

## Interview with JET Ambassador Dr Adam Perchard

Dr Adam Perchard's world lies in theatre, music, visual art and poetry, and soon they are hoping to add author to that creative list. Their work takes them all over the world, but they now consider Jersey to be their home. Nominated as Inspirational Person of the Year in the DIFERA awards, they spoke about past struggles, identity, and why they wanted to be a JET Ambassador

Dr Adam Perchard has a striking presence. Maybe it's the blue hair, or the flamboyant clothes, or the fact that they are 6 ft 3 ins tall – and they always wear 2 in heels.

As they say, they are always going to be noticed anyway, so they might as well own that gaze. 'It's a kind of armour against negative attention you have experienced in the past,' they say. 'If you take control and express yourself with the way you dress, you can have a lot of fun.'

It hasn't always been this way. Adam grew up in India, where their father was director of the British Council in South Asia. It was there that they were taught to sing opera by the acclaimed soprano Situ Singh Buehler.

Coming to Jersey in 2000 aged 15, a year before they came out as gay, Adam found that it was a difficult place to be a queer teenager. 'Luckily I had three friends who came out at the same time. But we faced a lot of abuse in the streets,' they said. 'It was a very traumatic time.'

Moving to the UK to be a performer and an academic, Adam studied English Literature and Language at Oxford University and got an MA and PhD in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Studies and Postcolonial Literature at the University of York.

Despite not planning to return to Jersey, Adam performed at the first Jersey Pride event in 2015. 'That was a really big moment for me. Liberate had done an incredible job in setting up this event. The streets in town where I could remember being spat at were full of not just queer people but also allies, people who were standing with us and waving flags, and dogs wearing rainbow collars, and it just felt like a huge hug from the Island.'

They have hosted Pride three times now, and last year they were involved in the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Island's Liberation at the Jersey Arts Centre. It was there that they first heard about the Jersey Employment Trust and they were approached to be a JET Ambassador, a voluntary role that brings together Islanders from any background who share the passion for making workplaces more diverse and inclusive, regardless of disability, ethnicity, age or gender.

'When I heard what JET does, it felt like such a great fit,' they said. 'It felt like all the things that really mattered to me, kindness and inclusivity, that I try to fold into my creative practice, were things that were being directly addressed by JET, and JET was making such a very real difference to people's lives.'

They also have insight into the importance of physical and mental health. While working as a lecturer in London, Adam had a nervous breakdown which at the time they felt had been down to the stress of academia, feeling overworked and under-valued. 'That work culture really wasn't right for me, but it was the result of that early trauma that really caught up with me. Growing up as a queer child in the 90s and teenager in the noughties was hard. Kids can be quite cruel so there was a lot of grief and pain, growing up in a world that felt like it wasn't made for me. That leaves its mark.'

'I remember walking to work, leaving extra time to get to places because I was frightened that if I walked up stairs too fast and my heart rate went up, I might have a panic attack.'



'I know so well how debilitating anxiety and depression can be and how hard it is to find help. It's one of the things JET tackles that really speaks to me. It's really difficult trying to be proactive and get yourself out of it when all your faculties are working at their worst.' Creative expression was the powerful tool for their personal healing, as well as some therapy.

'I started a cabaret troupe called Sex Shells, all of us were struggling with some of the darkneses in the queer scene at that time. We started making comedy about it, as odd as it sounds, to help ourselves and then we found others who also found it funny.' After the success of hit runs at the Edinburgh Fringe and several sell-out runs at the Soho Theatre, Adam realised they had been in the wrong job and that they could have a realistic shot at life in the arts.

'The decision to change career was very frightening and overwhelming but I'm so pleased that I did it because once I found myself in the right place, surrounded by a community of people I loved working with, I was able to really blossom,' they said. 'Once my mental health was sorted out, life was so much easier.'

'Life can feel impossible when you are in that kind of a black hole. Like many people, I had had suicidal ideations, wanting it all to be over. Thank goodness I never fully lost hope because now I just think it would have been so sad if I'd missed out on all of this happiness.'

Three years ago they also had a run-in with glandular fever.

'It took quite a long time to diagnose and I did all the wrong things and I kept on performing at a breakneck speed. I was chronically ill with it for a good two years, suffering very badly from chronic fatigue. And that gave me an insight into the way the health of the body can intrude on life and radically change what you can do careerwise.'

'The fear was that for something like 20 per cent of cases, that fatigue doesn't go away and that can be life-changing.'

'Finding a career path that was right for me was such a huge part of my recovery, which is one of the reasons I am so delighted to be working with JET. Promoting inclusion in the workplace is vital, and I am very proud to be able to help show the world the brilliant work JET does to make that happen.'

Adam moved back to Jersey during lockdown and they have fallen back in love with the Island.

'Jersey has become a really important place for me. The shows I did with the Jersey Arts Centre during lockdown really launched my solo touring career. Jersey is a place where I love to be creative and it's also a place where I've got a real community of fellow creatives, allies and LGBTQ+ people.'

Gender and identity are also themes explored in Adam's first novel, which has been six years in the making and is currently being sent out to literary agents.

'Its themes are gender and national identity in London between the Renaissance and the present day and it includes 500 paintings and monotypes I made which make it visually rich. I made one of the characters non-binary before I realised I was non-binary,' they said.

'Over the course of the novel I realised it was me too.'

This was time to practise the use of the they/them pronouns which Adam has adopted.

'I came out at 16 and I was able to start getting my head around it but there was always something that was never quite resolved inside me. As a child I spent a lot of my time wearing girls' clothes and pretending to be Elizabeth 1 – my Elizabeth 1 could shoot lightning bolts out of her hands! It felt like I lived in an in-between space, not quite male or female. Gender is so magnificently complicated and I used to think, if I can't fully define maleness or femaleness, how can I possibly declare myself to be neither or both?

'But then I remember one of my female friends talking about fillers and botox, and she said, "it's different for you, Adam, you're a man", and I just thought, "oh I'm not actually".

And then it all became much simpler. That category is not what I am. I'm something else.

'And it's why it's important for me to use the non-binary gender pronouns. It just helps me feel more fully who I am.

'People do get it wrong – and that's fine if it's an honest mistake. It's different if there is malicious intent. People can get anxious about using the wrong pronoun. I want to tell them it is important to try to get it right but it's ok if you don't always manage it, people are very relaxed and forgiving.'

Earlier this year Deputy Sir Philip Bailhache lodged a proposition to revoke gender identity guidance in schools, something Adam sees as a step backward for inclusivity. It prompted them to collaborate with a number of Jersey artists to make a video which was shared on social media.

'That moment when I heard about that proposition made me feel very cold and worried for the Island, but as soon as Jersey-born theatre director John Walton and I started reaching out to fellow artists I was bowled over by the number of people that stepped forward to give their time and energy to the video,' they said. 'And I have been bowled over by the positivity of the response. It has had more than 10,000 views and hundreds of supportive comments.'

Adam's next project is a new satirical musical *Glampires*, written with friend Rose Lewenstein, which is being supported by ArtHouse Jersey. The first industry showcase was held in Piccadilly in February and will hopefully one day come to Jersey.

Adam referred to the Island's Occupation history, with our resistance led by the lesbian artist Claude Cahun who famously said 'neuter is the only gender that always suits me', as evidence of a long-standing, diverse and accepting culture that has always included people who defy norms.

'Anything we can do to lean into that proud tradition and lean away from some of the cold winds of prejudice that are sweeping the rest of the world at the moment is great. One of the things about being an island is that we can really change it radically. We can really shape it and have a huge impact on it, which JET absolutely does. It's extraordinary.'

*\*This interview was written for publication in the Jersey Evening Post in March 2026.*