

# WRITERS MOSAIC

---

Nathan Bryon

In Conversation with Jonny Wright

'I don't even care what people think. This is my love letter to London. I don't care. This is it. I love it. That's it.'

— Nathan Bryon

Presenter: This is *WritersMosaic*, In Conversation. Screenwriter Jonny Wright talks to fellow screenwriter and actor Nathan Bryon about being a multi-hyphenate.

Jonny Wright (JW): Hi, this is Jonny Wright. I'm here with *WritersMosaic* and I'm interviewing the amazing Nathan Bryon. How are you doing, bro?

Nathan Bryon (NB): I'm good, man. How are you?

JW: I'm good as well. I mean, how do I introduce you? I was going to say writer. I've heard you talk about being a multi-hyphenate. So writer, actor, director. I think we met acting. I think we met through Rikki Beadle-Blair.

NB: Yeah, we did, man. I love that guy.

JW: Yeah, he is—he's been amazing. I mean, he's been great for my own career. In fact, kind of pushing me away from acting a little bit and towards writing because he said that's—I just remember he said, 'You've got more momentum going with writing at the moment.'

NB: I think he's a multi-hyphenate. So I think even me being around him at a young age was very much, there's nothing you can't do. If you want to write a movie, write a movie. If you want to write a play, write a play. He believed in no holds barred and I think that helps, right?

JW: Yeah, exactly. And so, has there been other people—we're just diving right in here, but have there been other people like Rikki in your life that have made you become this amazing writer that you are?

NB: Hah. Yeah, there's weirdly been loads. I was really lucky when I came in that—the first thing I did coming into the game, acting, writing, was find mentors. So I had Matthew Byam Shaw, who is one of the biggest West End music producers. He'd done *Bob Marley*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. You name a big West End musical, he's produced it. Got to sit down with him from a young age and just vomit and talk to him all the time about what I wanted to do. And he'd help me try and work out how I could do that. And then I had a great—all these people are still in my life. Lucy Pardee, who was a really amazing casting director who cast *Attack the Block*, and she cast *American Honey* and *Rocks*. And she's just done loads of amazing things. And I'd always sit with her. And I was at that time—I was about 17, 18, where I was just doing everything anyway. And I was acting I think, or just trying to get an agent or whatever. And I said, 'Look, could I have a coffee with you? I want to talk to you about an idea I've got for myself.' Because I didn't really understand the industry. As a writer, you probably wouldn't go to a casting director now. But actually, why not? Because I think everybody knows casting directors have a well of knowledge. So that's what Lucy—

JW: I think that naivety of youth is beautiful. We should do it more as—

NB: Yeah, I think we should do it more. I think it's something that we actually—as we get older, we worry more about who's the right person to talk to and what will they think if I ask this question. But actually—

JW: And who's the right fit for the idea? I remember sending plays out to really inappropriate theatres—

NB: Yeah.

JW: —That would never put it on. But actually, I get good feedback or sometimes even get into writing groups with those theatres.

NB: But it's that, isn't it? It's exactly that. It's just about—which I still think we should all do, just—you've got to have all those plates spinning at once.

JW: We met through Rikki Beadle-Blair doing some act. I don't know even who was acting in what, but that's how we met. But then we started working together professionally through doing *Little Darlings*, which is a kids' show based on a Jacqueline Wilson book. And we did that with Kindle Entertainment. And so how did you find—not how did you find working with me. For context, you've done *Little Darlings*, which is on Sky Kids and Sky Cinema. You do *Bloods*, which is a comedy on Sky. You've got a book called *Look Up*, which is a children's book. And amazing illustrations in that as well. You've written episodes on lots of different other people's shows. And you've been co-writing other things and children's TV, children's books.

How do you find all the different hats? How do you find the different things? Firstly, how do you find writing on your own compared to writing with someone else?

NB: Writing on your own, there's good days and there's bad days, right? Some days are like, *oh, I'm the best writer in the world*. And there's some days you're like, *I'm terrible. Why has anybody paid me to do this? How can I get out of this? Maybe I fake my death*. So I think there's good days and bad days of writing on your own. And regarding the feature film I've co-written with a guy called Tom Melia, who's fantastic. That, again, was a joy to write. We were always on Zoom and cafes. We got to meet up. So I really enjoy collaborating, like how you and I work together. It was really collaborative. We get to go into the office and talk and make something. I mean, writing on your own is great but it's lonely. And actually, all writing at the end of the day is collaborative anyway because once you start making whatever you're writing, you need a team of people to bring it together. So I like the bit where the team of people come on as opposed to the bit where I'm sat on my own for God knows how long.

JW: How do you find acting in something? And it was a substantial part as well, and you were amazing in it. How do you find acting in your own thing?

NB: It's something I've always wanted to do that I'm just too shy to put myself forward for. I would've put my hat forward for *Bloods* at the time, it just—I think I went through—I'm just shy. So generally, if I just—I don't know, I'm not one of those people to be—throw my own hat into the ring. I'm getting better at it, like with *Little Darlings*. But then—times where I have put my hat forward for stuff and it's gone

wrong. And so now I'm getting better at just being like, 'No, no, I want to do this.' 'Cause I just realise if you don't say, you don't get. And also I'm—I've been rejected from things before and the hurt doesn't actually hurt that much. Or if it does, you can rage. You'll rage and cuss everyone out, and then you'll get over it. Yeah, with *Little Darlings*, what was actually—it was one of my favourite jobs I've ever done because I was struggling with confidence in the acting department. And they kind of came to me and said, 'We love what you do, come and do it here.' And that for me has never happened before. And I—hopefully it will happen again. But what I learned from that is (a) I need to put myself forward. And (b) start writing myself more parts, and have more confidence in myself. My agent said something I think we can all learn is—I don't know about you but sometimes you think—I think, *oh, there'll be someone better than me who can do that*'. And my agent sent this really great poem, my acting agent, Malcolm. And he's basically—just to sum up the poem, it just said, 'well, why not you? Why not you, though?'

JW: For the listeners as well, I want to get an insight into what it's like to have something which has been multiple seasons. So *Bloods*, having two seasons and is getting a third?

NB: We're waiting for confirmation but we've started writing it, which is positive.

JW: So working as if it's going to get a third. So—but how's that—even having two seasons, how's that been? What's been the difference of having just a one-season thing and then going into a second? And what's that experience like of getting that recommission?

NB: Yeah, man. I think it's—I'd say *Bloods* is the hardest I've ever worked on anything. And biggest eye-opener, one of the biggest dreams come true. I remember one of the first moments that we had, what did I say? Busted our balls on series one. It was in the height of COVID. It was—when I first started writing series one, I'd never written a 30-minute script. So—and that's not to say, 'Oh, I'm really good.' Oh, it's the opposite. What I'm trying to say is that, series one, I had so much help from my producer, Seb Barwell. Paul Doolin, who was—he sort of, I guess I'd say he script-doctored—helped episode one, and then wrote the other three episodes in the series. And we kind of co-wrote on top of each other's work because I had some of the voices of some characters, he had some of the other. So series one was incredible, a massive learning experience. Deflating at times when you feel like you're not—like I've said in some of the articles I've written for this, where I just want to be good straight away. I don't want to—I handed in my first draft of episode one of *Bloods* and it was like 47 pages. And Seb was like, 'Look, there's loads of good stuff in here, we just need to get—' And then it's finding at least three funny jokes a page. And he just taught me kind of how to do it. So yeah, series one, biggest learning curve, amazing to see people react to our work. Then I was pretty much on set near enough every day for when series one was filmed. That was another amazing learning curve, seeing your work come to life, seeing what a scene needs. Because I think, if you're always at your laptop and you're not on set, you don't see actors bring your scene to life. And you also realise that a scene's not that long, it's about a minute, two minutes. So you need to move the story on, you need it to be funny as fuck, and you need there to be a reason for it. And you see that. And once you see two actors or three actors doing it, and it's working, you're like, *that's why I had to do*

*10 drafts of that before because I wasn't getting those things. Yeah, series two was a ride of a lifetime and I didn't know if I was going to get to the end because I didn't know if I was good enough. And on top of doing series two of *Bloods*, I was doing *Little Darlings*, and we were shooting my movie, all at the same time. So it was like—*

JW: I remember you said you needed a holiday. So you've got three very different projects. You've got a feature film, BBC feature film, you've got a Sky comedy, and you've got a Sky kids' show all—you're writing them all at the same time. How do you prioritise your time and how do you get into different mindsets?

NB: Well, good thing was *Bloods* was kind of my all-day-every-day job. It was like, every day there were Zooms. Every day *Bloods* needed 90% of my time. And then occasionally—and the good thing about the movie was that, obviously your movie gets greenlit when it's pretty much finished, right? There's a few tweaks, there's not that much left to do. Whereas your TV show doesn't get greenlit—your TV show gets greenlit off one script maybe, or something like that. So TV show needed loads of work. The movie just needed tweaks, and popping down to set, or watching cast and tapes, or— And also in movies, a writer is kind of—the writer's job is sort of done. It's just that you kind of hand over your script but we had a good relationship with the team so we were involved when they needed us. But in general, that was kind of done. And that is—when I say the movie *Rye Lane* is again, one of those things where I'm like, *I don't even care what people think. This is my love letter to London. I don't care. This is it. I love it. That's it.*



JW: And with *Bloods* season two, how do you find generating stories for season two? Is it harder because you're running out or is it easier because you know the characters more?

NB: I think the good thing is with that show is that you don't run out of stories. (A) because we have the best writers. We have an amazing writers' room, which is great. So they throw us in loads of—everyone brings loads of stories. And also I think they're paramedics, right? We interview and talk to loads of paramedics. I've watched pretty much every single series of *In the Ambulance*, ever. I've read loads of books. There's always stories about ambulances, paramedics. And then our characters are quite—it's a buddy comedy so they're all so different. So there's lots of conflicts to have. So one thing I don't think we ever really struggle with is finding story, yeah.

JW: What does—for any budding writers listening out there, what does an episode need? What does a TV arc need?

NB: It sounds obvious but when I first started writing TV, because I was making a lot of short films, web series off my own back. And one thing that I did, I didn't do a lot of, because I don't—I avoid conflict in my life, is that I often didn't write a lot of conflict. I would just write people talking. And I love dialogue so I could just write people just chatting about shit. But when you're in sitcom and TV, this sounds obvious, but every scene needs to be conflict. Every scene needs to be moving the story forward. So that's one of the biggest things I now will make sure in my work. That: *where is the conflict in this scene? What is making me watch this? We want to*

see these people having a difficult time and laugh about it. So that's my main thing. And I think—

JW: —And how does it work for, again, for budding writers out there. How does it work from having an idea to getting an idea greenlit?

NB: Man, look. There's a billion, gazillion different ways it can work. If it's an original idea, the conventional way is you write a one pager, you find a production company, a TV production company, or a film production company, or a theatre producer. And you take your one-pager, which is a summary of your idea. Basically, the idea of a one-pager is that you have compressed this multi-million pound genius idea to a one-page document that succinctly tells the reader what the fuck it's about. And it is so hard to do that. And hopefully that one-pager, when you've done it, excites a producer. And they take that one-pager, and they option it. So they give you some money to develop the idea for about a year, sometimes two years. And then you're inside the company, and you're working with this producer or team.

JW: Was this what happened with *Bloods*?

NB: *Bloods* was a different one where the rough cut—I made a web series called *Reality*, about being young, black and British. And then—and a producer saw that, and he wanted to make that into a TV show. So rough cut option there. We tried to get it off but we couldn't get it off. And weirdly, now I know, I've got more experience, I know why we couldn't get it off. There was no fucking conflict. But anyway, we move. Then, it so happened that Sky had commissioned a Sky Arts short for Samson

Kayo to do whatever he wanted. And Seb, my producer said, 'Oh, I've sat with Samson. He had this idea for a character'. Because it was from his real life, he was either going to be a paramedic or a getaway driver when he was a teenager. And we were like, 'That would be the funniest character.' And that's how Malik was born. So then Seb put me and Samson together, and we made this 10-minute Sky Arts short that they put on Sky with Jane Horrocks and him, just on these little paramedic adventures over a day. And that again, that was like the best thing I'd ever done at the time. I couldn't believe it. I didn't even have Sky so I couldn't even watch it on Sky. But I went to the screening. I showed all my mates and it was great, and I was really proud of it. And then at the launch of that, the producer comes over and he's like, 'Oh, Sky wants to write a half hour pilot of this.' And I was like—I literally said, 'Oh, that's cool. Can I be involved?' And the producer looked at me and he was like, 'Yeah, of course you're involved. You're writing it.' And I was like, 'Oh shit, this is sick.' Because Samson was really, really busy at the time. I think he was doing some movie or—you know him, he's a superstar. So I was tasked to do it. And again, never written a half hour before. So I was like [inaudible]. I wrote a few drafts, watched loads of sitcoms, and with loads of help from Seb, we got it to a place. But everyone agreed, including me, that I needed some backup. I needed some comedy heavyweight. So they brought on Paul Doolin, who is the nicest, funniest man in comedy. And we, with his help, wrote the pilot of *Bloods*. We got it into Sky, didn't hear anything for about, I don't know, two, three months. And I just thought, *it was another thing done, onto the next*. And then suddenly, Seb just gets back in touch and he's like, 'Oh, I think Sky's gonna make this.' And I said, 'Make it what? What do you mean? Another 10 minutes?' He was like, 'No, six times half hour.' And I was like, 'Oh my—' That's my dream come true. Co-creating a series has been my dream

from young, young, young. And then we just jumped straight into the writers' room. We started doing series. It just—from then you just—it's like rocket fuel. It's just like, *boom!* And then two twos now, you're just on set making it. And you have no idea what's happened but you're dishevelled and you're joyous. And it's incredible.

JW: And how has it been at the head? Essentially you were showrunning this writers' room. So how was that? And having all these different—

NB: I mean, again, I will have to minimise the sexy term of showrunner in this instance, if I'm honest, because I was new. So I didn't—maybe some people are superstars, and they just can come on and show run straight away. But I would say Seb, our producer, was our, in brackets, showrunner. And then I was a co-creator. So I was—me and Samson are leading the charge of what we want the show to be, how we want it to sound, how we want it to feel. But also at the same time, I'm still learning how to write a 30-minute script. So I need as much support as I got. So I was very vocal. Me and Seb had a great relationship. He wanted that sort of authentic voice of mine. And I was also doing pretty much most of the paramedic research. So I'd read about 10 books about being a paramedic. I'd interviewed tons. So I came with tons of research to the writers' room.

JW: And not to put a downer on all this optimistic advice, but how do you cope when that phone call never comes, or when the phone call comes and it's like, 'Yeah, sorry, we're not gonna do it.' And it's kind of the end of the line for the project?

NB: You just have another one. You actually—tell a lie, you bitch. You cuss, you cuss, you cuss. You just be cussing. I spent a few days cussing, cussing, cussing, cussing, cussing, cussing. ‘These people don't know nothing.’ Cuss, cuss, cuss, cuss, cuss. But at the end of the day, you move on. It's life. Do you know what I mean? It doesn't matter. It might feel like it's the—your magnum opus. But at the end of the day, this is a career, right? So it's a long journey. You're gonna have multiple times of rejection. You need to have more than one story to tell and if you don't, find more things that you're interested in. Because that's what it's about. And also, I always say I'm an artist, right? So that means that nobody decides whether I create art or not. So if a commissioner says no to me, doesn't mean I can't go and make a short film. Doesn't mean I can't go and do a monologue at an event. Just keep creating art. And the more you create anything, the more attention will come back to you, the more your art will improve, and the more likely you are to get your, ‘Yeah.’ So I see any form of rejection as difficult for sure, but no-one will stop me from being an artist and no-one will stop me from creating. And that's what I think you should do if you get rejection, just go and create something else.

JW: And if you're in a position where you'd think, or maybe listeners, or even myself would think, why are you funding your own films? And I mean—and I'm not—you absolutely should do. But I think that you—I don't know, it was just super inspiring that you're not—even you, in a position you are, aren't gonna wait for the industry to come to you. If you wanna fund and shoot a film on a Sunday, you're gonna do it.

NB: Yeah, man. Because what I'm saying, we're artists, right? So even if I can't get something on telly or whatever, I can get it on YouTube. I can get it in short film

festivals. I can get it on Twitter and Instagram. You are going to see my work. It does not matter by crook or whatever, you are going to have to watch what I'm gonna say. And if that means I have to pay for it, I have to pay for it. But it will come back to me, do you know what I mean? All the opportunities I've ever had in this life have come from me going out on my way to create something first and then sharing it, and then a bigger opportunity comes. You can't expect things to come to you if you have not created something prior because then it's guesswork. Whereas I am going to these people being like, 'I've got the seed of an idea.' And then you'll put—people—the minute you bring an idea to someone, nine times out of ten they wanna say no already. So if you go to someone with like—so the thing I shot could be a great sitcom. And I was like, *but it's about gardeners*. And I was like, *if I go into a room and tell someone it's about gardeners, they're gonna just be like, 'What? shut up!'* But I was like, *let me shoot a 10-minute film with a really great director, and great cast and crew, and great producer, and we'll make it look sick*. So then I don't have to tell anybody anything. I can say, 'Just watch this. If you like this, we could give you more of this. And if you don't like it, that's all right as well.' Do you know what I mean? But it moves things along. Same with—I sold another idea to Roughcut, high-concept idea. And I made a—I commissioned an incredible illustrator I worked with loads called Spike. I think I gave him a grand or something like that. And that's all I had. Remember, I'm not balling in any shape at all but I use all my money on making my work so hopefully one day I can have a big house and not have to do it anymore. But right now we're in the trenches still. And I paid Spike some money to make this 20-page comic book. And then I showed it to the producer at Roughcut, and then he optioned it as a TV show. And yeah, you just have to make stuff to get stuff.

JW: And how do you know—'cause obviously we don't have an infinite amount of money, our creatives don't have an infinite amount of money. So how do you decide which of your ideas you're going to pay and make a grand to do this? Which of your short films you're going to fund yourself?

NB: I'm just led by excitement. So at the moment, I want to direct. And I know that—I've directed a few little bits and I know I could probably—no, I don't know that. Let me not say that. But I want to show people my direction. And I know that this year I'm going to have to direct and write a short film I want to do. So I'm really excited by that. So that's leading my next story I'm going to make for myself.

JW: And then wrapping up where maybe we should have started, but I don't care, I like doing things in reverse sometimes. What made you an artist in the first place? What made you want to be an artist?

NB: Well, I started acting and I think that was because I enjoyed—I love acting, I enjoy it. I don't—I can't quite put my finger on what I enjoy about it. I enjoy—I just find it really fun. I don't know what to tell you, I find acting fun as hell. And I like—

JW: You don't have to intellectualise this. It's—we have a good time, it's nice.

NB: Yeah. I have a good time. Like this is what—someone said to me the other day, they were like, 'What do you prefer, writing or acting?' I'm always like, 'I like both.' And they're like, 'But you write more.' And I'm like, 'Yeah, but I like acting. I find acting fun.' I don't like not acting. I like—part of the reason I made that film, the short

film, was because I missed acting. And I hadn't acted probably since we shot *Little Darlings*, or I shot *Ghosts*. And I was like, *I need to do some more. So let me just spend two days doing it, you know?* So basically, yeah, what made me an artist was, I just like telling stories. Oh really it started—it all started—is that I like making people laugh. That's really it. If I can make people laugh in any way possible, that makes me happy. And that's what made me become an artist.

JW: Hey, that's a great attitude to have in life. Just to make people laugh, make people smile. If more people did that, the world would be a better place. I'm watching all of *Bloods* and yeah—

NB: —Yeah, well look, fingers crossed we get a series three. We hope and pray but if not, whatever I do next. The movie will be great.

JW: *Rye Lane*.

NB: Yeah. *Rye Lane*.

JW: *Rye Lane*. Oh and also, we didn't talk about your children's books, but my daughter genuinely—I mean, she's one, so she can't—I don't know how much she understands, but she loves *Look Up*. She really likes it. So yeah, keep doing all you're doing, man, because it's great. It's really inspiring that like, yeah, you just—you're doing so many different forms of writing. And that's, yeah.

NB: Man, I'm trying, I'm learning, and I'm enjoying it.



JW: So yeah, man. Yeah, it's been a pleasure. So please, please check out Nathan Bryon's work. It's all there. It's on Sky, it's gonna be on BBC Films, it's all out there. And go get his kids' books, they're out in Waterstones and all good bookshops.

Presenter: Nathan Bryon was in conversation with Jonny Wright. To hear more writers, go to [writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk).

Nathan Bryon was in conversation with Jonny Wright

A recording of this interview can be found at **[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

© Nathan Bryon