



Episode 2:

Music as a portal for empathy, lamentation, and social imagining With David Gungor of The Brilliance

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Katie: Your listening to This Election, where we are committed to the inner work that is needed to do politics differently. This is episode #2. I'm your host – Katie Cochran—and I'm so glad you are here.

This podcast series offers a new way of looking at politics, one that focuses on how we engage with others rather than on our partisan identities or policy preferences. It explores why politics is so triggering and offers spiritual practices that heal past wounds, ground us in our bodies, and connect us to that which transcends our differences.

If you are committed to active citizenship but feel worn down by a political culture of fear and anger, this podcast is for you. If you have lost sleep over politics, or your temper, or a friend, this podcast is for you. Politics is hard but is something we can heal from and it is something we can change. It won't be easy. It will take practice but my hope is that the conversations here open us up, individually and collectively, to a new way of engaging. This Election we will do politics differently.

[00:00:00] Our guest today is David Gungor. David is a multifaceted artist, songwriter, pastor, speaker, and music producer based in New York city. He leads a dynamic life, balancing creative pursuits with pastoral responsibilities alongside his wife, Kate, and their four children. As half of the brilliance and leader of the Good Shepherd Music Collective, David is deeply immersed in the music scene, producing music and podcasts from his New York City studio, and leading workshops on creativity and songwriting.

With over a decade of pastoral experience at Good Shepherd New York, he is dedicated to nurturing spiritual growth and community engagement through his work as a speaker, workshop leader, and mentor for Trinity Leadership Fellows. David is also a passionate advocate for empathy and peace, collaborating extensively with organizations such as the Peacemaking Organization, Telos, and Narrative4.

I first discovered David through the brilliance in the winter of 2019 as I struggled to come to terms with the challenges of running a [00:01:00] shelter. Their song, May You Find a Light, spoke to the longing I both witnessed and experienced as I accompanied people on their journey home. Since then, their music has been both a balm to my soul and a beautiful call to action towards seeing the humanity in all people.



Their songs wrestle with some of the most acute challenges facing our world, war, violence, immigration, political polarization, hunger, and anxiety. They have helped me hold the complexity of these issues and the complexity of my own life with tenderness and grace. Music like theirs is what we need if we are to engage on these issues and the others that plague us.

Music like theirs is a pathway to hope.

David, thank you so much for joining us today.

David: Thank you, Katie, for having me. And I'm very honored to be a guest on your podcast.

Katie: So one of the goals of this podcast is to expand the definition of politics to include not just our partisan [00:02:00] identities and our policy preferences, but also the ways in which we engage with other people on political topics.

So kind of keeping that expanded definition in mind. Can you tell me about your earliest political memory and what that taught you about how we engage?

David: you know, I think of my earliest political memory, and it's a odd memory, but I remember when I was a child when Bill Clinton won his first term in office as president.

My dad was a pastor at an evangelical church. And I remember it felt like a funeral or something. I was like, why is everybody upset?

I just didn't understand at all. But I remember just being like, why are people so upset about the president?

Katie: So that's interesting because it's like this seeing kind of the emotional effect of politics without even knowing really kind of what's behind all of that.

Do you think from that or from other things what you learned about, the ways in which we engage and, and how to do that?

David: That's a good question. I think [00:03:00] I was thinking the earliest and from that, I think that maybe I saw the start of just partisan politics and it kind of turned me off. Growing up, anytime I experienced a bubble of thought, I was always curious to what's on the other side.

A little later in life, the first time getting active in politics I think was probably in high school. 9-11 happened and we were in the Iraq war, And I, I remember I was on spring break and I



remember they had a name for the operation where they were bombing, Baghdad and we were all watching it. And I remember a lot of my friends, at the time, just through the idea of like USA and whatever it meant to be patriotic, they were excited about it. And I remember thinking that first it was like a spectacle of like, wow, [00:04:00] here's this giant response by us. But then on another part, like, Oh my gosh, are we watching people die right now?

It was the first time my own bubble was starting to pop, I guess, on what my political imagination was, of what it meant to be patriotic. Once again, that those are all like small little memories. But just kind of the way that you turn your head and go in what am I celebrating right now? Or what am I grieving right now? Those were two early political memories for me one as a child and one as a young teenager.

Katie: Yeah, I'd love that the beginning of political awareness is also just awareness of our own reaction, your own reaction to this and others people's reaction and how, that feels. There's dissonance there almost from, the beginning. I think it's dissonance a lot of us feel, as we engage.

David: Yeah, and I think dissonance through relationship and community because, just like religious beliefs or just like ethics, those types of things, they're taught to you at a young age. [00:05:00] And so you kind of grow up in a, in a worldview. And so the worldview that I grew up in at that time was a more conservative worldview. I remember being confused by, wait, so why is the party that is pro life like gun happy, and those types of things. As a child, you kind of start putting things together and questioning and, and then you ask questions and community members or people around you try to then say the answers. You have a question and you get an answer.

Katie: So the other two components of the project are trauma and spirituality. So we use a trauma lens to understand how politics has wounded us and why it triggers us. And then we turn to spiritual practices to help us move into a healing space.

David: I mentioned in the intro that I, I discovered your music while I was running a homeless shelter. And I found it so healing. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what you think gives music this [00:06:00] healing capacity? I think that music it's able to unite people's imaginations in a way that transcends language.

So if I don't speak Russian or don't speak Spanish or a certain language it can be hard to communicate with someone. But when you listen to a piece of music, you both can be brought to a place of wonder or hope or memory. And from that place it can lead you to learning about another person's story or the way that it connects them.

Our last record that we put out, there's a song in it. It's a very strange name, Lake Coatepeke. And the reason why it's that name is because John and I were recording this song that oddly enough, I wrote with my daughter who was in fifth [00:07:00] grade at the time. She was



leaving her elementary school that she had always been at and they wanted to write a class song.

And so I helped my daughter sit down and we wrote this chorus that goodbyes are never easy. And so she's singing it to her school, I'm looking at my own kids and thinking of the way that it's framed through that. And here's this person that was actually working on maintenance at the, the building that I was in.

And as he heard the song, he came up and he started listening and he spoke Spanish and he started asking about it. And we said, Oh, we're writing this song. And he told us a story of how it reminded of him, of his childhood. And specifically it brought him back. the way that he said it was so beautiful. He said, I was just transported back to the lake. And he was telling us about swimming [00:08:00] as a child and that he lost a friend, a friend drowned and he started crying and he was telling us this story. And then he said, thank you, thank you, thank you. And John and I were like, what just happened it felt like a, like a sacred moment with this person that I would never really had a connection with.

And the grief, the small grief of me being like, Oh, my kids are growing up. The small grief of my daughter being like, I'm leaving this school that I love To them, this huge traumatic moment of a child losing one of their best friends in a lake, but he's brought back to it. That's what music can do. It can bring you to a place of memory and the past, it can also bring you together in the present, and then it can lead you to a place in the future, together.

Katie: That's such a beautiful story. I think like, that [00:09:00] song holds space for big griefs and little griefs, right?, we're interacting as we listen in ways that are so different and that there's commonality there. It's a beautiful way to think about how music opens this portal for people to bring in their different experiences.

You know?

So I want to share one of the songs from your Brother album, "Does Your Heart Break?" Before I do, was wondering if you could talk a little bit about lamentation and how that's woven into your music.

David: So that specific song has gone through iterations and the first iteration was in the season of Lent, John, who is the other member of The Brilliance, and I were going to write a record with some themes and one of the themes that we wanted to have in it was the idea of lament, and just really being honest to ourselves and to one another and to the divine, if you [00:10:00] would.



And so we opened up Lamentations and there was a very dark scripture around children who are hungry. And we just had a conversation around, you know, does the universe feel? Does God feel? And so John had written kind of a pre chorus of this, this instrumental pre chorus.

And then we sat there and wrote the verse together. And then I think, eventually, we were just kind of playing around on it, and an odd patron saint of our band came up, which was Elliot Smith. Which is this, everything means nothing to me. And I feel like a lot of times when we see so much pain and you see so much, trauma in the world or you experience it, you don't know where to place it.

When you see things like mass shootings, or you see tendencies of [00:11:00] violence, gun violence, those types of things, you can easily dive into nihilism, which says nothing will ever change, and it doesn't matter.

One nice thing about the practice of lament is a practice of grief, corporate grief. Our spirituality in America in the 21st century reflects in many ways our own political discourse . I don't think that we know how to grieve well together. We don't have a place to put that, that grief.

Katie: I feel like this, it's a little bit of an aha moment for me because I, listened to that song and in some ways my answer was, yes, my heart breaks at all of this.

And thinking about it now, as you talk about corporate grief, I think one of the reasons it felt so cathartic, was I felt like I wasn't alone in the grief, right? It'd be, It took this personal feeling and made it corporate, made it communal. And even though I didn't know you, I don't know the other people who are listening to that song, it [00:12:00] felt as if it was something I was experiencing communally with the music rather than just on my own. And so I think, I just, I appreciate that, that insight. And also the insight of the need for us as a society to figure out how to grieve together in community

All right, let's [00:13:00] [00:14:00] [00:15:00] listen

so one of the things that I love about this song, but also about so many of your songs is that you actually hold heartbreak and hope at the same time So I was wondering if you talk a little bit about how you create music that that holds these things that seem to to be in tension

David: I think our goal for most of our music now is we try to create art that inspires empathy.

I think one of the things that spirituality has always informed us is that one of the greatest spiritual gifts is [00:16:00] the ability to see and is the ability to hear and learning how to listen, which is difficult. In no ways have we mastered it, but we practice it. Whenever you



see someone and you hear someone and listen to them, there's a real connection that can happen.

And I feel like through that connection, even if it's grief or whatever it is, you don't feel alone. And you feel like whatever you learned, you then have a certain sort of responsibility, you are now a part of that story Hope then is tied to what you do. And you're not doing it alone. You're doing it with people.

For myself, hope is not just a feeling. It is a action point. Even if it's as simple as grieving together, that's a hopeful thing because you're doing it together and knowing that you're not alone [00:17:00] and knowing that there are other people that see you and care for you.

The hope of our music is that people feel seen and heard.

Katie: The next song I want to share is Oh Dreamer, a song in the first suite, which was an album commissioned to raise awareness about dreamers and DACA. In that song, you use the inscription from the Statue of Liberty in a really beautiful, but also very evocative way. And so before we listen, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how music connects us to our history.

David: John and I, before we decided to do a series of suites, we were deciding if we were going to keep on making music as The Brilliance. We've been making music together since we were children I always laugh because my twins are 13, my oldest is 15 and after I had my 15 year old, I started to kind of want to make music again.

we released [00:18:00] our first album right when our twins were born. And so I always can kind of remember it's been a family childhood thing for me. Childhood as meaning like my childhood best friend and then family as in ever since my children we've always had The Brilliance and John and I have done that, but there have been times where you're like, what are we doing? I mean should we still do this and I remember we were in Chicago, we played a show and we just we thought maybe we're done and our friend Mark ready took us out And we were at a tiki bar, and he said, "What do you guys like doing?" And we just kind of said what we like is whenever people connect to the music and it brings us together and stories.

And he said, Why don't you tell other people's stories then? Why don't you do that? Why don't you make that kind of music? And so we were kind of interested and he said, you could help me. At the time he was working for a nonprofit that were trying to help [00:19:00] DACA dreamers. And he said, have you ever met with a DACA dreamer?

And I said, no, I know what DACA dreamers are from headlines, but I didn't know what were the issues for an everyday dreamer. And so he introduced us to multiple DACA dreamers And every time we would meet, every stereotyped that we would have would always be surprised.



I live in New York, which is a wonderful place, but a pretty liberal city. And I had all these assumptions from the news. The first dreamer that I met with, his dream was to be in the army. After 9 11, he was from New York. He was looking at all these first responders. Go towards the city and he was very inspired. And so he joined the ROTC and his plan was to join the army and then become a firefighter.

Right before his senior year, right before he tried to enlist [00:20:00] into the army, his mom sat him down and told him that he was undocumented and it really was a fracture in their relationship because he felt all this pain from his mom, even though she was a single mom working two jobs and taking care of her child, he felt like his dream was lost. He couldn't serve in the army and he wouldn't, be able to be a firefighter, et cetera. So he told us this story and I grew up in a Christian household, but one of the emphasis that I always had in a Christian household was non violence. And so to hear, to hear someone who wanted to serve in the military,

His dream was to serve. His dream was to be a firefighter. It kind of just stopped us in our tracks in the ways that we are so privileged as Americans.

And my daughter, at the same time as I was doing this, went on a field trip to the Statue of Liberty. [00:21:00] And then she did a little art piece and it had that, it had that poem.

And so then John and I, wrote the first iteration of O Dreamer. And every, everything that I had was kind of love as an open door. Welcome stranger, these types of things.

when you write a song, what I like to do is I'll be at a show or something and I'll play it to see what does it feel like to play? You know, you kind of test out the waters and John that night we sat down and he's like, I don't like that song. I was like, why don't you like the song? And we ended up having this long conversation and essentially any song for John that is just, there's no dialogue. It's just kind of preaching at you. It feels more propaganda than it does art. And so that night I remember I fell asleep and John and I were, we had a show in Grand Rapids. I think we were playing at [00:22:00] Calvin College. But I remember I fell asleep and I woke up in the middle of the night with a night terror where there was like a figure over my bed.

And I had, I told John, Oh my gosh, I had this terrible sleep. I had this night terror. In the terror, someone like came into our hotel room and it was propped open, and then this figure into that. And he looked at me very coldly and kind of jokingly. And he looked at me and he said, well, bro, love has an open door. Welcome stranger. And the dream to one person is the nightmare to another. depending on the context. And I remember that led us to then say, okay, well then how do we make this a question and a dialogue to where the listener is able to not just have something preached at them, but they're able to enter a dialogue.



And I feel like that, that is the challenge of any artist that tries to dive into political work. How do you not just be a sounding board for either a party or an [00:23:00] ideologue or in a sense just propaganda.

And so that, that is the mixture of somehow diving into poetry around immigration and what is a dream.

And specifically what is a dream to me and to my child, and how do you then put that in comparison to the dream of, if I asked a kid, what is your dream? Maybe, you know, Maybe they would say, I want to be a professional sports player. I want to be a doctor. I want to be whatever it is. A lot of times they think of what they do, but if you're talking to a person that doesn't have clean water or doesn't have food or is in war, their dream is very different.

And whenever you talk about your dreams and you put them next to each other, then you can kind of see privileges and realities and all different types of things. and that's [00:24:00] where, As you said, when you try to dive into art and specifically art in the past. It can, it can also show you in the same way, where we've come from and also how we're still tied together.

[00:25:00] [00:26:00] [00:27:00] Katie, I love that you chose that version of that song. Cause it's my favorite version anytime you're writing something, I probably have 10 different versions of that recording that I did. And that was a live recording. And it was with Deanna Cameros, who is an amazing artist, but she knew John from when we were in Grand Rapids together in college,

We went to Grand Rapids Community College and they had a great little music department. And [00:28:00] Deanna She has her own story of being undocumented. And she now, has her green card and she's an advocate for immigration and for people that are undocumented.

And so John and I, we knew for this project, we want to actually like talk to people And we had talked to Deanna and she, she is such an amazing singer, an amazing guitar player. And then, what was fun, is my brother in law, Joshua Roman, who's like a world renowned classical cellist. He played on that and we had, you know, you're doing live taking, you're doing something and it just, it brought me to a memory. So that was special that you played that version. I don't listen to my own music often at all because you only hear the mistakes or the things that you wish you did different. But that was one of the rare times where I was just like, Oh my gosh, I was brought back to this memory. So thank you for that.

Katie: So The Suites, that album was where you first began to include non lyrical pieces as well. Can you [00:29:00] tell me a little bit about that choice and the ways in which music on its own without lyrics can move us?



David: My wife and her whole family come from a classical music background. And then John, my partner in The Brilliance, is a composer and he's an amazing pianist. And John is very unusual in that he's a very good jazz player, went to school for that, also a very good classical player and as a composer and string arranger, and then also knows how to do, pop and other music.

At the time all of our music, it felt like we were a little bit boxing ourselves in, especially for John, for his different skills and language skills of being able to, he loves to write other types of music. The whole idea of how it came about was I was in New York at Carnegie Hall watching my brother in law, Joshua play a Bach suite and [00:30:00] everyone was silent. I just, I was so inspired. Most of the music that I was writing, was trying to get people either to sing along or get pumped or whatever and this was getting people to listen and be quiet. And I thought, oh my gosh, that is what I want for my spirituality and specifically for groups. And so The Brilliance was birthed out of that. I remember we were together with a lot of times we'd play a show somewhere and then you try to see that city and, eat at a great restaurant or go experience art or whatever it is. And we were in Seattle and we played a show that was, it was very beautiful, it was very meaningful. We went the next day out for a really good meal and then went to the, symphony. I remember it was a Russian composer and they were talking about this symphony. This person, the composer had to write the [00:31:00] symphony while being under house arrest. They had spoken against, the party and they couldn't kill this composer because he was too popular, but they wanted him to write a Russian anthem, war anthem. And then he brought in like, he brought in influences from the West, specifically like Gershwin and things. And it made us laugh so much, because it was like hearing the story, reading about it and listening to the symphony, it was this amazing protest music that was also, it was so thoughtful, there were no lyrics and you could enter into it in your own imagination of my own story of feeling boxed in by certain Christianity or by working at a church or by whatever it was and feeling like I couldn't say certain things in my own tiny small way, my life was not at risk, but you know, you feel like you're not allowed to say certain things in certain contexts. [00:32:00]

And so I love that when there are no lyrics and there's melodies, I think it really can transcend the language. It can get you past what I am thinking as a composer it can introduce ideas and then your own imagination can take it. And we can talk about it in a way that is beyond just a lyric.

Katie: Yeah, I found myself going to those songs and then to other classical music. And I feel like I did that. because I didn't have words for what I was feeling. It was often when really hard, difficult things had happened at the shelter. there was no way that words could speak to my experience, but music could. In the dreamer suite, I think it was more on the imagining side. it was wonderful because I'd be like, who is Ludwig? Who is Lily? Who is, you know, cause you named them after these people. and it made me really wonder like, what are their dreams? And, and also what is my [00:33:00] dream and my child's dream. And it just, there's so many possibilities in the interplay of those songs.



David: Yeah, Lily is my grandmother and Ludwig is Bethoven but even for that I mean not knowing the answer is more romantic and more fun.

When you move into the second suite, it ties you again to the past. Bach is a major theme for us. And for that second suite, it opens up with a Bach piece that then is reimagined in the in the theme of like our own 21st century mind and anxiety

Katie: Okay, so your albums have become less explicitly religious since the release of Dreamer and I think one of the questions that a lot of people struggle with is how to remain spiritually grounded as our beliefs are changing And so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the role that music has played in your spiritual journey.

David: So I laugh at this because the behind the scenes story is when John and [00:34:00] I first started The Brilliance. I was a youth pastor and John was, on a good day an agnostic, but on a different day, probably an atheist.

And we had written church music. And then we evolved throughout the years, and there was a specific time where I remember We released Brother, that album, and it was very meaningful because I remember going to my kids public school and the choir sang, the kids choir sang Brother in New York Public School.

And then beautifully, I got to play in Israel and Palestine. It was cool to play in front of a mostly Muslim and Jewish audience and see that brought together.

And I thought, this is what I want to do, what I want to do is be able to bring people together. The spiritual practice of peacemaking I think is incredibly important in our modern age. And so for us, it [00:35:00] was a very spiritual practice. And then I laughed because the more our music got away from religious language, John now works at a church and he's like, you know, I laugh because you're like, Oh, it's funny sometimes how, when you let go of certain boxes and you find yourself getting back to being more religious or more, whatever that is. It's a funny thing the way life works, but I feel like what it did for us instead of saying, Hey, I just need to write religious music or church music it was, what does it mean to write music about life and life is spiritual. like I said earlier, the ability to see is a high watermark of spirituality. before the last specifically religious, record that we did, and I wouldn't even say it was specifically religious, but was See the Love that, or All is Not Lost was the album.

And we had already, released a protest album, and See the Love was on that. It was just a little EP. [00:36:00] And, you kind of go, what are you protesting? What are you doing? It was in a sense of an act of learning how to listen and we could already sense, at that time, how divided politically we were getting. Of the inability to have any doubt, or have any kind of dialogue for the ways that we have our own views. And that will always lead to violence. fundamentalism always leads to violence. And so it was a very spiritual act to then try to move away from just religious language.



The first suite that you had mentioned was around DACA dreamers and around empathy of what immigration is. The next suite, which I think is, it's my wife, Kate's, favorite piece of art that we've ever done. It was, world keeps spinning.

It came out in January and then that spring COVID happened. And it was just really, it was really a thing of how do you deal with it, with [00:37:00] the chaos that we were in, the chaos of everything John and I, we would get together and it was weird because he couldn't play shows. He couldn't do this thing. We're getting older. My kids are getting older. And the next album was more birthed out of a post COVID: what is meaning, relationally It was kind of a weird record for us because usually we try to do empathy for others. And in a sense, feel it was kind of empathy for ourselves.

Which is really hard and uncomfortable to deal with.

Katie: But also, we have to have empathy for ourselves or we won't be able to really have it for others.

David: Right, but it's a difficult thing, especially for, and I don't mean this, I'm not trying to write off people's trauma or those things, but when you have certain roles, figures, and imagination, like I'm a dad and I'm a husband and I'm these things and I need to be strong right now [00:38:00] and I don't want my kids to freak out. I remember during that time I really, I had a weird season of health where in just a couple of years I had my gallbladder removed, but it was a terrible experience of getting so sick and not know what's going on and then ended up, during COVID, literally at like 3 in the morning on the street in New York because I couldn't find a taxi and I'm just laying down on the street in New York because I was having, I had terrible gallstones and I had this attack and it was so much pain. So having that removed and then getting kidney stones and then while that's happening, I started to have a lot of anxiety around things. And I got on some medicine for anxiety, and whenever you get on medicine for things, it can mess you up. The whole point is I felt like I didn't know how to address my own mental health and my own physical health, while also knowing in the world, there's so much worse things happening.

The shadow of whatever I felt there, I feel like that's always where the gold [00:39:00] is. And so I have a series of songs that are letters to John and Kate. And then John has a series of letters back And so we're kind of working through that, but anytime you do that, it's, it's odd to write music that feels personal. It's easier for us to write about other trauma than it is your own trauma or your own ego and baggage from that.

Katie: You know, I think one of my hopes with this project is for people to enter into that space of vulnerability to say, this is where I have been wounded and not, it's just that my heart is breaking because the world is this way, but also to, start with that self empathy and knowing that giving ourselves some space for that actually increases our capacity for empathy beyond ourselves. it was something that I feel like I learned the hard way at the



shelter, so focused on others and eventually burnt out because I did not take care I had a hard time, like you said, I'm so blessed, so to focus on that seemed hard, but I think [00:40:00] that it's the first step in trying to engage differently in the world. When we can show ourselves empathy, we are then able to hold so much more space for others.

So I'm so grateful that you shared and I hope that our listeners take that as an invitation to care as they move into all of this. So normally I end with this last question about politics but I'm going to do it as our second to last question because I want to end with See the Love because I feel like it is such a powerful invitation for this moment.

So second to last question: the goal of this podcast is to empower people to engage politically from a place of hope. And so my question for you is how you're engaging this season and how this conversation may have changed the way in which you approach that.

David: So to dive into politics, it's always a, it can be a vulnerable space if you're trying to listen. Because it shows your privilege or it shows your bias or your [00:41:00] emphasis.

I think as a spiritual practice for integrity, trying to, be honest and recognize hypocrisies in your own views or in your own party's views or in your own, you know, the ways that you fell short.

It's, trying to line up the way that you believe things or imagine things should be lined up with how do you actually act? What are you actually doing? And is there integrity there? So for instance, I can talk about climate change and talk about how it affects the poorest of the poor and what it's doing. My children are very passionate about climate change, and yet I also take airplanes across the world and go play shows and then talk about climate change. So it's like, there's a hypocrisy there. How do you name the inconsistencies and then not just become a nihilist about like, well, then none of it matters.

[00:42:00]

I'm more liberal, and so because I'm more liberal, I need to then have somewhat of a reflection of like, does the Democratic Party actually reflect my values? And I think the hard thing is, because we're in a two party system, one of the scary things is people say, well, then you only can vote for these two, because if you don't, you're just giving it to the other party

I do think our language and our discourse matters. And I do think that not being honest with integrity really matters. And so for me, How do I actually speak to people when they say something like, well, a third party vote doesn't matter. It's just a vote for this. I think in this election, yeah, probably. But in two elections, I want to break out of this thing. you look at historical movements being politically active is not a one election vote. It's not a one time, okay, now I'm done. The only way that you can break [00:43:00] out of those types of



systems is that you have people that say, no, I, I will be active. I will vote. I will get involved. I will discuss, I will hold power accountable. And for me, that then looks like, okay, what does it look like for me to vote?

I think that's important. And I also really think that it's important that we break out of a two party system. How do other places do it, that have democracy that work?, There are other ways in which you can participate and say, okay, I still have representation, even if my person didn't win, right? That's when you look at different systems. And I know on one end, I can sound then like What are you trying to do? Break up our constitution or that? No, I'm not trying to say that. But what I am trying to say is our current way of doing things is leading us to a place of not unity and not representation. In many ways it becomes [00:44:00] a zero sum game. And I think that will always lead to violence and always lead to chaos. And so I'm a creative that goes, can we think of more creative ways in which we can have representation and break out of the little cycles of violence that we have.

And so for me, if I'm speaking to a cousin or something that might really feel passionate about Trump, instead of me just giving the rhetoric of like they are evil, I'm asking questions and I'm acknowledging faults and acknowledging tensions.

And then in that practice of acknowledging that, can they acknowledge their own? And then can we have a discussion around what are ways forward.

I think that what we do right now, if you're not exactly for me, you're against me. And that's fundamentalism. There's no room for faith. There's no room for doubt. It's only certainty of this is what the reality is. And I'm so tired of [00:45:00] that.

Katie: This brings me back to your, story about Oh Dreamer. We can say love is an open door. But that doesn't have the same power as, Does love have an open door? Is this cost of security? You're asking questions and inviting engagement, and that's what you all did with that song. If we could do that in the way we engage politically, to not start with the statements but start with the questions and then listen.

Yes,

David: and also acknowledging the good of your political opponent, like I always, whenever I'm talking about Trump, I automatically talk about what he did for prison reform He did more for prison reform than Obama or Biden.

it's important to acknowledge the good in your enemy, or the humanity or the, like, Hey, yeah, I want peace too. I also want prison reform. That's how we move towards getting things done, not just being partisan,



And that, that's what I'm, I [00:46:00] think right now, my practice for moving into this next election is going to be one of grief and one of trying to know that it's not just this election, but it's elections after and also what does it mean to not give up dialogue with people on the other side.

For me, for Brilliance, anytime we talk about writing anything, The things that we always try to say is, all right, we're going to have a little axis here on one side. It says there's no idea above critique, meaning ideas are just ideas. They're not who you are. They're just ideas. I can critique that idea. But on the other side of that, there's no person below dignity.

Can we then set up things of the way that we talk about issues, seeing the importance of border control, seeing the importance of that, but then can I also do it in a way that [00:47:00] doesn't just dehumanize. And I think for a lot of issues, we don't like to dive into the actual idea. We don't like to have it critiqued. And it might be because we're trying to protect certain personhood. But being able to have that balance it's not like anyone does it perfectly, but it's at least a practice that I feel like that we need to try to engage in.

So this whole idea of the podcast of being able to engage, that's where I, I love it because the thing that you can engage on most easily is stories and trauma, and art. It brings you to a place of commonality and language, and commonality that's not just based in having everyone the same, but actually commonality and diversity is something that is amazing.

Katie: Yeah. thank you for all that. I feel like it segues so beautifully into to See the [00:48:00] Love, which for me, is this challenge to see ourselves in others, and especially those who are on the opposite side of the political aisle, right? I feel like both parties have groups that they want to make sure there's empathy for and fight for. But so often we forget to fight for the dignity of our political opponents. And this song is, it's an invitation to see ourselves in them and to wish them happiness and wholeness and And so I, I am gonna end with this, for our listeners and for us to enjoy and be inspired by.

[00:49:00] [00:50:00] [00:51:00] [00:52:00] Thank you so much. I feel so blessed to have gotten to be here with you today.

David: Thank you so much, Katie, for all you're doing. And, it was an honor to [00:53:00] be on this [00:54:00] podcast.

Katie: At *This Election* we see politics as practice and each conversation is paired with a practice that you can take with you as you heal from and engage the political arena.

This conversation is offered alongside a playlist. A playlist full of songs that bring people together and invite us into greater empathy and connection with each other. As we listen, we can grieve and imagine, remember and hope, knowing that are not alone in any of these things.



This playlist can be found on [This Election's Spotify Page](#), this episode's show notes, and on our website at http://www.thiselection.org/spiritual_practices which includes the offerings from all of our guests, including a link from [The Class](#), which is a practice we explore in Episode 3 with Jaycee Gossett. That link gives our listeners [a free 30 day subscription to their digital studio](#).

I am also making a second playlist of listener favorites and would love to know yours. What songs heal you? What songs inspire you? What songs help you remember what matters? Send them my way by emailing me @ katie@thiselection.org or messaging me on Instagram @ [katie.m.cochran](https://www.instagram.com/katie.m.cochran).

You have been listening to This Election, where we explore the inner work that is needed to do politics differently. Today we heard from David Gungor, of the Brilliance. You can find The Brilliance, where-ever you get your music. You can also follow them on [facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#). Search for thebrilliancemusic or visit their website at www.thebrilliancemusic.com. To find out more about David's work, including some really amazing peacemaking + creative community building initiatives visit www.davidgungor.com.

If you have enjoyed this conversation, please subscribe, rate, and review the podcast on whatever platform you are listening through. This is the best way to help our vision of a different type of politics reach as many people as possible.

A few thank yous to the people who made this episode possible. Our lovely theme music was written and performed by Ian Cochran and produced by David Cochran. The podcast artwork was created by Kristin Connolly and is available for purchase via her website lovecommakristin.com.

Finally, thank you for spending this time with me and for the work you are doing to heal our politics. I am so grateful.