

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Stephen Endelman Transcript

Announcer: [00:00:04] Welcome to The Dots. A podcast about connecting. The Dots is a series of conversations with artists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and change makers who talk about how they connect the dots and bring things together for their community, company, and themselves for a better life. Now your host, Digital Strategist speaker, and entrepreneur Kathleen Buczko.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:31] Musician, composer, teacher, and activist Stephen Endelman has blazed trails, composed the music that is the soundtrack to our lives, all while surviving his past and holding those demons accountable. Stephen, welcome to The Dots.

Stephen Endelman: [00:00:46] Thank you very much.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:48] I appreciate you taking the time. You've had quite a journey, sir. Let's start at the beginning. When did you start playing music?

Stephen Endelman: [00:00:58] I started playing when I was about 8 years old: clarinet in London and then became clarinet and piano and that then led me to a boarding school where I was a music scholar; Carmel College and I left there when I was about 14 or 15. I went to Purcell School. I went from Purcell School to Guildhall and then graduate school then just carry on down the line.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:30] You're quite an accomplished musician and teacher--I found it fascinating--your work in New York teaching students about classical music. Tell us a little bit about that journey.

Stephen Endelman: [00:01:44] Well the teaching started in England when I got back from graduate school; I needed a job. And prior to going to graduate school while I was at Guildhall I got involved with something called musical performance and communication skills which was basically how professional musicians--orchestral players mainly--could interact with a normal and regular set of people within school, college, university, prison.. all kinds of society. So that an orchestral player who would normally be playing with a penguin suit in an orchestra, how does he interact? What can he bring to his regular community? So I got involved with that and that led when I went to New York, to me being hired. Well first of all it led me to be hired in London to be head of music dance and drama. But I was a terrible dancer. I never took dance, actually.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:44] I'm a terrible dancer, too, so I completely relate.

Stephen Endelman: [00:02:46] Not everything can work. So that led to being the head of music dance and drama at a big secondary school--big public school--in England and staying in London and then I left went to New York to pursue my career in film composition and I ended up at the Metropolitan Opera as a composer in residence there, for the most part working with young people in creating their own original operas. And I'm still teaching believe it or not, once a week I teach undergraduates at the Guildhall now. I've been doing that for the last year and a half. In fact one of them is about to embark on a whole new life. He graduates in July and in August is moving to Los Angeles and he'll be my assistant intern to start with and trying to create a whole world for him. So his life ends up out here.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:44] That's amazing that's - how so cool. You see the full breadth of the work that you've done. I love that you are classical musicians people in penguin suits, because they somehow seem so untouchable.

Stephen Endelman: [00:03:59] That's the point isn't it? That's been the problem in a way for a lot of people. They're never able to... A lot of people feel for whatever reason that they can't touch classical music because it's untouchable. You can't watch it in an arena. You have to watch in a concert hall. There are limited seats. People look we weird. They wear suits--they wear penguins suits--but really if you did away with all that and you just closed your eyes and listen to the music, then you can experience so much. You can experience the journey that a piece of symphonic chamber music will take you on.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:40] It can be transformative.

Stephen Endelman: [00:04:42] I believe it is transformative. I believe the Greeks got it right when they said that music and food could cure you.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:52] Well you've been cured of a couple of different things. You've faced illness and you've faced surviving. So let's talk about those parts of your journey.

Stephen Endelman: [00:05:10] You know that whole--I never, you know that that word survivor always has a really... That's a bittersweet word for me, you know. It really is, because I grew up post-war England late 60s, 70s. My grandparents--my grandfathers have both been in the Army. My grandmothers had worked in factories. My mother was born in the blitz in Coventry. My father had been shipped off as a three-year-old to Wales for three years because his mother couldn't cope with him while her father was his father-her husband--my grandfather was in North Africa four and a half years in a you know in the British Army. So, they... and my father's family were Holocaust survivors. They'd been in years [Bergen-]Belsen. My concept of the word survivor was strictly if you had survived the concentration camp, if you had survived a prisoner of war camp like my grandfather's brother was in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in Burma for three years. So those were survivors. And then suddenly I learnt--that was seven years, nearly seven years ago now--it was just before or just after my bone marrow transplant. I was in the hospital and a commercial came on and it was like all these famous sports people who had survived an aspect of cancer and there they were talking about their experience having survived cancer and there I was having just being told that, well I wasn't "survived" yet, I was still about to have my bone marrow or whatever--it took another five years to say you're a survivor or cured or whatever. But I was told I was a survivor. So that word in itself has a bitter sweet thing to it. I had then... a process took place where I had...because I was in a coma for three months, it led people to ask me questions. And I was uncomfortable with the questions they were asking because it made no sense to me. It made no sense to me. "Did I see God?" I was incubated. I was in ICU. I did all that. Did I see God? Did I see light? Did I feel... Did I go to heaven? Is there a heaven and a hell? And random people would ask me questions like that. And I started to really think about the connections between my experience as a young man, as a child, as an 11 year old boy, my cancer, where I am today, things that have happened in my life. Music actually. And music. Yes. I have survived both a very rare form of brain cancer which put me in the hospital for nearly a year which included all that chemotherapy that a body can have followed by all the chemotherapy that you can have for a bone marrow transplant. And I started to realize that, through various other practices, that I had repressed feelings that I had had for many, many years because I was the victim. I had been the victim of child sexual abuse. And I've never even said it like that till about two years ago. Two years ago when I was confronted with my abuser in a court in England. And I went back to England to be part of the trial because I thought he had died 15, 16 years before that because I was told he was dead but, he hadn't died and the police...he had been reported to the police and then the police in England began an investigation

and I was in second person they spoke to and I said he's dead. "No, he's not dead he's very much alive, living on Pratt-Delancy. So then it took another two years of intense police investigation to gather eight boys, who are now men, my age and older and younger, to stand up and say, yes actually did abuse us, abused me, abused them, and then only three of us actually went to court in the end. And I flew from L.A. I was able to do that and we put him in prison for the rest of his life. He appealed and they just said, "No, there's no appeal in this case. You're as guilty as they come." So then I learned, "Oh. So now you're a survivor of child sexual abuse as well." So, I thought, "Wow. So I've survived these two things." I have to believe in my heart and I do believe that music has played a--and I don't mean--I mean in a really basic way, music has played a fundamental part in my wellness. My recovery and my wellness. To an extraordinary point, you know, certain pieces and I mean clinically there are certain pieces of music that I would not allow--NOT to be played on a loop in my hospital bed. Five pieces.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:37] What are those pieces?

Stephen Endelman: [00:10:38] They are basically certain slow movements from certain symphonies. And when I think about it now and I, of course I have analyzed it subsequently, but it's basically the two slow movements from two Mahler symphonies the third, excuse me, the third and the fifth. A contemporary Symphony by the Polish composer Gorecki; his third symphony. And funnily enough, and I don't know why this one, the adagio for strings by Samuel Barber.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:28] I think because too many people play it.

Stephen Endelman: [00:11:33] I don't know why that one because that's kind of the odd one out. But because you know there's the Henry corrected third symphony makes sense because it's magnificent and also because it has a voice in it. And I've always been very very connected to the voice. But the tempos are not dissimilar. They have a slow pulse. And I think that's all part of it--was all part of the process for me.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:10] So it touched something very deep.

Stephen Endelman: [00:12:13] And it still does. And when I listen to it today--I had a group of students on their career day in my studio now down in Venice. And I said, "What's your favourite piece of music?" You know many people will say, "I'll play you mine," and of course I play the slow movement of Mahler's third symphony. And so you know for me, that worked.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:53] So how did you get to that point? How did you find your voice?

Stephen Endelman: [00:13:00] How did I find my voice? In what way do you mean?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:06] You've survived cancer and you lived through a coma and, full disclosure, that's something we both share if we remember correctly. You come back to the root of who you are through music and begin to heal yourself.

Stephen Endelman: [00:13:27] Right.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:28] And you recognize that you also have survived. You are not part of a concentration camp or a prisoner of war, but you were imprisoned by this memory.

Stephen Endelman: [00:13:44] Well I think that that's true. There are two sides to that. Very true. First of all, I literally have written about the relationship between being in a hospital bed, unable to leave the hospital bed, and a prison. Those two things can be very connected. And then of course, the prison that you've--the self-imposed prison--of abuse as a 11 to 13 year old and the effects of that abuse on one's psychology, personality, how you move through the world. And that is a process. There is no...it's like anything. There are no fixes. And there are no cures. There's no... Everybody said to me when I came back from the trial in England, "You must have reached closure on this now." That is an offensive word to me. There is no closure.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:41] No. It is who you are.

Stephen Endelman: [00:14:41] There is no closure. It's where you feel comfortable being... And can you feel comfortable with yourself and who you are? And that is a process. And I realize now, every day that, yes, you think you've got that far but then something will trigger something that will put you back. Today I received the transcript of my... I have an attorney in England, and that attorney was at the trial the whole time. And what I didn't know is he was taking copious notes. And he decided to have those notes written up--completely written up. And there were 30 pages. I started reading this morning and it sent me down the spiral of... You know, a very very dark, very dark place because the biggest thing that you feel after that child sexual abuse--of being abused is just--there are feelings of guilt, the feelings of, "Why didn't I do--not do that? Why didn't I know better?" Now the psychologists that I've seen, and I've read a lot about it, there's all the logical reason as to why. That's why the age of consent is 18 because before you're 18, you really don't have the emotional wherewithal to deal with certain things. So now you're an adult. You're not 18 anymore and you're looking back over your life and you wonder, 'Well, why did I let this happen? Why? Did I enjoy it?' All those kinds of questions. Now, the cancer of course is different. Cancer, I have no choice. It was just, that's what happened to me. But in between, the abuse and the cancer I had, over many years--first of all, I'd never talked about it. I'd certainly never done any therapy with it whatsoever. I had moved through life pretty much with a big jovial face, a big jovial attitude, big happy gregarious, interactive human being, reasonably successful, doing what he wants, for the most part. But actually, that wasn't really me; that was veneer of me. That's the me everybody knows. The me--the internal me--spent a lot of time crying and feeling very alone. You know how they say you can feel alone in a crowd? You feel alone in a marriage, you can feel alone when everybody else loves you? That's me. That's how I feel inside. Now, of course, I have learned to grow. That because that's what an abuser does to you. He takes away, or she, but in this case obviously it was a he, takes away. He takes away your dignity. He takes away your youth, your innocence, for his own sexual gratification. He doesn't... he doesn't ask your permission because you know no better. He doesn't say, "Is it okay if I do this to you?" He's going to do it to you because it is his right and he has created an environment whereby if he doesn't--if you don't--if you'd said no, you would be in trouble. And also he's created an environment that, some of the attention you're receiving, you actually like. So it's a terrible, terrible manipulation which is what it is. Odious and deceitful and it's disgusting but it leaves the victim quite helpless as to know how to deal. So there I go through life happy and jovial working the room. And then I get--I got so miserable and so sad at my heart that I literally asked to die. And then I fell asleep. And then miraculously, I awoke.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:48] Right. Right.

Stephen Endelman: [00:18:48] And then I wanted to get into my regular life. That's another whole challenge. For anybody listening, getting back to regular life after all that, and not even having--now haven't even put the full two and two together. I'm still in...I'm just waking up from my coma. I'm getting all this chemotherapy and having a bone marrow transplant. I've been away for a year.

Seven months, well it's a year all together in two different hospitals. So now I've been away. So now I've got to come back. That was actually--that's been the--that's been the biggest--That's been one of--that is a huge challenge remaining both psychologically and physically healthy is another challenge.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:25] I do want to talk about, Stephen, coming out of that coma.

Stephen Endelman: [00:20:32] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:33] You are right, in that people get fascinated that..."Did you go towards the light? Did you see, you know, departed..."

Stephen Endelman: [00:20:41] You you want to know?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:43] Yes.

Stephen Endelman: [00:20:43] What do you want to know? You know, I'll tell you what I know now. I've never said this publicly. But for you Kathleen, because I know you, because we share the Good Shepherd [Shelter], because I know you I will tell you. First of all when people ask me, did I see the Son. The answer is no, I didn't. Did I learn things? Yes I did. Did I learn...people...people...Occasionally people ask me simple questions like, "What do you know?" That's a reasonable question. What do you know? What I know is this: that Christmas carol, Silent night holy night. The last phrase of that, "Sleep in heavenly peace." That is what heaven is. Heaven is the ultimate in peace. You cannot be touched. You cannot be hurt. You cannot be abused. It is just that it is the most blissful of sleep. The most blissful, perfect, peaceful sleep. Okay well that's pretty interesting. But what about.. what about you know, the Garden of Eden. I don't know that I ever did, but I don't think that's the case. I think all that happens is that our energy is now at peace. It circulates. And this is where...and this is kind of where I feel like...and whoever we've connected with in our mortal lives we can reconnect with in this other place, in these other lives, whatever they are. I don't know, but I know one thing no one would ever come back from a near death experience and said I wish I had another. I don't I wish I had another half a million bucks, it would have been so much more fun. I wish I could have--if I'd had had more money, I'd have bought that car or whatever. No one has ever done that. That's rubbish. So I think that's true, I also--because people would get very upset with me because they would want to know why in the last seven years have I literally made a career out of talking to random strangers. Anybody I can talk to. Fascinated by people, because I realized that that's what we're supposed to do in this life. We are supposed to connect with our--with other human beings. That's what we were designed to do. We were designed to connect with other people, to learn about those people, to learn to...to learn to coexist with these people, to learn to make music with these people, to talk, to sing, to dance, to hug, to love. That's what a function--that it's what our functioning should be about. Unfortunately, we find ourselves pushed away from that quite often. But in my very core, in my very very core, that is what I learned.

The experience that I gained from being in a coma, waking up and going through all that lunacy really was that we have to connect on the deepest level that we can with anybody. That will return and return and return. We have to live each day to the maximum. You cannot look behind. Don't go backwards. Just go forward. Anything tacking to this in the past is a learning tool to the next thing. Check yourself. You have to check yourself all the time. All lessons. Everything is a lesson to the next thing. If I could practice a little bit of what I am saying and I try hard to practice it. Of course not always easy.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:45] Yeah that was my question. How are you putting it into practice these days? That's not easy. That's not easy.

Stephen Endelman: [00:24:50] Well there's a couple of things I'm doing. There's some practical things that I do and some not practical things that I do. The not practical things probably as I make a point of if I am sitting at a table... I sat at a table at lunch today on my own, minding my own business. I heard somebody speak with a British accent and that was it. That was my lead in. "Hello, what are you doing here?" And we got chatting. I would probably never see that person again but just for that one moment, I learnt a lot about them. They learnt something about me and a connection was made. That doesn't mean I gave my telephone number or my email; I didn't. So I made a point this time of saying you know, it's been a pleasure meeting you. Goodbye. That's all I needed. It made me happy, it made me feel like I'd done something positive.

Stephen Endelman: [00:25:49] In my Rolodex, I try to keep it to a minimum otherwise it would be absolute job-box clog up, but on a more practical level, I put what I'm doing. I wrote a book which I've not had published. It's still a work in progress and it will be for a while. But I did write a screenplay, a short screenplay, which has been worked on. I have raised money to shoot that in the next month or so. The money is sitting there waiting for us to put the rest of it together. And that will not be a standalone film called a man... "A Boy, A Man, and His Kite." And it's going to be both a standalone film that will probably then hopefully be made, well probably, no, will hopefully be made into a feature film. But it's also designed to begin a foundation that deals with male sexual abuse and consent. How boys are not taught, well boys boys aren't taught to speak openly anyway from an early age, A. And B, we don't teach children how to ask and for people's consent. We don't teach boys how to ask girls for their consent. We just teach-- we don't teach. We teach sex ed, but what we don't do is teach a boy, a young man, how A, he should ask for whatever it is at the age appropriate whatever that is, and when he said--when a girl says no to him, that's okay. It's okay when somebody said no. It doesn't mean they don't like you. It doesn't mean--it means that they're not ready for what you may want. And that's... Those are all things that I wasn't taught. That was all taken from me, but I absolutely see the value in that. So the idea is, you know to come to... But I think the biggest thing is to... We won't get ...so much of this has gone on over the years so and still is going on, but if you don't expose it, if you don't talk about it, if you don't have open conversations with people, if you don't use words like consent-- is kind of a buzzword right now-- but if you don't use words that have meaning to people, that people understand, then it will just carry on and perpetuate. It's not okay for men, young adults to assume that they can touch a girl. It's just not okay. It's also not okay for a man to think he can touch another boy. It's not okay. It's wrong and we need to talk about it because that will explode--expose how wrong it is. And if you expose it enough times it's a poison that you can get rid of. Although I'm not sure you can really get rid of it because it is a disease--it's a disease. For a man to want to abuse a child is a disease. It's a sickness--a sickness that I don't know that you can...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:17] Well I think that there are things that, when you bring them to light, there are ways then to begin to deal with those things. And it is about...it is about sharing. It is about in many ways kind of getting to the core of the heart. So much of the music that touched you as you were going through your healing it was because--and you continue to heal--is that it touches you in

a deep and profound way.

Stephen Endelman: [00:29:44] Oh it really does. I mean for me, not for everybody. Other people might listen to a pop song that reminds them of something else.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:52] Right. Exactly.

Stephen Endelman: [00:29:54] But for me, the pieces that I chose for my music in the hospital. Just. They just were right for me. And I actually, I think however that's probably, you know now with functional MRI and things like that, I mean, I might have been doing some research into that but I think you could probably see in the brain how the Mahler did definitely, it did affect me, it affected me in a very profound way.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:30:27] Absolutely. So, you're working on... What's next? What's out there in the professional world for you?

Stephen Endelman: [00:30:36] Okay so right now I'm in my new studio in Venice with my.. with the brilliant, creative Swampy Marsh--Jeff "Swampy" Marsh. It's my first time in animation. He created "Phineas and Ferb." He's great. He's awesome. We have a studio here; writers, animators, producers, and me in one end of my music studio doing a new show based on a New York Times best selling book "Pete The Cat." It's a music show.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:12] I love "Pete the Cat."

Stephen Endelman: [00:31:13] It's literally a music from beginning to end. And Pete, he learns play guitar and write songs and then he forms a band and we have written a real music show. So I brought in Elvis Costello, Diana Krall, we have k.t. Tunstall, we have Don Was. We have-- for Season 2 we have Alanis Morissette, Dave Matthews, we haven't really amazing amazing people performing and I'm writing/co-writing all the songs currently. There are 36 songs in the first 14 episodes and then, so there's 36 and 14 episodes and it's--it's pretty awesome actually. It's really exciting.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:32:03] It sounds incredible.

Stephen Endelman: [00:32:05] And then, and then the other thing that is interesting is that when I woke up from my coma I wanted two things. One was "Fawlty Towers" and one was "Upstairs, Downstairs" and then through a bizarre kind of quirk, I ended up getting the rights for "Upstairs, Downstairs" to turn into a musical. So I am in the process of writing that with two other people-- Brits who live out here. Both very well-known in their own--in their own right. So we're doing that now. And then with my movie which is...so that's professionally and, you know, I'll probably do a movie this summer. Whatever. I mean the real big things are "Pete the Cat," "A Boy, A Man and A Kite" which is my movie, and "Upstairs, Downstairs" which is my project.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:32:56] You're amazing, Stephen.

Stephen Endelman: [00:33:00] Not really.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:33:00] Yeah you are. You're pretty cool.

Stephen Endelman: [00:33:01] Stop it.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:33:01] You're bringing music. You're bringing the light to everybody and

sharing... sharing your story and building the healing.

Stephen Endelman: [00:33:12] I hope so. That's the plan, isn't it?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:33:14] Yeah it's a great plan and I'm happy to have been a little bit of a part of it and I want to thank you so much for being on The Dots.

Stephen Endelman: [00:33:21] Thank you, Kathleen, for having me, that's really, really nice. Thank you. Thank you.

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