

Cerys Matthews

The musician and radio and TV broadcaster talks about what's important to her, and the inspiration behind her upcoming festival, The Good Life Experience

INTERVIEW DANIELLE WOODWARD

I'm lucky because I don't think of my radio show as work; it's more of a pleasure than a chore. I choose all the music and guests – people who are passionate about something are the best to talk to, as they always enthuse and inspire. One person who was particularly fascinating was composer David Amram, who was friends with Allen Ginsberg and the Beat poets in the 1960s; I could listen to him talk all day.

I prefer interviewing people who have been around a while and have experience. I love getting a glimpse into their lives and their wisdom. I can handle any subject as long as the person is passionate about it – the world is an interesting place.

I've always believed there's a chunk of us who are curious and able to choose from what's on offer; who can discern differences for ourselves and don't want to be spoon-fed the middle ground. I've broken every radio programme rule in the book [by choosing an eclectic range of music and people], and I've got a massive share of the UK radio audience on Sundays.

The reason you live is to learn, and to learn is to live. That's the thinking behind The Good Life Experience [the three-day festival co-founded by Matthews]; it's for those who are curious about life. I wanted to put a festival on the map that inspires and gets people using their hands – an antidote to a scheduled life of school and work – where you meet chefs, authors, musicians, handicraftsmen; axe makers from Manhattan and denim makers from Shoreditch, so you can experience something new.

We were enthusiastic about giving the natural world a voice in the modern world. My husband [Steve Abbott], Charlie and Caroline Gladstone and I felt there was no festival that combines the feel of the *Great British Bake Off* with Bear Grylls, and *The Tube* music show, which was all about quality. There's no VIP area; it's all about inviting everyone to be part of the story, rather than just a consumer.

Memories are what make life worthwhile. From childhood, I remember splashing in the sea; cooking the fresh fish you've caught; preparing a meal from plants you've foraged... my best memories are to do with spending time in nature.

You can't start things scared of the outcome. You have to go into things because you believe in them.

I've always been curious; as a child I was constantly kicking against the system and questioning. I grew up in the 1980s, when the boys did woodwork while the girls did sewing and, even at the age of six, I knew that I wanted to do woodwork and play football. My parents were bemused by me.

The simple things make me happy; I'll put on a bit of jazz and light a fire, have family around or get together with neighbours, a real mix of generations, and if someone picks up a guitar and we sing, that gives me an inordinate amount of pleasure.

Lack of common sense, bureaucracy and wasting time make me angry – we're engaged in politics, but we know it's going to take years to work through. Nobody tells the truth as it's not going to be in their political favour, so the truth gets pushed down. It makes my blood boil; I want things sorted yesterday.

Negativity hurts, but the best way to deal with it is to not read it in the first place. On Twitter, I go back to the person to ensure they know there's someone on the other end of that conversation and usually, they apologise. Most people are kind.

We need an open society in which we can talk about difficult subjects without getting angry. The worst thing is not being able to talk without people jumping at you. There are difficult conversations to be had, but we must have them.

The Good Life Experience is from 15-17 September on Hawarden Estate, Flintshire; thegoodlifeexperience.co.uk. Cerys is on BBC Radio 6 on Sundays from 10am

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