve you. And I started going out a little bit but I didn't Really discover a big gay community in New Jersey until after I was 21. I actually spent those years, between 18 and 21, on tour. So I wasn't around a lot. [laughter] I just discovered a whole new world on tour of, you know, I mean every conceivable kind of person. We went everywhere, we were internationally touring so I went to Australia, I went to Europe. I've been to every continental US state, which is pretty neat. Still not Alaska or Hawaii, and that's definitely on my ... my list. But, you know, I like to say that I got my college education on that tour bus and it really ... I met people I never would have met, I saw places I never would have seen. Can't learn that from a book.

Honkasalo: So music was an important part, I mean it still is but music was an important part of you. And you're a drummer!

Gus: Well I actually, and I come from A musical family so it wasn't a question of "if" it was a question of "when." My grandfather was a professional jazz musician, He played with Harry James and Ben and Goodman and Tony Pastor and all these people. And my mom and my biological father were in a band together in the 70's. And both of my aunts are musical, one of them was on Broadway. And her daughters, umm, one is a cabaret singer and the other is Fiona Apple. I don't know if you've ever heard of her?

Honkasalo: Yea

Gus: But umm, Fiona's my cousin. So I share a lot of musical genetics, I'm the only drummer which I find funny because I'm in a family of singers. And I think I did that to rebel. [laughter] against the family of singers! But even my little sister, my little sister lives in Burlington Vermont and she's a musician. She's got a couple of music projects in and she is fantastic singer. And she's kind of who everybody calls when we need a singer on something they'll call my sister. So it's in there it's always been in there.

Honkasalo: So how was it—I'm going to get back to you being on tour. How was it like, picking up the drums? Like how did that happen? What was it like for you?

Gus: I was really bad for the first year and then it just clicked. And actually my mother didn't tell me that my biological father was a drummer until I have been playing for about 3 years. He was never never part of my childhood so you know, I am thankful for the good pieces of him that I got. And actually if you want to circle back to that I have quite an interesting story about him and I'll share later. But yeah he—well where were you going with that? [laughter] sorry.

Honkasalo: Yea, you started playing the drums and then you went on tour, but how did that happen?

Gus: I was playing in a band when I was about 16, and my guitar player and bass player were very good friends with this band called The Lunachicks Who had started in the early 90's. They were they were part of the riot girl scene, New York punk scene. And had steadily been increasing in popularity since they started. And we had the opportunity to open for them the night that they recorded their live album. So I got to meet the band, they got to see me play and you know two years later I got that kind of dream phone call that everybody wants of like "Hey we had to fire our drummer do you want the gig?" And if I don't know if you—such a ridiculous reference but that movie Rockstar with with Mark Wahlberg when when the guitar player of that metal band called him and he's "Like yeah do you want to come audition for us?" it was very much that moment of like "Oh my God one of my favorite bands is asking me to be there drummer." And like they really want me to do it. So they threw me into the deep end, I had to learn like 30 songs, because they had like 5 albums or something, and I had to learn 30 songs in about a two-and-a-half week period. And then we left for almost 2 months and we were supporting the Buzzcocks, which are a very famous English band. And we toured all around the US, and living on the tour bus doing that doing the whole life as an 18 year old my eyes were were opened to a lot of things very quickly. So yea.

Honkasalo: And this was in 1998?

Gus: 99, Yea Fall of 99.

Honkasalo: Do you want to tell more about, what the tour bus life was like to go state to state?

Gus: I actually, I don't think I've ever slept better than the sleep I got on the tour bus or something about like the rhythm of the road that just knocked me out. But you know, I mean it's intense you're on top of people all the time it's really hard to get any space. But it was I mean that's not a complaint whatsoever cause most bands never get a tour bus. So, there are some interesting rules, like you can only pee on the tour bus. And our driver was was exactly when you picked her a tour bus driver to be like. If I remember his name was Dale. And he's like 6'5 or something and just, we were all afraid of him. [laughter] We're all scared of him, but you know it was the whole thing like "dont lock yourself out of the tour bus." ... And just clean up after yourself ... I learned a lot of life lessons really fast about how to be personally responsible for my for my own stuff.

cause it was my responsibility to make sure that my gear was in working order and that I had the things I needed, and that I was eating well and not you know like, I was underage and making sure that if I was drinking I wasn't being stupid about it cause that's not ... I wouldn't want my band to get in trouble. You know, we crossed into Canada so there was a lot of like make sure all your paperwork ... it's like life skills that I would have gotten in a different way but I was really thrown into it. So, I grew up I grew up quickly.

Honkasalo: And how was the punk scene in New York City at that time?

Gus: I miss it, it was amazing, it was so much of a community again and the great thing about the punk scene, Punk communities they don't give a crap who you are. If you're into the music and you're a good person you're accepted and that's it. They don't care about gender, they don't care about sexual identity, they don't care about any of that stuff. So the fact that I had just come out was like not a big deal, it was it was nothing and in fact every Lunachicks drummer is part of the LGBT community in some way or another. So I share that history with the other two. [laughter]

Honkasalo: So you mentioned that all these people were part of the LGBT community, was it something that was a part of the music scene in general? That there was more a representation of LGBT and women or ... ?

Gus: There were definitely so many women. Especially after I left the lunachicks, I had like a five year period where I was doing ... playing with a lot of local bands trying to figure out what the next step was. And those were the kind of—I mean everybody was there to see everybody's band, it wasn't the kind of thing where you show up for like one friend and then everyone leaves. You stayed, you were there for the whole night because all of your friends were there and all of your friends were playing. And it wasn't like “oh your band is better than mine” it was like “let's get a bill together we can all be part of it.” So again it's just family community I didn't realize like how much of the through line I've had with that. But you know, there were so many all girl bands, it was mostly all girl bands at these shows. And what was really great was seeing like although the male musicians giving respect to all these female musicians in a way that like they should have all along. But you know when you've got five bands on the bill, and it's all women you have to respect that. And they did! And that was great. It was definitely—I maintained a lot of connections, I made some new connections through that. Which which brought me to my next project actually which again I got that dream phone call, it was for a band called Lez Zeppelin which is an all female Lez Zeppelin tribute. And you know, it was very much like “hey I'm the guitar player for this band, I heard this demo you did we think that you'd be perfect for this.” And I kind of went yeah this is my dream I definitely want to do nothing but Play Led Zeppelin, awesome! So again it was like well we have this tour coming up in 2 weeks, can you learn a 50 million songs and come play with us? And you know, I've broke out all my records and got to work and watched every DVD and video I can find. And set off for three and a half years doing that. All over the world.

Honkasalo: So you toured—now you were how old?

Gus: I was 25...?

Honkasalo: 25, and now you were doing ... world tours.

Gus: 25-26 yeah. I mean it's funny we were we really big in New York, we sold out every venue we played here. We were really big in Colorado because we did the ski resort scene twice a year. Two weeks in the summer, two weeks in the winter. And then our our home away from home was Germany, believe it or not. I love the Germans and their love of Led Zeppelin, it is remarkable. You know its like—And I mean, we saw a little bit when we went to Tokyo, the fanaticism of like ... people waiting in our hotel to meet us. And we're like “We’re just four people from New York what do you want with us?” You know, like. It was amazing to see the response because it was all of these people who had loved Led Zeppelin in their teenage years, and they get to relive it with us every night, and they're bringing their kids to the shows who are seeing Led Zeppelin for the fir—you know. Not claiming that we are ... we were Led Zeppelin, but we were pretty great at what we were doing. And we took the music we really tried to make it our own, and go like “Is this something that they potentially could have played that night?” like “Is this Jam in the spirit of Led Zeppelin? Let's do that.” So you know it's typical tribute bands get dressed up like the members and they try to execute everything note for note. We were going more for like “Let's take the music and our own individual musicianship and let's just see what happens with it.” And it was a beautiful thing, and it was amazing to see you know, everybody in the audience was right with us the whole time. Just like you know, hanging on every note the way that you’d want them to. And you know, when that big drum fill is coming I better nail it because there are 50 drummers in that audience that are going to critique me if I don't get it right. So the pressure of that—but it just it just drove me to do even better. There's really nothing that I found that even comes close to that in terms of like musical fulfillment.

Honkasalo: So where did you go after that?

Gus: Umm, Where did I go after that ...

Honkasalo: In terms of your music career.

Gus: I've done—Right now, I mean well since since leaving the band and now my career shift in a little bit. I'm also a dog trainer. which is funny because when I first started playing drums at 10 years old, my parents wanted to make sure that I'm serious about it so they said “we're not going to buy you a drum set but if you can if you can figure out a way to come up with half the money will chip in the other half and you'll get some drums.” So I started walking all of the neighborhood dogs in Princeton, which is which is how I came up with the money. So dogs and drums have always been the two most important things in my life and I still get to do both of those today. But yeah I walked all the neighborhood dogs to save up money for drum equipment. So in between touring I was running a dog walking business in New Jersey and and that kind of morphed into dog training. Say about 8 years ago, I met my mentor-trainer through a teaching program here in—actually it's through Animal Behavior College which is like an online education program. And then you do an in person mentorship. And a friend of mine actually knew my mentor-trainer so I

requested to work with her. And so once that happened I started training dogs full time, which is what I'm doing now. And I've been been trying to figure out my next musical project. I've done some studio work, I've done some filling gigs here and there for people. I really miss being on tour, so that's something I'm still looking for the next, the next Avenue to do that. But I've just been trying to keep myself busy, keep myself playing.

Honkasalo: Do you have currently a band?

Gus: Yeah I have, it so funny I feel like I've gone back to my roots a little bit, I'm playing all 90s cover band. Which is great cause this is the music that I learn how to play drums listening to. And I'm also in an all-queer Rage Against the Machine tribute, which is been really fun. So I feel like—and maybe this is true for everybody when they hit their mid-30s. That they you know, there's certain yearning for Nostalgia of teenage years. But like all that music still means more to me than any other music, so it was kind of natural for me to find something that would allow me to play that again. And you know I'm not I'm not really sure what the future holds for any of these things but I'm open to whatever comes.

Honkasalo: So how is it to play today? I mean you have a background with the punk scene and the end of the 90's towards the beginning of the 2000's. Also you have experience of playing before the era of the internet and Facebook and all this. Do you want to tell a little more about that?

Gus: I think it's just you know ... the internet has been great, but it's really hurt the music scene in terms of participation. Because it's very difficult to get people to go out and see your band when they know that they're going to see pictures and video of it on Facebook the next day. There's not a lot of incentive to get out there and have the experience. Which is just sad, and I think what we've seen or at least like what I've been conscious of in the last 5 years is a lot of these bands are reuniting and doing like reunion tours, which is great cause it's kind of waking up all of us. [laughter] To remember what it was like to be going to the shows all the time. It was it was much easier to go to a concert back then, it was cheaper first of all. We were all younger so we could stay up later, that wasn't the same challenge that it is now. But you know, the community feeling is not there, and actually I just went to see L7 last month. It was the first time I've ever seen them even though I've been a fan since the early 90s. And I just remember like all of these people in the audience, and you know not like I have any kind of ownership over that band or anything but going like “well where have you been for the last 20 years?” You know like this band has always meant something to me like ... it's kind of like those—what is it? Jumping on the bandwagon, it's almost like, you you want the band to still be successful but like you missed the fact that you and so many people have been fans for 20 years and then all these new people are just discovering them and your kind of like “This was mine first.” I don't know, its a little selfish to think that way! But the community feeling even at the show is not the same. It's not like you're all they are together, it's very much like “Oh I'm going to take a selfie and the bands behind me and then I'm going to get you know 150 likes on Instagram!” What does that mean? It means nothing. Put your phone down and be there for the band because they're working their asses off to entertain you. So I think, that frustrates me is still like like performing. You're giving something

to people, that's was always been a big thing about it for me is like, I am giving ... it's a gift for me to be able to play it, but it's also a gift for me to be able to give it away. And I think you miss some of that if you're too into all Social Media stuff so I feel like that part has hurt us, a lot.

Honkasalo: So how does it feel when you are when you're playing? You mention that you were you went to see L7, so you were a member of the audience ... but when you were playing, do you—is it different, your interactions with the audience in those settings or...?

Gus: I mean, being the drummer, it's always interesting cause I have, in some sense I have a barricade between me and the people cause my drums are there. I'm certainly the loudest thing on the stage. [laughter] I don't know perfect performing—Going to see a band that I really love, just makes me want to perform better because I want the people in the audience to have the same experience that those people just gave me. So it's a lot of it's a lot of that give and take, and knowing that what I'm doing is making somebody else happy. We should not—we should not be selfish with that.

Honkasalo: So how is the project with the Rage Against the Machine queer...?

Gus: Yea, it's, we have a gig coming up in a couple of weeks actually. We only play like once or twice a year. So we just started rehearsals for it, it's very exciting. But it's also, it's an interesting thing for me. And this is, I think we're my trans identity kind of plays into where my music is currently. I have known—the two bands that I am the most known for I guess, we're all female bits. And now that I'm transitioning and I don't identify as female, I guess the question for me is how do I bring my past experience and the ... you know, the history I have. How do I bring that into the present moment, because my Rage tribute is all queer, but they're all queer women. And then there's me. And so, if somebody looks at us onstage, they're not going to see that the drummer is trans, they're going to assume that I'm a lesbian. And when people talk about “Oh yeah you know Gus was the drummer of Led Zeppelin.” People are like, “I'm sorry what?” Because there they might be you know, they're seeing me for who I am today. Talking about before, and you know people forget the T in the acronym all the time! So it's kind of weird to try to explain it but it's almost like, I don't ... I don't want to erase my past, but also—My past gives the wrong impression about my present I guess it's the best way to say. So I'm still trying to figure out how to avoid having to come out all the time over and over and over again, when I talk about what I what I used to do.

Honkasalo: Do you have a community of other trans musicians or...?

Gus: Yeah I do actually play with, he lives on the west coast now but, Ryan Cassata who is a trans musician-singer. I was his drummer and actually when we play live I'm sure that I will be his drummer again. But we had an all trans band that we put together. So all four of us were trans. And that was cool because you know, if you're at the show you know when you're going to get. It's not like you show up and then you find out. So we use that definitely is a platform, we went and did some speaking engagements and performances at universities to try to help educate more about what it is to be trans, but also to be in a band with all trans people. You know, there's

nothing particularly unusual about it except that, to—you know a band is very much like a relationship and in order to to be your best you have to be able to be yourself completely. And so to be in an all trans band where my gender or my pronouns were not going to be challenged ... you know, that's I mean, that's the dream. So and, not like my my pronouns or my identity have been challenged in any of my other bands but—You know, it's kind of hard to be the only one. And the moment—like for example, like my 90s cover band. They're all they're all straight, and in order for them to work with me in a sense they have to be open to a political aspect of the band that perhaps they weren't open to before. So having me, like if I'm the only trans person in the band it becomes a political statement right away. And so you know, they have a choice whether or not they want to take that on. So that's that's always been a thing for me when I'm looking for projects is, “I'll play with you but you're going to get more than just a drummer because that's who I am.”

Honkasalo: And how is the response from the community of listeners or the fan base of the bands? Do you see—how do they react to the fact that trans is perhaps, I mean it is, today much more talked about and visible. There's visibility then not.

Gus: My Rage tribute band tends to play a lot of gigs that are very queer friendly, cause that's the scene ... that we all happen to be in. With the 90s cover band, which is called *The Secret Lives*, I'm not aware that anybody in the audience actually knows that I'm trans or not, and it's not something that we talk about, it's not something that we advertise. You know, my band members themselves are very accepting and they totally support me. But, I don't know what they say to their friends about me, in terms of when they describe the band. I would hope that they've listened to the information that I've given them and that they are representing me accurately. But you know, that's a different conversation. [laughter]

Honkasalo: At the same time, when the music scene or the punk scene started to declining from the East Village, that's about the same time as—when trans as a term, end of the 90's. When, slowly our community started getting more visibility, you're saying that on the other hand those people that you played with back then, and their fan base are not so accepting towards the fact that the member of the band is now a trans person in an all women's band. Do you, do you want to say something more about that?

Gus: Well I think I think what's interesting is, when I run into people now that I used to know in the early 2000's, it's amazing how many of us have transitioned. Honestly, I'm like “Oh okay” but yeah I have several friends who I just recently found out that they're starting to transition and I'm like “wow I mean if we had known this about each other back then I don't I don't know but ...” You know it wasn't—like the lesbians and gay men were always centered in that conversation, and if you were bisexual or transgender or even queer it was like “That's nice but that's not the focus.” You know, and I, not only was I the only—at the time, the only girl. Or not the only—but the only the only LGBT person in the band. Even if they were all women I was still the only LGBT person in the band. So it was very much like, they accept me, but I'm still othered. And so, that's what really started having me question a big piece of my gender as well, was the feeling of being othered or being other. And not being able to put my finger on why I felt that way. Because it

wasn't just like, "I'm in a room full of lesbians and I'm the most butch one here." That wasn't it, yes that happened to be true! But that wasn't what I was feeling, I was feeling like—there's something about my identity that I can't put my finger on it, I can't even verbalize what it is, but I am separate from you somehow and I don't know what that is. And that's where I think that whole thing about me feeling like I had to live like a masculine woman forever, and just be okay with that. Once I became aware of the idea of transgender identity, it was like the clouds parted and there was a rainbow. That whole moment of "Oh my God I don't have to suffer anymore, like there is actually language to describe my experience." And I think honestly we are way ahead of our language and that is what presents major problems when we talk about our community. You know, we only have certain verbal Concepts. But so so much of what's happening like at least for my experience of my own trans identity, so much of it is internal that I can't put words to. So I'm hoping that someday or language catches up with our experience but I don't know when that's going to happen.

Honkasalo: And how did you find some kind of language to express your—you said that when you discovered trans identity—how did that happen?

Gus: So, funny enough I had a trans friend who had top surgery. And I was like, "Oh I wish I could do that." Because for my entire life I was felt like my my chest was like a foreign-Just, I have a very weird way of describing it. But it's like, it was like an alien being was living on my body and I wanted it gone, and I didn't know—So I didn't understand that I didn't have to identify as Trans in order to have top surgery. And when I figured that out I went "Oh I'm doing that!" And it wasn't, I didn't have top surgery because I was trans I had top surgery to have top surgery. It was after I had surgery when I was—or actually like in the lead-up like a few months leading up to the surgery. I started to go on YouTube and I found all of these people on YouTube that were saying things that only I had ever said to myself in my head and I went: "That's interesting because I've I've always felt that way right always thought that word you know I didn't know that was possible I didn't know that other people were also feeling that way." So, I kind of, I feel like I kind of came to my trans identity backwards compared to a lot of people. But it was just this feeling of identifying with other people's experience that led me to discover my own, I guess. Which is you know, I've been on hormones now for about 14 months. And in that 14 month period I've even seen my identity shift 3 or 4 different times, so in no way do I think that I'm done or as an endpoint. You know we're all in transition for our whole lives, weather we identify as trans not! Let's not forget that! That is what it means to be a human being, is to evolve and grow. We just do it under a microscope because everybody's watching. I mean I think, once I had the—So is really the concept of like gender neutral, gender non-conforming, non-binary, that I was like "Wait a second what?" I don't have to be an unhappy woman and I don't I don't know if I feel like a man. I don't know if that's right and I wish there was some other word. Oh yeah now there is. It was kind of—I did have like a light bulb moment with that.

Honkasalo: When you mentioned the language, that there isn't words and there should be more. Do you find the music scene that you're in, or you're passion with music, do you find that as a possible avenue for articulating those experiences. I mean, I know it's music and not words. But you talk a lot about, or what I'm hearing is a lot about the different kinds of communities—and

on one hand that whole experience was a channel for you to become who you are. So in terms of where we are heading now, do you see that the music community could be more inclusive in terms of trans musicians?

Gus: I think it comes down to, you know, the very point of this project which is visibility and using our own words to describe our experience. Just by virtue of me showing up is a radical act, because I'm not afraid to talk about who I am. And even if you watch me play and you don't know that I'm trans, if you find that out I would hope that you would still—that's saying this but, I would hope that you would see me as a drummer who just happens to be transgender instead of a transgender drummer. That's really important because being trans is only part of who I am and right now it's in the forefront of my life because I'm still early in the medical part of it. So there's there's a lot of you know, I'm paying attention because I'm changing and evolving everyday and it's—I can almost feel these things happening. But I really look at music is a platform just to—just for exposure. You know, what I hope is that they would they would hear the band they would love the band it wouldn't matter who we be in the band. But that's like a privilege cause right now we have to care about who's doing what. In order to normalize the conversation we have to have more visibility, so I'm okay with being like pointing out I guess. I'm okay with somebody going “Well that drummers trans.” Because I would want the trans kid in their bedroom to go “Well if they can do it I can do it.” You know I think role models are important to the youth, I think that the youth of today especially the college age kids are the ones that are creating the language that we're going to be using. They are the ones that are keeping this engine moving forward. So I don't know...

Honkasalo: Well, thank you Gus. Is there anything else you'd like to share or forgot to mention or..?

Gus: I think in terms of, for me and my my experience with my family is important because it's—I have a really happy story of being trans. Which is not the normal and I was find that important to think about, and talk about because I want—I mean I want that for for every kid every trans kid I want them to be loved and accepted unconditionally by their parents which does not happen. So, yeah I think—I don't know how to word it but ...I think it's really important for I mean not even kids could just but just trans folks in general. That even if your chosen family is not supportive you can find family and that we need it. And we need you know, community has been such a big part of what we talked about today but—we are we are lost without community. And we have to find it someway somehow, which is the positive thing is I think the internet has brought us. It has provided a way to connect to other people even if you don't live near them, and still get support. You know and I think that's been really important for me, is even though I have my family support, to find other trans people and support each other. I don't know if that answers your question but uh—And that not—things may not always turn out the way you think they're going to turn out but you know like, this whole idea of “It does get better.” I think it does get better, but I think you have to consciously work at making it better it doesn't just happen by itself. Which is something that I've taken into every year in my life, that if I want to be successful have to do work. So for all of us I think you know, we just have to just have to keep doing the work even on the days we don't want to be the educator. Sometimes we have to, because we're

not we're not going to get to a place of trans acceptance unless we're all doing it. You know, or no. [laughter]

Honkasalo: Was there something more that you wanted to tell about your positive—you said your experience with your family?

Gus: I mean, not just family but, I'm fortunate enough that I don't—I'm not at risk for losing my job or my housing because of my identity. My boss is amazing actually because she constantly checks in about pronouns, she's like "We still we still good with the pronouns is there is there anything that I can do to help with this?" We had a company meeting, it's a small company, but we had a company meeting to talk about what to do if clients misgender me and how to handle that. And what to do if clients ask questions and everybody was very open and they were really, they were really receptive to being educated in that moment which is great. You know and you don't always think about gender identity when you think about dog training, like I don't know the last—when does that ever come up? But it's a very interesting experience to go into somebody's house who's paying you to be there to tell them what to do, and what do you do when you get misgendered? Like—I'm bringing this up because this happens to me quite frequently. I'll go into a home and usually it's a person with you know, a fair amount of of money. And they call me she or they or they say something, and I have to make the choice then "Am I going to come out right now and make this—and make my job about my gender? Or am I just going to deal with being misgendered and do my job the best I can. And any pain that comes from that I'll just deal with it later?" And I don't really have an answer yet, it's it's kind of—it differs based on the situation based on how safe I feel. But you know, I think it's most people, when they come out of work, they probably only have to do it the one time. Where I feel like I'm doing it 10 times a day. And in a room full of my students, I might have 5 clients they're calling me "he" and 5 clients that are calling me "she." And you know, so I have asked my boss to kind of take the lead, and if she uses my pronouns correctly then other people will follow suit. And you know, it's been a slow change, but at the end of the day I know that I'm still going to have a job. [laughter] I'm not at risk for losing that. Which kind of made coming out a lot easier.

Honkasalo: Yea, thank you. And do you want to add something else?

Gus: I think I'm good.

Honkasalo: Well thanks, Gus. It's been really nice talking to you, really appreciate your time.