

BRANDON MORGAN

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FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEWER: Amy C. Evans

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Amy C. Evans [00:03]: Okay. Okay, this is Amy Evans on Wednesday, October 27th, at about 9:00 a.m. on Zoom with Brandon Morgan—

Brandon Morgan: Yes.

ACE: —for our follow-up interview for Houston in 2020. There's a rainstorm outside my window and tornados in the air, *[Laughs]* but thank you for being here, Brandon. And we'll just dive in real quick; I promised I would keep this short. So I just want to see since we talked a year ago in August in the thick of it, during Covid and the Black Lives [Matter] Movement and the dumpster fire that was that whole year. We're eking out of it now, but I wanted to see and ask you how that time has impacted or influenced the work you're doing today.

BM [00:52]: Before, I think it impacted and influenced most of the work, but I think now even more, it's made all the work even more concentrated. There's an inherent sense of the work that we create to be aware of the effect and message that we're putting out. And basically more of a hyper focus on the content that we produce of ourselves to bring light to the issues. I think it makes it happen in a more purposeful manner and on purpose; it's very purposeful now for sure. Or at least how we work, as far as me and my friends and what we do.

ACE [01:38]: Yeah. So you were out of work as an actor, and you and your friends started Actors Quarantine Corner that's still going.

BM [01:46]: Yes. Correct. We are still going.

ACE [01:46]: So tell me maybe some of the episode highlights or things you learned over the course of doing that this year.

BM [01:55]: We are a very dramatic show. We had a topic every week. We touch on what we feel, it is very much so in real time type of topic choosing. A couple of our target topics were during the Black Lives Matter movement. Last week, we just did a topic about critics because a lot of theater happened in Houston, and critics finally got to actually review the shows and see what those were so we can touch on everything. Anything that is very relevant and true to our circle, as far as theater goes, we definitely try to touch on that in every kind of way. You can always find it on Actors Quarantine Corner on YouTube by the name. Also on Instagram, we are on all platforms. Every Monday, 9:00 p.m., we are—I think next in March, it'll be two years continuously that we have been doing this thing that was birthed in a pandemic. So that's pretty much it.

ACE [03:05]: So seeing as how you have so many guests come in via Instagram live and Zoom and all that, what kind of sense have you gotten of how other people have dealt with the pandemic and how other artists have made their way?

BM [03:19]: I believe a lot of people have gone digital. And everyone is doing the same thing: they are creating their own space and entity to still have a place to flourish and practice and just be in the midst of the art. And I think that's the same way that our show was birthed from. We just want to act. We want to act. It really started as, "Man, maybe we should just go live and do monologues because we have nothing else to do." And it just created its own thing. And I believe

everyone is literally on that same path. There's a lot more self-creating, self-promoting, self-marketing happening, as far as what everyone has to offer, whether it be art, dance, theater, people are just creating things on their own and just pushing it out. And that's something that has not usually always happened, it's usually all done through city grants and the big theaters that we have here. They usually push out the content that we see, and now we are making the content, and I'm appreciative of that. It gives us a lot of freedom and responsibility at the same time.

ACE [04:47]: Yeah. Well, and I don't want you to put all your business out in the street with numbers and everything, but I know that y'all, since the beginning, have offered your Cash App for tips after the show or the podcast. And then you have some merchandise and whatnot. So has it been a little bit of an income generator for y'all too at this point?

BM [05:09]: Yes, very much so. Yes. When we first started, we were pumping those Cash Apps, it was like, "Hey, hey, hey." We still do it in a sense, but it's not much more to focus; the more focus is more on just our production. We still do monologues every week but now, instead of them being done live, we actually get together, we film them, we costume them, we do our own makeup, we edit them, we direct them, we edit it down, put it on YouTube. And this is a weekly process. We do something new each week, and that whole process is done and clamored into one week. So because of that, we do honestly tell people, if you enjoy what you see, donate what you can. **[06:02]** So, in a sense, yes, there is a little money that is generated. We also have merchandise that you can buy, AQC merch. That's A Q C M E R C H dot com. So yes, buy a t-shirt, buy a hat, just different things that generate income, and we are appreciative of it. And it does allow us to do a little more than what we did. You know what I mean? We do funnel that

money back in. We bought cameras now; we bought production lights and it works. And we're very appreciative because it continues our art without having to be backed by some corporate or big entity, you know what I mean? I just love what we do now. It's my baby; it's our baby. It's a thing that we have full control over, and we produce the content. **[07:06]** We want to make aware of that content, as far as being African American men in Houston that are actors and they just need the truth, and we want to make sure that that is the forefront of what we are trying to say. Because at the end of the day, that's what we are, just three middle-aged—maybe not middle-aged. I don't know, I'm pretty young and old at the same time. But three African American men in the city of Houston that are working, and we definitely do have an opinion about things. And I think that it's very valid and one that should be heard. So that's where we are, and I'm just enjoying it. It's a weird time to be enjoying something like that or anything, but it has birthed something very true to me, you know what I mean? And it's a good moment. You just try to find the silver linings, and this is a great silver lining. We're just creative.

ACE [08:10]: Yeah, well, my question was going to be, how have you managed to find joy for yourself this year? And it seems like that has been a good balance for you to stay with your buddies and create.

BM [08:21]: Very much so. Very much so. That is definitely 100% the answer. That's the joy: we get to do it. And we do it—it's not like we all work separately, and it's like, "Oh, well I would have done it like this, if we could do it." Now, it's ours. And we have total control and choices over how it works and we make that happen. It is definitely a joy of mine because it's something that I've never had the opportunity to do. **[08:50]** I'm definitely under the reins of whatever

director in theater that I'm working for at the time. We run the show, and it's a good feeling when you want to be creative. It's a good feeling to have when you have the urge or want to be creative and not being stifled by we can't say this, or we should not say that. We have that freedom to be free and say it. And that in itself as an artist, is always joy, being free to create, and say, and do whatever you want at the time that makes it real at the time. That's any joy for any artist. You can ask around, I'm sure everybody would enjoy it.

ACE [09:38]: Yeah. Well, and related to that, I wonder if you see a responsibility of creative people to respond to society and current events and how that has manifested itself in Actors Quarantine Corner and will continue?

BM [09:58]: Oh, yeah. Yes, very much so. That art itself has a way of reflecting the times, whether it be through painting or speech or poetry or spoken word or theater. Art is basically the illustration of the commentary of the times. And it is always relevant, it will always push the envelope of trying to be relevant or to be futuristic to teach us something about what we could go into. And art has always been that vehicle for that, and I don't think that's going to change. And I think with the digital age now, it just gives us more of an opportunity to be a part of that, you know what I mean? **[10:50]** So it will always be in the forefront of showing us what it looks like, what can come outside of the media and people writing and talking about it, but art gives us the lens to actually see what that actually looks like. And it will always be there, and I hope for my years to come, it will stay there and nothing else replaces that. But I think it would be hard to do because there is no other way to use free speech in a way to show someone what it is that is happening in the world. And it'd still be a viable way to gain information. That's just where we

are, and I'm glad I'm a part of that group of people that actually get to do that. Yeah, it's a good life. It's a very wavy one, there are definitely highs and lows and peaks and valleys, but I wouldn't ask for myself to do anything else ever. So this is where we are.

ACE [12:02]: Now that things are opening up, I wonder what you have on your calendar going forward, as far as performances, and then how you're going to balance that with Actors Quarantine Corner?

BM [12:15]: Well, luckily for us, we got ahead of the curve in our plan because we randomly chose Monday [for our podcast]. And Monday is the usual universal day off for actors, so I think we covered our bases with that one, as far as, would we be able to do it. We started doing it on Monday, so I think because of that fact we're definitely going to be around for a while because we always have a window. But as far as my work coming up, I'm—barring life and, I guess, vaccination status and Covid—I will be in the show with Rec Room, I believe, late January and February. So actually getting started on that in a couple of months, and I'm excited. It's going to be my first time even getting the script or getting to be back on stage. **[13:23]** March 13th of 2019, I believe, that's the day that everything went away. I remember it because my dad's birthday is the next day after that. It was March 13th, and everything just disappeared. And I had been waiting in the wings patiently, but it's definitely coming. I can feel the energy. The closer we get to the end of the year I get a little more excited because I know it's coming soon. Kay B [Kendrick Brown], who's a part of Actors Quarantine Corner, he just closed the show. So he's one of the first ones to actually get a chance to get on stage. Joe [Palmore] will be in the show next for a Christmas show, and then I'll bring it up the rear, so I'm excited. **[14:17]** But I told

them on the show, I was like, "Man, I'm mad because you guys get to get on stage before me, and I still got to wait." But it's coming, and I'm excited. But the show will be at Rec Room. It is entitled, *Is God Is*. Not sure if I'm supposed to put that out there or not, but that's the key. That's what we're doing. As far as dates, I'm not sure of the dates, exactly, but it's definitely going to happen, I believe, in early February, end of January, somewhere in that window. But I'm just patiently waiting for a chance to get back out there, do my thing. I'm itching, but it's coming.

ACE [15:03]: And your mention of Rec Room, I don't think when I interviewed you a year ago, August, that Rec Room had given you that space yet for y'all to produce Actors Quarantine Corner.

BM [15:12]: No. No.

ACE [15:12]: Is that going to be for the long game? Y'all going to stay there?

BM [15:16]: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. That is Actors Quarantine Corner's home until further notice. And shoutout to Matt Hune at Rec Room. I've actually done work with Rec Room, as far being on their stage. We actually were in one of our friends' garages doing a show, battling the elements, whether it was hot or cold, heaters and fans. I don't know, I was talking to Matt one day, and he was like, "Hey, man, I love what y'all are doing. You want to use the space?" I was like, "What do you mean use the space?" He was like, "You can do the show here. Just do it here. Find a corner." I was like, "Any corner?" He was like, "Yeah." [16:09] So we worked out the logistics of where would be the best place, especially if things were happening in the theater or where would we keep our stuff. And we actually worked it out, and it came to be just a lovely

bond. It's a big family now. It's almost my home, you know what I mean? I spend a lot of time there; I do shows there now, pretty much every Monday. We also record and edit and shoot everything there; it's almost like a big production studio house that we turned it into now. I'm very appreciative, man, and shoutout to Rec Room, again, because I'll be back there on stage again, finally soon. Rec Room, I believe, is definitely a powerhouse in helping us create our art and get it out. **[17:04]** They are definitely a conduit and an avenue for us, and they constantly push the boundaries of what they do and what they allow, as far as in theater, pushing the limits. And that's the idea. That's what we're here for. We're here to show a fish-eye lens into moments of life and show people what it is that we look like. And you decide whether that is good or bad, you take that home with you and you process it, whether you feel one way or not. But it is just supposed to allow you a moment to see what life looks like as a person. You never get to sit and look at yourself, you know what I mean? So you take this moment to see what that is, whatever that content may be. I appreciate everything that Rec Room does, as far as showing that lens, showing what that looks like through that lens. And I appreciate them a lot. Yeah, Rec Room is a beautiful thing we have going on there. They're doing good stuff.

ACE [18:11]: In the city of Houston, that's a great testament to Houston's creative community supporting each other and the theater community, specifically. And you have one of my favorite pieces of merch[andise] from the pandemic, your t-shirt [that says "My art is pandemic proof"]. I don't know if you have hats, too, but I have a t-shirt.

BM [18:27]: Yeah, I wish I had it all. It's pandemic proof.

ACE [18:31]: Yes. Good. It's perfect. What we've been through and, dare I say, we're all a little stronger in different ways because of it.

BM [18:43]: Yeah. Very much so. I think we mentioned that on the shows about how once things go back to normal and we're all able, everyone has just been wanting to do so much that the art that is going to be created is probably going to be even ten times better. Because we've all just been waiting for our moment to do a thing—everyone is on that same page—and create something beautiful. I've seen about two shows now in Houston, and they were phenomenal. Every actor, everybody involved, it was all phenomenal because we are all just a lot more grateful and a lot more humble about what we are and what we do, and the opportunity to do it again is a gracious event that we're all about to embark on. So art, for the next two years, is going to be super great. So I encourage everyone to go check out art in the next two to three years because it's definitely happening, and we are coming back stronger than ever.

ACE [19:46]: That's right. Well, Brandon, I know you have a limited amount of time today, and we're almost done. I just have one more question for you and that is, reflecting on being a part of this project, Houston in 2020, I was working to document what was happening real time a year and a half ago, and then these follow-up interviews have been so great. I wonder what you think about being part of this project and what it might mean ten, twenty years down the road?

BM [20:16]: I just hope that my ideals and values regarding art and especially in my city is reflected and able to live on past me. And that's another reason why I'm appreciative of this project is because, as far as we go or wherever we go, there is someone who appreciates the art

and appreciates this city and wants their voice to be heard further than wherever I can go or wherever I am. That's just what I want. It's not even about the money; it's just more about the city and how rich this city is with art. And Houston, it'll blow you away with the amount of art that happens here. From the ballet, to the art shows, to—just a crazy amount and it really does get overlooked a lot nationally, I guess you could say. **[21:25]** But I just want to bring a light to that. And there's a lot of good things happening here, and I think that the wider lens should be on Houston also. And I want to help usher that in. I want to be a part of that. I definitely want to create a space where it's possible for a city to support the arts as it does, like in New York or LA. The state and the city, they support it in such a way that it makes things a lot more possible to happen, as far as making more art, more money in the grants, more funding. And I want to be a part of that, so anything that I can do to put that out there, I'm definitely going to take that chance—avenue—to speak on that. And I do it a lot. I definitely do it a lot.

ACE [22:24]: Well, Brandon, thank you so much for being a part of the project and this follow-up interview. And I agree, the next couple of years are going to be pretty exciting here in Houston. Can't wait to see you back on stage.

BM [22:36]: All right. Thank you, Amy, I appreciate you.

[22:41]

[END]