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Hey y'all, it's Doctor Chaz. Welcome to Black Matter podcast. Podcast and social platform for black queer femmes and all things black dimensionalities. I'm coming to you live from my position as a black academic, postdoctoral fellow for the Center for Media at Risk at the Annenberg School for Communication in the University of Pennsylvania, AKA I'm in Philadelphia for a year. If you listen to this show before, you know that I'm passionate about using media to center black joy in all ways possible. I'm interested in how we talk about black joy and just how we use the microphone to share stories and archive moments of joy that are shared between me and all of my amazing guests to this show. Through the course of the series, I hope that you get a moment to just reflect with me about joy through the spaces in Philadelphia that I encounter while I'm here for a year. Our first guest is Julie Garrett, an actor who I met by chance doing something that we both love, sitting and just observing and kikiing about space and place in a gay bar. We talk about his life in Philadelphia, the gentrification of queer spaces in the city, and the linkages between the black queer dance floor and the church. So without further ado, here's Black Matter podcast coming to you from the University of Pennsylvania in Philly. It has been a very long time since I've recorded. Um, since the last episode I've recorded, I have literally moved into a whole new zip code. So I want to say, um, welcome back to I guess, season 3 of Black Matter podcast. Uh, she has been through some things the past uh few months, but as always, I am very glad to be doing this podcast because a big part of this podcast or why I started this podcast is to. Use media making to center black joy. Now that I, um, have come to a new city and I'm meeting new people, I'm thinking a lot about black joy, and what brings me joy and how to find joy, um, in. New ways. I'm figuring out what all that means to this, this journey called life during a pandemic, but enough about me. I would like to welcome my new friend, my new guest, uh, Mr. Jolie. There we go. Can you hear that? Yeah. Alright, so Jolie, give us a little bit of tea about who you are. Well, good evening. It's such a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me. I am Jolie, and of course that means pretty in French or happy and um I like to think I'm a very happy person and um so people always want to know how do you spell your name? What does it mean? I said just think Angelina, but I had it first. Um, I am a professional actor. I'm a performing artist, uh, which means many things, and, um, I've been in Philadelphia for about 10 years now. And uh before that I lived in New York City, um, the Big Apple and uh learned many, many things about life and survival uh from that and um so yeah that's who I am. I'm a performer. I'm a storyteller, I am a lover. And uh I always say, you know, ask me an honest question and I'll give you the honest answer. Part of my research project and the work that I'm doing in the Center for Media at Risk at the University of Pennsylvania is thinking about black joy as a form of resistance, right? So thinking about how when we choose joy in a world that um constantly is subjecting is subjecting us to oppression. Um, and having us focus a lot on our survival right in a state that doesn't always care about our joy or give black people the care that we deserve. I am very passionate and very interested in learning about um the ways that black people experience joy because I think when we talk. Talk about our joy we're able to kind of fill a lot of uh knowledge gaps, um, not just in academia but knowledge gaps in the world because of the lack of knowledge about the ways in which that black people experience joy and pleasure and intimacy. So tonight, um, as we sit in my kitchen, which, you know, the lineage of black kitchens throughout this world, right, are tend to be spaces of joy. I'm thinking about, um, just so many kitchens across, uh, this country that. Um, fuel and have, uh, fed my black joy, right? So let's start it there. Tell me about a kitchen of someone in your life, um, you know, I'm thinking about the aunties and the elders and the ancestors, um, but tell me about a kitchen that, that sparks your joy. Oh, absolutely. You know, we always tend to gather in the kitchen when we want to discuss life issues. I want to start with my grandmother. I grew up in Texas and her name was Mamie. And uh she was part black and part Native American. And the way I used to wake up in the morning is she took care of me when I was, uh, my both my parents were at work and uh she used to get up and get into the kitchen and she would cook. Um, homemade biscuits and sausages and eggs every morning. So that was my wake up call. I smelled the biscuits and the and the sausage, and I knew there was love in that kitchen. I didn't need an alarm clock. I just smelled breakfast. And um and she taught me so many things about cooking and about life and about patience and um and about spirituality and um. It turns out that um I always used to wonder why she was the first person at church to open the doors and turn on the heater and the air conditioning. And it's because um when her husband died, he left her the land that the church was on. So in a way that was her church and it was something that she was very proud of. And um when I was a kid, people used to ask me all the time. She lived across the street from the church. And they would say, um, my nickname was Jojo. And they would say, Little Jojo, who lives in that white house across the street from the church? And I would say just me, Grandmama, and the Lord. So Texas, tell me more about about Texas. Texas. All right, as everybody knows, Texas is a very red state. That's why I was asking. Um, very, uh, Republican, very, there is a lot of racism uh there. But there's also a lot of wonderful things as well. Um, no place is all good or all bad. This was my birthplace. It was my home and I grew up there. I can remember specifically, um, when we talk about, um, black joy. I remember specifically around 5th or 6th grade when They started to tell me it wasn't cool anymore for me to to be friends with my white friends. And um and I always wondered about that and and also the teachers. When you would say to them, I want to be a fireman or a police officer or an actor, when I grow up, they would say to you, Well, don't you want to be like your father? In other words, they didn't want you to aspire to be anything greater than what your parents were. It was a psychological conditioning. Uh, lucky, luckily that I, uh, I grew out of and, um, and expanded from that. And now, um, when I look back on that, I understand uh why it's so important for you to go other places. And to experience how other people live. Because if you've only, if you've only lived one place, then that's all you know. When I graduated from high school, I knew I wanted something bigger. Uh, something grander, something, um. More satisfying than what I had experienced. So I had an English teacher. And we were studying um Macbeth. And we had, uh, she, we, we had learned the dagger soliloquy, a monologue. And uh I done the speech and she said, I want you to stay after class, and I thought I'd done something terribly wrong. And she said to me, she grabbed my hand and she said, You must major in theater. And that's when I decided I was going to um to go to New York. And uh and study theater. And so the seed of ambition was planted. And so I go from rural Texas to the biggest city in the country. New York, right? So you can imagine the culture shock, but it was something, uh, it was something that I, um, I needed and I just, uh, I grew and I expanded uh in ways I never imagined. And um And that brings me here. I'm from a little town called Shelbyville. Which if you've ever watched The Simpsons, Shelbyville is Springfield's rival. Oh, really? So that's sort of Shelbyville's claim to fame. Got it. And uh, so yeah, Shelbyville, Texas. If someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time. Doctor Maya Angelou. Back with our episode, I wanna know, um, I wanna know more about you. I wanna know how you got to Philadelphia and I'm very interested in, um, through your perspective, uh, the ways in which you've experienced joy in Philadelphia through the arts because I understand that you are not only a theater connoisseur, you're also a theater performer and so I would love to just hear stories about performing in Philly. Of course we're gonna talk about, you know. Some of the men's that we've encountered and I just want to hear um some stories from you about performing in Philadelphia. Well, first of all, let me tell you how I got to Philadelphia and since we're talking about black joy, what brought me to Philadelphia is coming out of a place of darkness. And by that what I mean is that I was in New York and um I was suffering from depression and I had not worked in quite some time. And my best friend, who is from Philadelphia, came to my apartment. And he saw the condition that I was in. And he said, You're leaving New York today. He said because if you don't. You will not make it out of this situation. He said, I want you to pack a bag. I've called my mother. And she's waiting for you. And so that's exactly what I did. And that's what brought me to Philadelphia. And when I got down here, his mother met me at 30th Street Station. And she drove me to a pizza parlor and we got a pizza and we rented some movies and we went to her home and she said, Don't you worry about a thing. She said, I'm your mother now because my mother is deceased. And this woman nursed me back to health. And I experienced joy like I never had before because I had come from such a dark place. And especially with a lot of black men, we don't want to admit things like depression because we think it's a sign of weakness. But it's actually a sign of strength to tell someone that you're suffering and to share your story and to share your story because you will find that there are other people who have experienced the same thing. And you're not alone. You are not alone. And that's what brought me to Philadelphia. And since I've come here, I've, I've thrived. One thing I do, um, that's very important I think is when I get up in the morning, I look in the mirror and I say to myself, you are enough. And I smile. And when I do that, it just, it just lifts my spirit and it sets me up for the day to come. And I seize the day and I know that whatever comes, I have the tools to, to deal with it. And it's very important. As these dual pandemics of racism and disease compound to create even larger disparities within black communities, this is a unique and historical moment, uh, that provides us an opportunity for the world to see America as we truly are a story far from racial equality and much less racial harmony. This problem is not just, uh, how the story has been told, but for whom, uh, and by whom. And so in my, in my work of Black joy, I think that joy. Helps us to bridge knowledge gaps and I think that when we talk to black people about joy, it's not about um erasing what we know as the struggle, right? Or the experiences that we've had, uh, with depression or with, you know, finding a way out of no way, right? I think that there's just an opportunity to learn about black culture through the ways in which that we experience joy and pleasure. And so for you, what, what does that kind of resonate when I talk to you about um learning about black culture through a lens of joy? Um, this, a lot of this comes from the work that I do in performing. I do a lot of classical work. And uh a story I want to tell you about like I was, I was doing a play in um Las Vegas. A lot of times when, when you see a black actor come out and these, um, a lot of the roles that I play. People, first of all, they're sort of like taken aback and then they start to listen. And um I do a lot of Shakespeare. And uh and Shakespeare wrote, If music be the food of love, play on. And a lot of the language is very musical to me. And uh And just the sounds of the words make you feel a certain way. So I had done a show in Las Vegas. And the young African American um woman came up to me and she said, Would you come over and meet my friends? And I said, yes, of course. And, uh, and then when she sat down, she said, she says, OK, everybody, he's here, he's here. And then she said, could you talk quite again for us? And can you talk what? White, not white, but white. So I just thought that was, that was just a funny story that happened and and then the white people, they're like, Oh, you were so good. Your people must be so proud of you. And I said to this lady, I said, you know, when I get back to Philadelphia, I'm gonna tell them all what you said because they'll come for you. What has it been like living in Philly for you, uh, in terms of getting involved in the arts? Oh, it's, it's been very, um, it's been very rich. Philadelphia is a very, um, um, truly, uh, uh, culturally, uh, arts rich community. Um, I was telling you earlier, I have a friend that plays in the Philadelphia Orchestra and so I have a chance to, um, um, listen to a lot of classical music, um. Our first experience in classical music for a lot of uh of us is cartoons. And then you go and you hear the um the actual um. Compositions and you say, oh, I remember that. I remember that. And um so, and then I've auditioned for a lot of companies here and I have a show coming up this summer. I'm gonna be doing uh The Tempest, that's in Wilmington, Delaware. And um It's a beautiful story about forgiveness. And uh that's a very powerful theme, learning how to forgive. Mhm. Um, and, um, so yeah, it's, it's been very, uh, it's been very enriching for me. When I thought about inviting you to the podcast, it was because the way that we met was a very joyful experience. I mean, I was, it was a Saturday, it was my first Saturdays kind of like out and free in Philly with, you know, no plans, you know, you're in a new city, you just wanna go to the gay bars, right? And, and I think as a black person in, uh, gay bars in any city, right. There are gay bars and there are queer bars. And when I, you know, you know the distinction, right? So I always am, am curious like, where do the girls go, right? G U R L S, like where are the girls? Where are the aunties? Where are the black femmes, where, you know, where, where are we at? You know, and so I was sitting in the bar, uh, charging my phone or about to start charging my phone, and I asked this nice gentleman, um, if he knew where a charger was. That was you. And you. Said oh you can plug it in right here and then we just started talking, right? And that's how I felt like, OK, the girls are here, right? This is, this is a bar where everybody comes and so I, um, I love that story and I love that experience because you were one of the first kind of strangers that I had talked to and felt like, OK, I would, I would get a drink with them and then we did we we had a nice dinner and got to share some stories and just like talk about life, you know, and I um. I think while I'm working in in higher education, it's especially when you're on a research fellowship, you know, you're only here for a year or two and so often you can see the city or think that you're seeing the city through the experience of the university, you know, and so it is really important to me to make friends intergenerational uh friendships because of the ways that I think we. Um, we learned so much not only about the city, right, the city, the city of Philadelphia in particular, but I do think that, and I'm not trying to age you, but I do think that intergenerational friendships, um, help us to kind of access a type of archive, right? Because you hold a type of, uh, knowledge and a type of history and a type of story. Right, of being a black gay man, um, in Philadelphia at a time where, um, Philadelphia probably looked a lot different than it is that I'm expe than the Philadelphia that I'm experiencing as a black gay man or black queer man. I'm interested in the the time that you've been here if you could just like share. Um, some experiences of what it's like to, to, to, to walk through the neighborhood in 2020, sorry, in 2022, right? You can tell we've, we've been having a few glasses of wine during this podcast, um. Juxtapositioned or in contrast with how these neighborhoods have evolved, um, through the lens of, of a black gay person living in Philly. Well, one of the things I want to say is that there's a reason why I'm still here, um, because you learn how to survive in these communities. It's something I've noticed about because you know, I'm part of two gay communities, New York and Philadelphia. And something I've noticed um about some of the bars is that um they have become much more um inclusional um like there's one gay bar. That people don't even call a gay bar anymore. I know because it's, you go in there and it looks like it looks like uh it's gentrified, it's gentrified to see I've lived here for two days and I know what you're talking about. There it does seem like that's a trend in Philadelphia that um the the gay and queer spaces seem to be becoming like popular in a way where it feels like you're a tourist. Well, let me tell, let me tell you one of the things, one of the reasons why I believe that is. Um, A lot of straight women started coming to these gay clubs because they could come and they could wear the little barely their dress and assume that they won't be bothered the men men caught on to that, yeah, they caught on to it and they started following them and then they said, and then what happened was they discovered that this is where the party is, you know what I'm saying, because the girls, exactly, because, you know, we know when we talk about black joy, we know how to enjoy ourselves because we put up with so much oppression. Uh, and so much negativity to where we want to go to a place where, where we don't experience it like I was at the level up the other night. And I'm a great observer. Wait a minute, so you know this is there's gonna be a lot of pen listeners onto this episode. So tell the girls, the GIRLS, right? Tell those girls what level of is. It's a black space. It's a, it's a black space. It's black black. I just wanna say it's the only gay. That's what I, that's why I went there is because I wanted that experience and sometimes I just sit there and I observe. Joy because like you say, you know, I'm a man of a certain age, so a lot of these these girls are a lot younger than me. And I just, I see the difference between when I was their age. And what they're doing now. And uh there, there are a lot of similarities and there's some differences, but it's all good. There's room for it all. And I watched the um the drag show and they're so incredibly talented and um the things that they come up with as far as artistry and performance, um, is, is just incredible. And you know, I sit there with my drink and everything and what happens is Usually if I sit there long enough, like yourself, someone will approach me and we'll we'll just strike up a conversation, you know, it doesn't have to be anything, it doesn't have to be rocket science. It's just a conversation. And that's something uh also with the, with um smartphones just just to sit and have a conversation with someone in a bar. It's, you know, when I was their age, you know, we didn't, we didn't have smartphones. So it was, so you went to a bar, you know, to talk to people, to meet the people and to hook up. So when you go to a place like Level Up and you watch a performance and you're not thinking about, you know, your cell phone, electronics and stuff, you know, and you're just thinking about having a good time, dancing, you know, laughing, just enjoying life for an hour or so. And it's so incredibly liberating and and that's why I love it. You know, and, and uh it was just like, and then I would see every once in a while, um, you know, a white, a white kid would come in, a girl, you know, I'm just like, you know, and I would watch them and I would be like. They, they came in and they want to experience that too, you know, and this is that you always have that thing, you know, and it's like no one bothered them or anything, you know, and they, they decided that they wanted to stay or it was too black for them and they left, or it was it was like, but this was, this is our place. This is our space and this is this is what you get. It's so enriching in that way. And I think it goes all the way back. Uh, you know, to the tribes in in the uh in the beats, and the rhythms, um, and also the, the embodied experiences of us, um, in our abilities as black people to create alternative worlds, right? Like to to create joy in spite of and and sometimes it's not in spite of, it's because of, right? Um, and I, I hear you talking, uh, bringing up kind of um. A question of lineage, right? And also, uh, when I say the archive, I'm thinking about the types of archives that we both hold in our story. So what I'm really fascinated about you sharing with us is how when you go into a place like Level Up, which is a black owned, um, blackity black space, uh, a queer space in Philly, um, and when we think about. Joy, I want to make that distinction about black queer joy because of how queer folks have been, you know, instrumental in creating these alternative worlds and reimagining spaces that were not designed for us and then saying, look, this is where the girls come, right? And that is for everybody black, right? And not just black people because black joy is a form of knowledge um and a type of embodiment that other people can can be inspired and moved by, but that doesn't mean they should take it. But when you come into a space like Level up, um, in 2022, what do you think about in terms of how the queer spaces, queer black spaces in Philly have evolved, um, because I hear you saying that, you know, you, you get joy from seeing how the girls that are maybe my age or younger are able to kind of come and experience a type of freedom in there, right? Um, so I'm, I'm really interested in, in just how you're articulating the type of joy that you're getting from, from entering into a space that maybe one. was not around, you know. Well, I think it starts with the music. Yes, it was great music then, but there's also great music now, you know, we were just we were just talking about, um, Kim, um, I like Jasmine Sullivan, um, people, of course, um, um, Jill Scott and and people, you know, she's sort of in that in that middle ground, but it's just like there's always going to be great artists, music. And um But what what it is is like um the rhythm of life is what I'm talking about. It's a, it's um how can I describe it? It's like a heartbeat. It's like the drums are like the rhythm of the soul. So it's like something that has a driving beat. Um, it's what I find, you know, when I walk into level up. I know it's going to be some good music, you know, whether, whether it was from the 70s, the 80s, 90s, whatever, it's going to be good. And it's like, and you can tell, you can feel it, you know, because I watch people, you know. Dance for like an hour straight without sitting down. It's like because they're so um almost entranced by the beat. And uh and I mean it's just incredible and it's just a culture, you know, I watch, I watched the um the barmaids in the way that the way they move, the way they serve people, the way they flirt with people. Familiarity. I watch. I watched Reggie at the door, you know what I'm saying? It's like and the fact that he remembered my name and I had not been there in probably over maybe 6 months or something like, you know. And um And he just looked at me and he's like, 00, hey Julie. I was like, yeah. He's like, come on in, you know, and it's just that familiarity, it's like a family reunion. Right. I am a a huge reader of the late Bell Hooks, um, who's one of my favorite authors, and she has an essay that I constantly, uh, pick up, put down and pick up and put down in my work, um, and it's a very, it's a moving essay that inspires me not just in, uh, my academic writing but also in my, my art practice and the essay is called The Home Place, a site of resistance and. Really she talks about the black home and the ways that we create home as black people and how those spaces are like a site of resistance, um, how the joy, um, the freedom and the pleasure and the ability to just be in those spaces is is uh is what it means to kind of resist white supremacy, right? And so in this world where we are kind of, uh, riddled with white supremacy, sometimes the black home, right? And I'm also thinking about black queer spaces in this, um, metaphor of home. Um, those are the spaces where we can go and kind of shield ourselves from this, you know, bullshit world that constantly degrades us, doesn't see us, doesn't think our hair is beautiful, uh, criticizes the way that we talk. So I'm interested in kind of uh the other types of home places that you found in Philadelphia. I hear Level up is one of them, but more broadly I hear that it's it's black queer spaces that make you feel at home and then also um are from which you kind of get a type of joy and I love and I think that it's beautiful that you're saying that the joy is not just from in your body but you get a joy from seeing other black people maybe experiencing a type of freedom um or or practicing a type of freedom. Um, in a world where that's not always um allowed, right. Well, another, another, um, um place of solace for me is a black church. Um, I also, I sing in the choir at uh Eno Tabernacle. Oh, that is your next interlude. You're gonna give us a, you're gonna give us the choirs. Marvin, uh, Marvin Sa. Never would have made it. That's my, that's one of my favorite ones or my testimony. Yeah, yeah. I was also a Mary Mary fan as a kid. Mary Mary was my teenage years. Mhm. Oh, I love Leandria Johnson. It's my favorite right now. But, um, going, you know, going to that church where where what you believe are religious or whatever, there is a certain kind of joy that I get from that, especially singing in the choir. We had a Christmas concert, um, it was called Soulful Christmas at the Camels. I can smell it. Yeah, the camel center. They cooked, right? Yeah, and it was so good, you know, even it was like the, uh, um. What's her name? The, uh, uh, Mrs. Ceremony? I can't think of the Center in Philadelphia. Yes, well, it's a, it's a big performing arts. It's like the Kimmel Center to Philadelphia is what Lincoln Center is to New York and it's very high brow, OK, but not that night. And uh, um, she came out and she said, we're gonna have church tonight in the Kimmel Center. And uh we did, and we had all these black pastors came out one after the other. And we sang and we sang and we sang. And uh it was just an incredible experience. And we, we care and I tell you when I leave after that singing, uh, after the preaching, after, you know, the praise breaks and the clapping and the fried chicken and the collard greens and all that. And I come out of that church and it's like, I feel like I'm on cloud nine. Transcends the the religiosity. It's it's about spirituality and neutrality, and you're set for the rest of the week. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. But that's how I feel when I leave level up. Yeah, because as my as my, yes, that's too, and, and you know. My, my mother and my mentor Madison Moore, Doctor Madison Moore, would say that the black queer dance floor is also a form of church. As a matter of fact, I was at level up one night. Take us to church and then one of the queens sang a gospel song from Ricky Dillard. What song and and turned it out. Um, I can't remember the name of it right now, but everybody knew that song. And we had double claps and everything and it was like we had church that night and it was and then I realized it's part of the same world. It's not, it's not separated. It's not different. And everybody knows that most of the choir directors in all these black churches are one of the girls. Yeah, I, I love, I love that that linkage of, you know, black queer spaces and also black church because I think um what we tend to uh not often uh recognize is the. Connectivity between uh black cisgender women and us, right? The girls and the ways in which that our, our queerness, our femininity, our gender identity um is rooted or comes from the black woman, right? Like as a as a child, uh, who went on who went to church on and off, right? I was always so um. So, so like, you know, just immerse my first um. Um, exposure to what we know as femininity and what we know as, as flamboyant, right? It wasn't on the body of the gay man or the queer man. It was, it was black women. It was Karen Clark she. Yeah, the big church has, right? Um, you know, even Mary Mary to a certain extent, like just the performance, uh, that was Sunday morning, right? And the transformation, right, of, you know, my auntie, I can think of like Saturday night, you know, start ironing from, from 7 o'clock. Getting ready for church, uh, thawing the meat to come home and cook for after church, like just the whole preparation, the production, the performance of it, right? That was all flam, it was Aviance. It was flamboyant, you know, you know, you have the whole set up. You say the Reverend says, uh, Sister Newkirk, could you, could you give us a selection this morning? And Sister Newkirk says, Well, Reverend. I wasn't feeling well when I woke up this morning, but if y'all pray for me. I'll do what I can. She said. You know, and, and, and I, I think about, um, there's a there's a performing artist, uh, who's based in New York. His name is Xander who I am falling in love with and one of the things that Xander said at an event that I was at a few weeks ago at the kitchen in New York, um, because my sister has a residency there, Ms. Madison Moore, and, um, she was giving a talk about all of these things, right, about the ways in which that, you know, our home places as black queer children. Um, these spaces where we're surrounded by, by queerness, right? By flamboyance, by, by, uh, world building, right? How it doesn't always, um. It's not always acknowledged how these spaces fuel our creativity and he said that, you know, I, I realized that I didn't have to leave parts of myself to become myself and I think that so much of us are conditioned to, uh, think that we have to leave these spaces to be our full self and I think where I am in my life it's about kind of. You know, going back, Sankofa is an African proverb, um, about going back and reclaim, going back and reclaiming how these spaces are also queer spaces. Exactly, right? You know, when I go back home to Texas, that's something I've, I've, uh. I've come to learn. I am who I am and um. And you, you know, you accept it or not. And so it's like a lot of people think, you know, I moved to New York and then I became gay. No, I was always. People think I went to college and gay, right. I was born. I was born this way. And um even on Facebook, you know, I have um I have friends from Texas, you know, a handful, you know who who who really understand who I am and that I didn't all of a sudden change when I moved. Um, the things that changed about me changed for the better. So, um, And you know, it's a lot of it has to do with politics and uh um ignorance. Um, but, but those people who um, who are still my friends, you know, it's like, um. If you're not going to be my friend because of my sexuality, then we were never friends to begin with. We're gonna take a little bit of a break so you can give us your uh your gospel interlude. Oh, gossip a little dirty McClaren. We fall down, but we get up, we fall down, but we get. For saying it's just a sin. fell And got. OK, and we are back. Tell me more about spaces in Philly where you feel at home. Reading Terminal Market. Yes, take me there. Well, we can go in the morning. No, I pretty much go there, um, for breakfast every morning, and the reason why is because it's such a wonderful representation of Philadelphia. You can find. Anything, any kind of food you want to find what's a cheesesteak, seafood, uh, pretzels, dessert, sweet potato pie, ribs. They got some black owned food in there? Yes, they do. And they have a sign of all the black owned and operated businesses. That are in the market that are in the market. I like to go to this um place called the Dutch eating Place, and the pancakes are big as a plate and also people who are not from Philadelphia. I like to sit there and watch them try Scrabble for the first time. It's so funny. But then they order these pancakes. These pancakes come out and they're huge and it's like what they wind up doing, you know, is eating one of them and taking the other home. But um, it's great. It's great because um and the and the what I love about this place is that it's a counter. And everybody's sitting close together, you know, I think it's it's about maybe 40 people, but because you're so close together, it lends itself to conversation. So it's very difficult to sit so close to another person and not talk. You know, it's like it's more difficult not to talk than to talk. I mean, I, I love that because one of the things I have to be honest about that I have not experienced a lot in Philly it's just that kind of like. I miss the Southern hospitality, you know, Richmond is not in the deep deep South, but Richmond's in the South. It's enough where, I mean the way that you and I met, you know, just 22 girls talking in a gay bar, that happens a lot in Richmond, and I find Philly can be a little grungy, you know, and um I'm interested in just like where are the spaces where we go to kind of make community, you know. In those kinds of ways where it's OK to talk to a stranger. I know it exists in Philadelphia, but like, where are the spaces where you have kind of experienced that type of um that kind of black hospitality? We terminal markets. Where, where are your favorite uh black spaces, black owned spaces in terms of uh restaurants? Ms. Tootsie's. She just closed down. I know that's like. Some of these places are closed. COVID has, has wreaked havoc, uh, on a lot of these places. I did get nice and bougie the other day with my friend, you know, we put on a little lip and a heel and went to South, South, now see, I've never been there. OK, beautiful bar, beautiful as Aretha Franklin said, beautiful gowns, beautiful, yeah, yeah, it was, it was, it was, it was giving, um. Black elegance, you know, so there, I mean, there's a time and a place for that. It's not, uh, somewhere I would go regularly because that doesn't pay me that much, but it is a nice, um, very beautiful jazz cozy spot. They seem to be always booked and busy too. Oh, another place it's not really a sit down type of place. I love a hole in the wall. It's at 40th and Lancaster. OK. It's called Quality Taste. Oh, the Jamaican spot, yeah. Now the service. Right. But I'm Jamaican, so I can say that, OK? Nobody else can. I can't. Oh, they just opened a new one in my neighborhood. It's Irene. um, it's like um 40th and Chestnut. But the thing is, it's a beautiful restaurant, but there's nobody. in there yet, nobody, nobody's going right? you walk by there and there's nobody, I guess nobody people don't know about it yet, but I'd like to get the word out because it's a beautiful place. Well, part of the payment for this podcast is we will go to to do that we're gonna get Jamaican food on me exactly. We're gonna do that. There's another place actually called the Texas Wiener. And it's across the street. That's not. No, no, it's not Jamaican. It's um, but it's very black because most of the customers are black. They go it's a little, it's a little greasy spoon hole in the wall type place because I know that you like to cook too, right? So take us into um into your kitchen. What what are what are we cooking on on a on any given Sunday? Oh, on a Sunday, well, I probably cooking to watch the football game with the boys or the girls. The girls are coming over for dinner. What are you cooking? Uh, I like to cook oxtails. OK, she's expensive now. That's only for the for the for the people coming over. I'll probably do some um some nachos, um, I do some chicken wings. One of my favorite things to cook, I do like catfish with collard greens and candy yams. And then my specialty is pecan pie. OK. Yeah, and I put a little dolce de Leche. Don't give you a recipe because it's a lot of white people listening. You know what I mean? You'll be walking up, you'll be walking to Reading Terminal Market and they'll be selling your pie. Where did you learn how to cook? I'm assuming there's there's a, there's a black mama behind there somewhere. My mother. My mother was an excellent cook. And so much so that when she baked pies. Shout out to the black women who can't cook because I don't know. I don't know any of them. Do you know any? No yes. But you know, for the black mamas out there who can't cook, we love you just the same. I just, I don't know her, you know, I really don't. It's like I need to interview a black woman who can't cook or who just doesn't cook because, yeah, when I think about good food, I think about all my aunties, you know, and I. I have an uncle who can who can really do some some mean uh grilled jerk chicken um and a and a bread pudding. My uncle my uncle Charlie can do a bread bread pudding. I have a cousin Ricky he does the brisket. OK, and my uncle Charlie does a um a potato bread pudding. Have you ever had that? My mother's pies were so good that when she took them, you know, to the church of the fellowship hall, the church ladies would hide them. To take home so that nobody else I've done that. I've done that. It was so good. It's like, is this Lurlene's pie? And they had that right. We said that we're gonna do a little segment where we're gonna give quotes, quotes, quotes about our joy, quotes that um that that have resonated with us from folks that we love. Oh, my mother. Oh, a white lady once told my mother, she said to my mother, she says, if there's going to be any \*\*\* in heaven, I don't want to go. And my mother said to, Oh, don't worry honey, with that in your heart, you ain't going nowhere. The other day my auntie Sharon, we were at, um, her house sitting on the, on the bedroom floor just just kikiing and cackling and her son was talking to mess and she said, stop talking to me stupid because you're not. Only an auntie can give a compliment, words of affirmation, and stop talking to me crazy. And you know, being from Texas is a lot of Texas sayings. Tell me what I have, you know, you get up out of bitch, you know, when you comb your hair, brush your teeth and just say. And uh uh my aunt Vert, she would say, oh, you need to go back to bed. She goes, You look like death sucking on a pickle. The thing about being an artist is like if you tell someone you're a nurse, they believe you right away. But if you say you're an actor, they don't really believe you. It's kind of like, well, what have I seen you in? Because if it's like, if you haven't been in a major motion picture, then you're not really an actor. It's it's that sort of thing, that sort of ignorance. And um, you know, the theater was here thousands of years before film was even thought about. And I, I want to go back to something you said. Um, why is it that you that you feel so connected to uh the character in Fences? Drew Gabriel Gabriel, Gabriel blow your horn. Well. There's a lot um that can be said about um how the spiritual world influences what we do in this world. And sometimes it comes to us in a dream and you might not really understand it and you and you try to interpret it, what does this mean? What does that mean? I want to use an example of um before, before my mother um went on to Gloria, I had a dream of her being in like, um. A a bright white light or light, you know, and uh we were sitting, she used to love to watch soap operas and we were sitting watching so yeah, and there was somebody knocking on the door and she said, baby, go and see who that is. And I went to the door. This isn't the dream, and there was nobody there. And she said, Well, go outside and see what he is. And I went outside. And when I went outside and was walking around our house in Texas, and uh day turned to night. And I walked around the house and when I got all the way around the house, then you know, I saw my mother in this bright white light. And uh and she said to me in this white light, she said, Mother has to go home now. And um And a week later she passed away. But then on my birthday, my birthday is on the 9th of April, which by the way, is the same day that Doctor King was buried. And uh I used to have a recurring dream. And one of the dreams was I was in a cornfield and um a phone was ringing and I answered the phone that was mother. And she said, baby, what are you what are you doing with your life? I said, I'm still doing the performing arts. And she said, Oh, that's good. And then she said, You better go now because you've got lots of work to do. And I would have the same dream um every year. And um and with the character Gabriel, he's always talking to these people who were in heaven who have gone on, you know, and people look at him like strange. And at the end of the play, what happens is his brother dies and he sees him entering the gates of heaven. And then at the end, everybody sees what he sees. So I think it's it's sort of like it's about belief. If you believe in something, it's like I used that movie King Richard, the Williams sister's father, he believed in them so much. That he refused to let go of that dream. He had a had a manifestation and they became what was manifested and uh it's very powerful, it's very powerful. Our parents, right? When we think about our parents and how they've gone on to be ancestors and how we still kind of communicate with them, um, I find that the manifestation that uh he was able to kind of see in his daughters, it speaks to the ways that oftentimes our loved ones are black family, right? Um, chosen and biological, are able to kind of see our bodies in a world that is not yet here. Exactly. Right? And so there's a part of Afrofuturism that that takes place, um, through daily practice where if we really listen to those dreams where. Able to kind of put our bodies in alternative worlds, right? Like someone saw level up before it was possible for that to be a space and now we're talking about how this black queer space, um, in Center City brings us a type of joy. Look at Tyler Perry, who was homeless at one time he saw in his mind. The studios right exactly. My my father was a real black Texas cowboy. And when I, um, when I decided what I wanted to do, I'll never forget it. He said, uh, boy, you sure you want, you sure you want to be an actor? I said yes sir. He said to me, god damn it, then they'd be the best at it. And so that's that's the motto I live by. Be the best at it, you know, no matter what I'm doing. Whether it's August Wilson or Shakespeare or Chekhov or Alice Walker. I love what you said about about Gabriel. It gives me um inspiration to kind of think about the question for myself in terms of what characters um do I feel very deeply connected to. But as we think about Afrofuturism and we think about um centering the, the radical black imagination and in all its boundlessness. I'm very um interested in just hearing you talk a little bit about what do you what do you dream about and what are you manifesting right now as a performer and artist that lives in Philadelphia, um, and who's constantly, you know, thinking about shows and and and acting, um, and embodying different black characters, right? How is all that connected to what you're manifesting? Well, first and foremost, an actor is a storyteller and it goes all the way back to Africa and being storytellers. And I just want to, what I'm working on is telling some of the greatest stories ever written. I want to, um, because I've been doing theater for a long time and I want to cross over. Into um to film. And uh and I want to work, I want to work with some of the people who I admire very much like Morgan Freeman, Denzel Washington, Viola Davis. Many of these people, you know, you know, they didn't, they didn't wake up. Uh, being the stars that they are, you know, they had, they had struggles. They had, uh, uh, to get there and I, I have a friend, you know, he's making a Broadway debut right now in Chicago and, uh, and I, I want to play Othello on Broadway. It's one of my dreams. And uh I want to work at the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. When I leave this earth. I want to make, I wanna have make uh made a mark. As one of those people, um, who was one of the greatest storytellers. As far as our stories, like as far as the classics are concerned, because I'm very I am very versatile and uh. There's a, there's a quote that I love, uh, it says, let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man. It's just being about becoming more human and. Taking these stories and bringing us more together, you know, than we are apart because when you, when you leave a play or a movie. And you know, why do you go? Why do you go? Is it holds a mirror up to life. And so, you know, I just want to have that platform to where that mirror just gets bigger and bigger and bigger and we're able to see the whole world in one story. And um yeah, that's, that's what I worked towards maybe a uh uh a line from Gabriel. Very simple line. It's the last line in the play, Gabriel says. That's the way that go. There you go. Jolie, I want to thank you for coming on the show and sharing a multitude of stories tonight. What I want you to do as we close out is leave the girls um with ways that they can support you, um, through Cash App, Venmo, or coming to your next show. Well, let me tell you something. If you, if you will come to the neighborhood on Friday night. You're gonna see me somewhere. I think just, just come on in and you know I'm, I'm doing this show, um, it's in Wilmington, Delaware. It's just a hop to skip, uh, from Philadelphia, but, uh, I'm doing William Shakespeare's The Tempest. I'm playing the lead, uh, this summer, and I would really love for the girls to come out and see that and uh have that cultural experience and see the, the, uh, um. The range that I have. Mm. The transition, right, exactly the range that I have, you know, um, because, you know, I can go from, you know, being a social butterfly, um, at taboo one night and, uh, and, and, and the uh the lead in the Shakespeare play the next night, so. And then, and then we'll talk about um all the other things that uh that you're interested in, uh, as far as you know, maybe spending summer in the Hamptons. We can do that too. This has been such a pleasure. And uh just remember to smile when you look in the mirror, smile and say to yourself, I am enough. Jolie, thank you so much for coming on Black Matter podcast. I want to thank, uh, the Center for Media at Risk at the University of Pennsylvania for supporting my work, and I want to thank everybody black in Philadelphia and beyond. Thank you for having me. Oh. The thing I don't always find in level up is that. Uh, people there are not like kind of uh as social as some. That's the only thing about, yeah, bike up, I feel like the girls are ready to talk, you know. Um, I haven't made a lot of friends in love. I danced with people and stuff, but I don't think people really go there to say. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you ever go when they have the dancers? Mhm. I love it. I missed that. Um, I've I've been want to go to, um, maybe go sometime to this uh. The brunch at Taboo. They they have on Saturdays and Sundays. And what's that like? I haven't been yet. I, I see. Oh, they have dancers? It's a drag. OK, cool. OK, so we're going into the kind of um the kind of deleted or or behind the scenes part of our episode. And I want to share some stories because you know as we talk about intergenerational friendships, and we talk about making connections and the black body as the archive. I also like to talk about The stories that are under the rug, right? And um one of the things that I also focus on in my in my scholarship and my work is what I call con artistry theory. And to define con artistry is to think about the intellectual contributions, the learnings from black folks who break the rules, right? Black folks who live outside of the confines and black folks who not only break the rules, but sometimes break the law. And who do it as a means to um, take our body from constantly focused on on survival, from constantly being focused on survival and really thinking about thriving and claiming our joy by any means necessary. And so I always love to pay homage and recognition to the black folks that say, fuck it, and that break the rules and I love hearing stories about this as well. And so this will not be for the Pen people, but this will be for for us, for my podcast. I remember when we were at dinner we were just sharing stories about men and about um some of our experiences with um you know with the men's and with getting things from them and all of that and so I, I, I wanna hear some of your craziest dating stories and just anything that you want to share. I'm blanking on what we were talking about that night at dinner, um, in terms of like specifics. Oh, a con artist. Oh, there was that night. Well, this was in New York. Uh, I invited this guy home with me. And uh woke up and all my shit was gone. The next day, um, this is a white guy, black guy, give us context. It was it was it was a white guy. I had gone to a club. He took all your stuff. Yes, I didn't in Loretta Devine voice. Exactly. I didn't meet him inside. It was in the street and he was hot and everything and How long ago was this? Oh, this, this had to be like 15 years ago. I woke up. I, I was dog sitting my uh my best friend's dog as a Labrador retriever, and the dog was lying on top of my chest with his father and he's just looking at me like, You stupid motherfucker. And I wake up and I look over, my computer's gone. Uh, my TV's going and everything, and the doors, the door is still wide open. Damn. So, but the thing is, I go to file a police report and it was a female officer and, and it was awful because she tried to make it sound like, you know, it was my fault that I got robbed, you know, and I guess in a way it was because I just got home with me. So that was one that was one experience. And um and then there was an experience where I came out of the club and I had this watch on and this guy tried to rob me. And a lot of times Um, they think because you're gay you're weak. They do think that they, that's a damn lie. Oh honey, I know. I gave this guy karate chop to the neck. And he said, I can't believe you did that. I said, I can't believe you tried to steal my motherfucking watch. We've all had one of these. I'm just gonna call him Ben. Mhm. Who we don't know was gay, you know, I've, I have had, uh, many of experiences of, of intimacy, um, with men that may not be or identify as one of the girls but they wanna they always want some of the well they're like a kid in a candy store and I'm still, I'm still seeing him as a matter of fact, I talked to him today. Really and uh he just got back. take us to the beginning. Because it is a beautiful story. I met him on a chat room. OK. The chat room was called Straight men with Gay Urges. That was a cha so original. Straight men with gay urges. I just couldn't resist. And listen, I was, what is this? Where is this chat at? This was, I was in New York. Where's the chat that's a straight man with gay urges plus money. Cause I wanna be in that one. Because you know we can make money off of this. I know I was supposed to be working, right? And we started talking, right? So this is um. The following story you're about to hear is rated R, and not for young audiences. I was, uh, I, I decided that I was going to dare him to do something. So I said, uh, I said, did you have, uh, did you have coffee this morning? He said, yeah, I said, uh. I said, if you really want to meet me, I said, I want you I want you to jerk off in that coffee cup and bring it to me at lunch. And he did You were playing. That was, that was how you saw if he was straight but willing to play. We all do that. And then he did and he was like, no, this guy was like, and he, I'm sure he was married with children, of course, but, but I became like a dominatrix. So you really got to, you really got to lean into your own con artist you got to play you know to use him to experiment that excited him, you know, you have these guys. What it is is these guys are used to being in control power and so when they have someone overpower them, it's exciting. And so, uh, we would, we couldn't keep our hands off each other, you know, we would go to restaurants and stuff, you know, and it'd be like it's just that look and all of a sudden we'd be in, we'd be in the bathroom carrying on and then y'all are still friends? Oh yeah. He, well, this is, let me tell you what happened. Yeah, sorry, I'm I'd I'd fallen in love with that's. No, and I'm not, I'm not criticizing you because I'm speaking from my own experience. That's where it happens when you start to kind of like engage in sharing a type of care with them when in real in reality they are, they are exploiting us, of course you know they're coming in for a type of uh uh Six Flags experience and then they go back. They're tourists tourists. It was, it was, um, but let me tell you, it's a blessing in disguise. What happened was I got a national tour with the show. And I was gone for 3 months. Well. When I got back from the 3 month tour, he couldn't, you know, he couldn't wait, so he met someone else and the wife wind up leaving him for this other guy. OK. And um he met a man, another man. Right. What I'm saying is that she's fine about that and they got a divorce and um but the thing about it is he is um he's much happier now than he was because now he's his true self. That it was going to happen eventually, but it wasn't me that broke up the family. I have another guy. Who is the way that y'all, the way that Julie just kind of made this like head til like I have another one. It sounds like it's another bag maybe how I mean I also hear that there is a type of joy from this different because this guy is also an artist. We have a meeting of the mind. OK. But it's still something that is a fairy tale. But to quote Bernadine from from waiting into exile, don't get fucking married, meaning don't fall in love with these kinds of tourists. And here's the thing. This guy this guy lives in Connecticut. He comes to Philadelphia and uh we we sleep in the same bed, I think, but we don't have sex. And then that's even more intimate. I girl, I was literally about to say that. It's more intimate because it's a type of, you know why it's more intimate? It's a type of imagination. It's a type of kind of like yearning for a type of um access into this world that they feel that they cannot quite enter into. So the thing that's dangerous is like how you are showing up in their mind that they're not acting on in the ways that they're not acting on. Every summer, the wife and kids, they go to Europe. For vacation and you get invited to come kiki at the nice house the whole week. And uh Chef, get out of the sunken place. Exactly. Actually, you know, and he's he's like he's so good to you. Yeah, but, but it is, and we both know that. Um, it's real and it isn't in a way and, and so it's like it's something that can never be, but, but it's so. Um, joyful, if you will, for that week or whatever, you know. And so, um. Well, it's a type of it's a type of like um. I don't know, it's. It's a type of. Reminder In a way, how, how amazing we are, you know, and how we as black queer men are also like care. Absolutely.takers, caregivers, um, but sometimes that care can be displaced, right? Like I always say, you just have to be one. One step ahead. Unless this is where this this term less is more, you've heard less is more. It doesn't have to be something extravagant or sometimes he comes to Philadelphia and we go, we go to the state store and get a box of wine, come back and listen to jazz and just drink wine and it is just like. It's Lovely. Lovely so liberal, you know. And then when I go to his place, sometimes we just watch movies. Classic movies and um. And then sometimes we do do that, the big thing, you know, you'll say, um. Uh, you want to go to Boston and, and have dinner and see this show was like, yeah, let's do it. It's like so spontaneous. You know, it's like, and, and both of us are just like. are just loving it because it's it's about, it's always about, it stems from art. And um, And he just loves, love, and the thing about it it's like when we talk on the telephone, it's like we can, it's nothing for us to talk two hours. Because we're so engaged in what each other is saying. How do I get a sugar daddy in Philadelphia? It's actually not as hard as you think. OK, but you can't give me it can't give me the secret on a podcast, but I want to date in a way that pushes me beyond my own comfort zone because you're in a new city, you know, like if I'm talking to myself, it's like you're in a new city, you don't know anybody here, so whatever. Do let me say this I can introduce you to someone who will hook you up. With the sugar daddies. OK. Within a week. Within a week. What is this like a sugar daddy, um, Ponzi scheme? No, he's, he's uh, I would call him. A connector. Uh. The sugar daddy madam of Philadelphia. Fine, OK, I'm down. I'm down. I love your stories and I, it's making me think about how I want to leave this place, leave Philadelphia. Um, with some dating experiences that pushed me out of my own comfort zone and because we are talking about the brilliance and the, the magicalness of being with one of the girls, right? That we should get, you know, compensated well for that, especially when, when a lot of these men are tourists. Oh, that's that's no problem. And the thing about it is now that we're sort of coming out of the pandemic. Are we? Are you manifesting that? Because I'm ready. Yes. You know what it's like to teach with a mask on? I'm I'm over it. Or how moisturized my skin is like I'm doing all this care work and they don't see it. But what I'm saying is that most of these experiences that I'm talking about obviously occurred before, um, before the pandemic. Have you ever been to, have you ever been to a place called Voyeur? No, but I know of it. It's like the after hours place, right? OK. You'll, you'll meet the men that we're talking about right lawyer. yeah, OK. How do I have to present myself as Doctor Chaz or just Chaz in distress? I just moved here and I'm lost and I need a dollar. Or 5000. No, all you have to do is be yourself. You, you don't need to do any extra. myself is doing. There you go. Jolie, I want to thank you for coming on the show and sharing a multitude of stories tonight.