

Jully Black – Unleashing Love and Positivity

Host: Emily Madden

Overview:

Award-winning and platinum-selling recording artist Jully Black joins us to talk about love and positivity, her accomplished career, and the role of music in advocacy.

Black talks about seizing opportunity, explains what it means to be a 'co-conspirator,' and gives us the inside story of [her famously edited performance of 'O Canada' at the 2023 NBA All-Star game](#).

EMILY:

Platinum recording artist, celebrated Canadian, awarded singer, songwriter, actress. Use your talents to be a social justice advocate. You're a philanthropist. So naturally, I have to ask you.

JULLY:

Yes.

EMILY:

What's on your mind?

JULLY:

Oh, what a beautiful question. Love is on my mind.

EMILY:

Oh, tell me more.

JULLY:

Love, love heals everything. Self-love, love thy neighbor, I am my human's keeper, love of family, love of friends, love of opportunity, love of community. It's that four-letter word that I think sometimes is misused and sometimes not used enough.

EMILY:

We had an amazing conversation earlier today with someone who's talking about building trust. And one of the things they asked is, who's an optimist? Who's a pessimist? And in our room a lot of people said i'm an optimist, no i'm an optimist, but I think that's outlier right now, the vibe is feeling a little negative so for you to be love love is on your mind , love is in your space tell me more and what makes you feel that positive vibe.

JULLY:

Yeah. Can you tell me your name one more time?

EMILY:

I'm Emily.

JULLY:

Emily, Emily, because I like to speak to...like you're my homegirl. You know what I mean? So like, so Emily, I lean into the power of words a lot. And being almost and going through hormonal changes, it's been the biggest gift because I'm finally at a stage where I'm okay being not okay. And I'm also okay disrupting some shit. Right. And so there's a I listened to Alicia Keys had an interview. OK. And it moves me to the point where I actually transcribed it. And she simply said...I use it as a mantra. I'll say the beginning of it. She simply said things could change for the better, so profoundly and so swiftly. Yes. But she said, I have free time. I have abundance. I have friends like I've never had before. And now she's like, I started looking at my...there's more to it. I was like, oh, things can change for the better. So profoundly, so swiftly. True change happens in an instant. Everything that we want to happen in life happens in an instant.

EMILY:

Yes.

JULY:

There's not some, oh, guess what's coming? Oh, love's coming. Oh, that new job is coming. Prepare for it. Oh, you see what I'm saying? Yeah. We're not going to see it on the way, but we can lean into becoming.

EMILY:

So you're saying, like, be open to it. Realize it's everywhere around you and there's other stuff around you

JULY: For sure, oh yeah, those entities those vibrations those frequencies

EMILY:

Yeah yeah and i think vibrations is an excellent kind of way to describe it and of course as a singer, the singer in you you're kind of...

JULY:

it's energy but yes it's energy right

EMILY:

vibrating on that frequency and this is like i said to you you know what's that vibe about because like i really i feel the same way like what is the vibration you're choosing to kind of bring to a conversation. And so thank you so much for sharing that.

JULY:

It's my pleasure.

EMILY:

Tonight you're going to be talking to our invited guests at Magnet Network Live about this concept of co-conspirators, right? And so co-conspirators, more than just like, we hear a lot about ally, allyship, right? And I think co-conspirators has just a slightly different nuance. And without taking away what you're going to do tonight, would you give me like a little kind of peek of what you're thinking about when you think about your presentation?

JULY:

Yeah, it's simply a conversation. Conversation I've had with friends. Conversation I've had with people of different walks of life, different races. In particular, white girlfriends, white guy friends. I was like, you know, we've been friends since kindergarten. And I get it. They're like, hey, I'm your ally. I'm like, but it's there's some action around that and not just seniority. There's some courage around that. Being willing, I often say, are you willing to drive the getaway car? Right. It's sacrificial. It's actually sacrificial. I eat, you eat. I don't eat, you don't eat. I go to jail, you go to jail. You go to jail, I go to jail. Right. It's that type of, and also leaning into like liberation for the long haul.

EMILY:

First of all, I'm really excited about this performance. But I think like that point about like willing, the courage point, I think a lot about that because, you know, we all know exactly what to say, what not to say. There's rules in, you know, complexity is complex. Right. And there's like, you know, do this, don't do that. Make sure you say this, don't say this. And whether that is kind of black, white, or whether that's with our Indigenous friends, or whether that is just any kind of cultural sensitivity, but I find that it's that authenticity of like being willing to maybe put yourself out there and be wrong in the way that you do it, but being authentic in that your intention is actually to be willing to drive, you know, to get, like, I'm with you, you know what I mean? And I might not exactly know what to do because we didn't all learn exactly what to do. But like having that authentic kind of co-conspiring conversation, I think, is like what inspires me so much about you and about this talk tonight. So thank you.

JULY: Thank you.

EMILY:

So this I'm going to I'm going to kind of pivot about sort of this event is really about the future. Right. So we have a lot of stuff happening in the world. Our future, for good or bad, is not as certain as we thought it was five years ago. Like all the ways that we're thinking, oh, this is going to be this, or maybe years ago. So you have been a trailblazer. You've opened doors for other people. You are, you know, creativity,

innovation. You're breaking down doors. How do you think about opportunity in terms of creating opportunity, not just for what it means for the person you're creating opportunity for, but what it means for that whole community, the whole family, the whole everybody, like the ripple effect of opportunity for maybe even just one person.

JULLY:

Right. Well, I think that preparation is a step, the step that's sometimes missing. Thank you for saying all that you said, Emily, because that was through sheer necessity. I didn't say, hey, guess what? Now there's that door, I'm going to kick it. And there's that window I'm going to climb through. It was basically thinking about my ancestors who has given me a life of privilege. Like sometimes people use the word privilege and don't associate it with anything but white. And it is a privilege to be Jullly Black. I'm using my Jullly Black privilege. To shine a light on things, to be vulnerable, to say when I'm wrong, right? To be accountable. So with opportunity, you know, realizing that it's kind of egotistical sometimes. I have to close my eyes. I don't want to really make it land. To be in a position where you are like, I'm creating this opportunity or I want to do this for this community or I want to. It's really in the silence. My mom, my late mom, she was so wise. And she would say, Jullly, what you do in private will be rewarded in public. Oh, oh, oh. Let that one land.

EMILY:

Let that one land.

JULLY:

Yes. So there's things, our scotch shivers, there's so much change that can happen if we will step out of the spotlight. and be the co-conspirator and know that, hey, you know what? These changes may not be for my generation and be okay with it.

EMILY:

Everybody who's sort of my network, what we're working in, what we're doing is really around how can we create structures and pathways that support the talent of the future or the talent of today with the right opportunities, not just any opportunity, the

opportunity that's right for them, that fulfills them, that allows them, whether we're talking about newcomers, whether we're talking about communities that have traditionally been excluded, whether we're talking about ourselves, like me as a mid-career professional, like how do I, am I satisfied? Am I growing? Like, am I, you know what I mean? Like, so much of what we're doing is here. And I think that you stand as a bit of a testament that you can see to what happens when we do our work, right? When we create opportunities for talent. You know, you've had such an incredible career of opportunities, different things that you've done. And yeah, I understand one thing leads to another, but creating the pathways to letting all of us shine and become who we want to be, you know, you are that. Like, can you speak to that at all? Like what that feels like? Like what? Yeah. How does that feel?

JULY:

It's wow. So much is like, my mind is going like this. As you were speaking, the word that came up until like on the screen of my mind's eye was seize. Are we willing to seize each and every opportunity? For example, when I was presented with the opportunity to do theater, I played Carolina Change at the Elgin Theater in Toronto, and I'd never led a company. I'd never...it was pages, songs. It was Tony Award winning. And at first, I was like, I'm a singer. I'm going to be cheating on my music. Like, no. Right? But I remember a mentor way back when, say, there's many sides to your voice. So are you using all? Are you truly seizing? Could you seize this opportunity and show yourself what you're capable of with dedication, commitment, education, mentorship, all the things? Because that accomplishment, I'm shivering, is what helped me have the courage to stay home on Native land four years later.

EMILY:

You know, I was like, do I ask it? Do I not ask it?

JULY:

No, of course you don't ask it.

EMILY:

I have many of our friends and our colleagues here today are, you know, from Métis and other nations. And, you know, they talk to me so much about July Black. I'm so

excited she's coming. She means so much to our community. And I know you've been presented and celebrated in indigenous communities. And was that moment like a planned moment? Was that moment it came to you? Like that moment, like what did that moment mean to you? And I don't mean to ask you the question I'm sure everybody asks you, but I have to.

JULLY:

No, no. What I will say, Emily, is that no one's asked it from your perspective, from your face, from your point of view. No, I want to encourage you that never..not ask a question because it hasn't been asked by you. Right? You're one of one.

EMILY:

Talk about shivers.

JULLY:

I think about that. One of one. Yes. Right? And it did come to me as a download because I had stopped singing the Canadian Anthem for three years prior. Right. Right? I turned down any sort of anthem. I was like, okay, I was taught this in kindergarten. Let me try as a songwriter. Let me go through line for line now. Yeah. Right? And this opportunity came. Largest stage for the Canadian Anthem.

EMILY:

So beautiful.

JULLY:

Period. because we don't get our anthem isn't sung at the Super Bowl. It's not sung unless a team makes it in the Stanley Cup. So I was like, this is the one time. So this is where you have to exercise wisdom. My mom, again, another Jamaican saying, she would say, don't cut off your nose to spite your face.

EMILY:

Yes.

JULLY: Right? So I could be like, no, I'm not doing it because it's like, wait, wait. Opportunity. Talent meets opportunity. An opportunity to stand in the gap, to be a bridge. This is why I have this tattoo permanently on my arm. Right?

EMILY:

Okay, good.

JULLY:

But I didn't shout it out. I called two Indigenous friends. And I said, how would you feel? How would your family feel? How would your community feel? And they said, this is the only way we've sung it our whole life. I got permission. Appropriation versus appreciation.

EMILY:

Absolutely.

JULLY:

Right? Absolutely. And the rest is history.

EMILY:

Amazing. Yeah. And I think, you know, this leads very elegantly and easily into a question about the role of music and advocacy, but I think we've long known that music has been a pivotal instrumental part of change, societal change. And do you think that, I'm going to say, do you think there's more room for that? Do you think we've done it all? Do you think everybody's done it? Do you think that it's going to be different kinds of pieces? How do you see the future of advocacy music, social change is it just going to be what comes up the way we've done it since the dawn of time it's maybe the kind of elegant way to do it

JULLY:

I think it's always... it's always about the story and the story the songwriter is also the storyteller right and so. It hasn't been all done, life is still being lived right and a lot of times if I think about you know Marvin Gaye "What's Going On" or, you know, James Brown "say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud" or you know "we are the world" like this

there's always songs that represent the time that we're in, right" Who run the world? Girls! Like it doesn't... right and so i i'm excited for what's to come musically, now they're systemically. you know i just did a voiceover for a documentary called Paid in Full on CBC, and it's about wage disparities, about what's happened since the s till now within the music industry where artists weren't getting their just desserts, basically, right? And that's still happening. And so we've come a long way. We still have further to go. But at the same time, it's like, as long as we have... my mom, again, she would say, as long as you have life, you have time. And my biggest mission... My mom left me with is to die empty, to rob the grave. There are books, there's, you know, all types of stuff in there, recipes, cures, conversations that hadn't been had.

EMILY:

One of my favorite kind of concepts that I've been thinking about is this concept of being undone, right? And so when we think about, you know, Canada, for example, and kind of continuing what we're talking about, there are really great things that we've done as a country, there's also things that no person should ever have done, Right? But this idea that we're not done what you're bringing forward is so powerful and something I've really been thinking a lot about lately. So i think i'll ask you kind of one final question in that way, which is i don't believe it's one person one industry... I don't think it's government. I don't think it's the music industry. I don't think it's artists, poets. I don't think it's technologists. I don't think it's anybody that is the person that should be driving that. I think it's all of us that should be collaborating and driving it together. And I'm just wondering if you could respond to that or tell me like what you think about people from different industries coming together collectively on one kind of like major big issue and bringing all those different perspectives together?

JULY:

I think that it's something that will be impactful if we are ready to listen, learn, and take action. It starts with the listening. Sometimes you could come together and the ego, you know, representing our industries. But the biggest change in my life, the most impactful change that's happened has been in the time that I've taken pause. Right. Even being... being a part of this wonderful event. This is the leaning into, I kind of say, feel the fear and do it anyway. Right. And meaning it's...the unknown. And I'll

come and I'll be truly July. Right. Do my thing. But I also want to learn, like what is what are we doing here? What are we actually doing here? And just listen. Yeah.

EMILY:

I am going to let you get ready for the rest of the night, July Black.

JULY:

Oh, my goodness. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.