

Programmer's Notes: Orla Smith

Caveh Zahedi

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Hi Caveh,

A few years ago, I found out that my dad had been married to another woman for nine years before he was married to my mother. This revelation was completely shocking – I had never gotten a hint that that had been the case – although ultimately it didn't tangibly change anything about the way I live my life. There were no secret children, just a chapter in his life with a woman who had been tastefully edited out of old stories, because he never found the right time to bring her up. He told me I was free to ask any questions I wanted whenever I was ready. My first instinct was: I should film an interview with him. A pause for reflection later, my second thought was: why do I struggle to imagine talking to him about this without a camera in between us?

The camera (or a microphone, or the written word) is a lens through which I channel a more openly reflective version of myself, something that I see in your work, too. When you were on Peter's podcast – Back to One – a few weeks ago, you spoke about the difference between the warm and expressive Caveh that you play in your films and the guarded shyness that people might encounter when first meeting you. You talked about the Zoom call that you had with me, Kimia, and Lucy in the leadup to organising this tour, and how self-conscious you were about coming across as cold and ungrateful. It was strange to hear you speak so touchingly to Peter and his listeners (rather than directly to the three of us) about the things that went unsaid in our brief and minor social interaction, but I think I get why that was the place for you to express those thoughts. I know that I was warmer than you were in that call, but not because I was any less guarded – instinctively, I was performing lightness, friendliness, competence, to make a particular impression. (For the record, I'm not sure much more could be expected from a first Zoom call.)

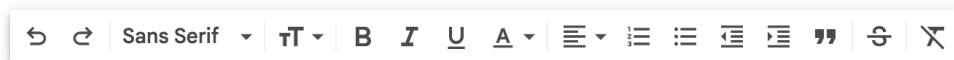
The version of a person that takes action and the version of them that reflects on their actions are two different people, and it's a life's work to close the gap between them. I think that's a criticism that some people have of your work: that it's all reflection and no change. I don't know how to feel about that. I guess the argument against that is, as an artist, you don't owe the audience self improvement — and we only know you as an artist, not as a person. Then again, I wonder how people will react to the third and final season of *The Show About the Show* in that regard. In it, I see a change: a sense that you're interested in developing your signature self-reflexivity into something more productive for yourself and the people around you. While previous seasons greatly favoured camera addresses and recreations, this one mixes in more real footage of you directing, acting in ways that yourself and your collaborators will later reflect on. You end up looking worse because of it, but I think it's because you're trying to become better, and I think, in turn, it makes the work better.

That's what I get from the version of Caveh Zahedi in your work, anyway. I can't speak to the real Caveh Zahedi, because I don't know him (yet).

I may have been completely aware that filming my dad was some kind of distancing mechanism — a way to stay reflecting and avoid acting — but that didn't stop me from doing it. And that's probably fine. I don't think it's a terrible thing to linger in that reflective place: it's good for art, and I make art. It's good for life too, in moderation. I wonder where that line is; your work makes me think about that. I'm curious if you feel like you've found it, or if you even care to?

Looking forward to meeting you.

Orla



Orla Smith is a London-based filmmaker and curator. She is the Co-Director of The Creative Nonfiction Film Weekend.