

Queer as friends

**Brilliant conversations on
the beauty of friendship**

with Tanith Ilesley & Dr. Katie Hall



Katie

Welcome to Queer as Friends brilliant conversations on the beauty of friendship with Tanith, Ilesley and Doctor Katie Hall.

We're here with Erin Henderson Smith and Sid Spong.

Sid

Hello.

Katie

We're very excited to speak to you today. And would you like to introduce yourselves, please?

Sid

Yeah. Of course. This is Ery. They're an incredible talent. They are a very kind person, first of all. But they're also a sickening drag queen, a crafty lady. I would say they are super into discovering new assets of themselves, and have been on a journey of self-discovery over the last two years that I've been, I've been very happy to be a part of.

Katie

That's lovely.

Erin

And this is Sid. They are again a very sick drag queen and highly, highly intelligent, a wonderful singer and really great fun and always great for a laugh and someone I can just really bounce off and have no inhibitions around. I find that I can talk to Sid about anything, and Sid can be very honest, but also prop me up as a friend as well.

Katie

Good stuff. That leads really nicely into our first question. Which ills, why are you friends?

Sid

Well, because it's a very small town, you see, and big characters really stick out in a small town. I'd say both of us are. Yeah. And we met through the drag scene the first time I met you.

Erin

Now, that's the question, because I remember the first time seeing it. Yeah. Which was at a open drag night, which was back in December 2024. Yeah. And Sid wasn't actually performing. They were in the audience, but they were roped into being a prop in somebody else's performance. And I didn't really speak to Sid then. But then there was another drag night a few weeks later, and I presented one of Sid's friends with a doll version of themselves, and I remember said going, oh my God, that's amazing. And then Sid and I were messaging.

They were very impressed with the the art that I produced. And then I decided to do drag myself. And that's when Sid said to me that they're actually a vocal coach and I needed a vocal coach. And so it started out as kind of like student teacher. But we did have a burgeoning friendship at the time.

Sid

Very unprofessional student teacher relationship. Because because. We are we are wild and we like to have a fun time together, right?

Erin

We are so like siblings because we call each other chosen family. We do behave like kids.

There was, I think there was one time in the pub where we were just sort of doing something funny with the hands and we're like, right, let's play thumb wars, you know?

Sid

Yeah.

Erin

I see Sid as my sibling, not just my friend.

Sid

Yeah. I'd say I'd say there is a there's a drag family to its chosen family element to our friendship. And I think you were existing on the peripheries, maybe of the drag scene, because you were seeing something inside it that you really wanted to, to explore for yourself.

And then it was when you got permission from the queers that had been doing it.

Who is anyone to tell someone they can or can't do drag? But I think you really did need that permission in that time. And once you had it, you just started thriving and doing it all by yourself and it all kind of poured out.

Erin

Sid and some other drag artists, what all kind of encouraging me to do it. They were telling me, you really should do this. And our drag mother, because we have the same drag mother.

She said she knew when she met me that there was a little drag queen there.

So it was one of those things where I just needed permission to come in and they were like, come in, the water's lovely. You know?

Katie

That's really nice. But was it instant friendship?

Erin

I say it was instant like, but growing.

Sid

Yeah, I'd. Say I'd say the way I bond with people is through vulnerability. Because I've been thinking about this process of how you befriend someone.

It's it's the same in all different types of relationship that I have in my life. It's kind of shared experience. It's creativity and it's vulnerability. Those are the massive ones for me. And sure, we do some really cool things, career based stuff and impress me that way.

And obviously it every does do all of that stuff also. But I think really it was the vulnerability and the stuff you shared with me in a very close time.

We suddenly used our experiences and our traumas and our hopes and dreams, and we kind of got all of that stuff out of the way quite early.

Erin

And I think there's a neurodiverse version element of that too, where it's like, we're not going to mess around. If you like someone, you're going to tell them the history and then you can see the future a bit clearer, right?

I think I just have a tendency to just go bleugh.

Sid

Yeah. And you either go, yeah, that's good, or no, that's like, yeah, and here's my here's my stuff too.

Tan

Yeah, that's really nice. Why are you still friends now a couple of years on. And what does your friendship maintenance look like?

Erin

Well, you're still my vocal coach. It's true. Still teaches me. But we'll have a lesson after this.

Also, we often just like going out to places like having coffee and just milling around and walking around and Sid knows so many people in town. When we walk down the road, there's about half a dozen people they'll bump into that they know. And always introducing me to people.

So I've actually made a lot of other friends through Sid, and it's a great networking thing. They're very gregarious and very, very social butterfly.

And that's what I really love about hanging out with Sid, it's never boring.

Sid

Yeah, I'd say sushi, karaoke and honesty is is how we maintain our friendship

with each other. And I think that we have loads of these little rituals that we'll do. And they're cute. And it just gives us a nice little structure so it doesn't feel like we're doing the same thing. And I think that's we've done we've done a lot over the last year, trips to London. We were just we just went to a sound bath together with my mum, which was really fun. And I think you're doing things is important. I think also the small things, the kind of chill days, the when you're not feeling good will talk properly to.

There's a lot of friendships where you just won't talk to them on the days where they're feeling off. But that's not us. I'd say. If anything, it's quite the opposite. It's those days where we really need each other and reach out.

I'd say also with the drag scene is great and there's events on in Folkestone all the time. And so we get we get that as a, as a chance to kind of reconnect with our community and keep up with people. There's constantly a new situation, a new drama and new everything.

And we we go to those pretty much weekly and it's wild in the scene. So much has changed in the last year. People have moved away. People have died. Like there's been a lot.

It's nice to just have a nice, stable friend with me throughout all of that.

Tan

What would you say the most significant moments have been so far in your friendship? I mean, you met through the drag scenes, and presumably there was a moment area where you stepped into that drag persona. And what was that like for you said, to see that flourish.

Erin

That first time I got into full drag. You were my .

Sid

Yeah, it's true, it's true. And we walked down the street, didn't we? That's that's a huge moment. You tell it. Yeah.

Erin

Because what happened was that in Folkestone, they were showing a viewing of Priscilla, Queen of the desert, and Dita Garbo, who's Drag Race royalty. She and her partner were going to be there in drag.

And her partner Fever Dream as our drag mother. So we decided that would be my first time in full drag. Syd arrived at my flat and got into drag very quickly, didn't you?

And I was already pretty much halfway through mine. We had to walk very quickly down the road to the cinema, because we were a little bit late and and I honestly felt so comfortable, surprisingly comfortable. And then when we got into the cinema, our mum was there and the first thing she said to me was, it's nice to meet you. And then I sat down next to her and she said how proud she was, and it was just lovely to sit there as a group, as a friendship group. And then we had a picture taken together in the cinema, and it was just lovely to be with my sibling and my mum and be together as a family. And I felt so me, my makeup actually for my first albeit wasn't too bad, but it has improved a lot. But Sid I know is very very honest and was always very honest.

Sid

The truth is that every was always going to be an incredible drag queen, and the way I knew

that is when we turned up for that, I was running in messy, my little wig out of a plastic bag. It was all a little bit last minute, but that's really what drag is to me. It's not. It's not as methodical. It's not meditative. It's a little bit chaotic and it's a little bit punk.

Whereas with with every and Jessica it was here's the lashes, here's the makeup, I've got everything sorted, I've got it laid out and ready. And when I came round you'd been in drag I think already for a couple of hours and you were just doing the last bits. And here I was with no face on. And then when we did finally get out of the door, which was very, very late for the for the screening, we walked down the street and we were obviously rushing, and I think it was just that moment of we were both so uncaring of these people walking past us, being like, what in the world am I looking at? Because it wasn't even that late in the evening. It must have been so funny to them, and I would have loved to be one of those people walking past us, because I would have loved it. And I think we found out in that moment that not only is drag a mask and a shield in itself, drag with friends is even more of that. You really can't tell us nothing when we're both out there in drag.

Erin

You know. When we both said that when we're in drag, we feel so powerful and I can walk down the road in full drag. I've done it like, only did it the other week. I can walk down the road in full drag and I don't care. I feel so powerful that nothing can touch me.

And when I'm with Sid, we just feel like the dynamic duo. Yeah, I'm just like, hey, you know, nobody's going to mess with us.

Sid

No. I really agree. And I think more broadly at the moment that I was really and moment of significance in our friendship has been, I'd say when you won your first drag competition, which was, so you tell them about the direct competition.

Ering

Yeah, it was before Christmas. It was the second edition of a drag competition at Folkestone called Folk n Drag. And this edition was Happy Folk n Christmas. And there I did my first one, I sang When You're Good to Mama, which we drilled a lot and I got good at it. But I was so scared, so scared because it was my first performance in front of our drag mother, who is an incredible singer. I felt so inferior next to her.

Sid

And I didn't set you an easy song.

Erin

No, I mean. She was so proud. And I actually got the judges vote to go to the final. And when it came to the final, I did a stand up routine, a parody of the song fever. But my act went wrong. My wig snagged on my dress, but I still won. I got the audience vote, and then five days later was the prize, which was a winning a gig.

So I had to come up with a whole new act and I did it.

Sid

Oh my God, it was a stressful two weeks having to prepare three different numbers from top to toe, you know, I mean, it was it was absolutely wild. And I was worried for Ery for the first time because it was like, that's a lot of work and you care so much about it. And it's also the people that were doing it were a drag parents. And if there's anyone you're going to try to impress, it's your drag parents, right? It wasn't just some little gig in the middle of nowhere, right?

It was. Yeah, it was really important. And we spent pretty much every day drilling and rehearsing and creating comedy and making sure we had all of the comebacks ready so that when we performed to these bunch of loudmouthed queens that are our friends, we knew that they were going to scream back and do stuff like that. And what the best part was that they they were so amazed when you had everything ready right back for them in that moment. And I think the performance didn't go wrong. Sure, there was technical errors, but that was a that was a masterclass in crowd work. It really was.

Erin

And what I loved about it, was that Dita Garbo, she actually complimented me. She never really compliments anybody, but she told that to me. Yeah, she said that my comebacks were really good because she fired back at me. She does not hold back. But I kept thinking, is she being bitchy or is she only saying that because she knows that I can handle it? But quite a lot of the things I said back in that comic routine were where lines I'd already come up with. I just carried on with the script because unaccounted for the heckling. But some some things I said off the cuff. But it was one of those comedy routines where it welcomed heckling and audience quantities of anything. From a performers perspective, you can see all of that from an audience perspective. It doesn't matter whether it's pre-planned.

Sid

And and that's part of the magic in the illusion of performance. And I think, yeah, you started to understand that process then of, oh, this is why we do that prior preparation. And and I mean, you always have, that's always been your thing. But I think you saw three times in a row that you can make a successful performance quickly. And I was very proud of you for that. Yeah. No worry.

Tan

That's so lovely. I love the pride you're expressing for each other. Our next question is, how do you show up for each other? And given that your relationship is a working one as well as one of friendship. You said that when Erin did her routine, you hadn't chosen an easy song. And so it seems clear that you push her in ways, you know, to exceed maybe what she thinks initially she's capable of. Are there ways in which Ery pushes you in return Sid?

Sid

Certainly. I think that Arie pushes me to accept kindness, which is something I struggle to do, is to, to to just have wholesome days where there I think it in queer life, there's so much focus on partying and there's so much focus on just keeping on going and going too hard sometimes. And with Ery it's the exact opposite. Days are often quite slow and we just mill around and walk around. And I think just accepting those kind of small gestures of kindness, it's been meaningful for me. I think also, Ery pushes me to understand more about the way I connect with other people, because it's quite an atypical friendship in a sense. We're both queens. We have big age gap between us, and I think there's something really nice in the way. I don't think I relate to people my age that often. I find that quite a challenging thing. I think we have different priorities, and I think a way that Ery kind of pushes me is, I think, to accept that I am not the typical 24 year old, and maybe to just kind of make those nice friendships, those those little dreams, that strange person that you see at the side of the gig, it turns out they'll be the one for you, not the person, kind of that would seem the likely fit, right?

Erin

Yeah, I think since the kind of person I would like to have spoken to when I was 24. So I'm 42 now. So it's a case of, it doesn't matter how old you are, it's how well your minds connect. And quite often people at the age of 24, without being generalizing too much, may not have

these wisdom and ideas and philosophy that Sid has, whereas someone my age has been around a bit longer, will probably have more to talk about. And Sid has a lot to talk about. So we meet our minds there. We can challenge each other intellectually and also we have no problem telling each other when. No, I don't like what you've just said, but we don't let that get into a full blown argument.

Sid

No, I mean definitely in drag.

Erin

Okay, I take it back. Yeah.

Sid

When we're walking to Gaia, for example, you're like, just. Like, slow down. Yeah, exactly. She's a fast walker. She really is.

Erin

And this one was in stilettos and got their stiletto caught in the grass.

Sid

Indeed, indeed.

Tan

That's interesting that you should say. Oh, we've never shouted at each other. You mean in your friendship outside of drag? And funnily enough, it's something that Katie and I said in our own recording. We've never had a stand up row. I mean, it's been 28 years now, but we've. Yeah, we've never had a raised voice. We've never had a row. What do you think that says about you as people?

Sid

I don't know, I don't think I'm exactly against the idea of arguing with people. I'm not just completely like that would never happen. Right? I think what I think it's just healthy debate is better rather than yelling at each other because you're never going to get anywhere. If you're just going to yell, she's. Too on the nose. And it would be, it would be a little bit, it would be hard to because you're quite witty and you're quick and you would break through it. And I don't think anger can work when you know you're up against a really intelligent person. I think that's it. I would also just be silly. You'll be. Come on, go eat your sushi and shut up. Right. There would be. I think it would be quite pathetic.

Erin

I've got my other friend, Greg. He and I, we have this brother sister relationship, and I can say to him, oh, Greg, well, you just shut up and have your coffee, you know, and stuff like that. So I have no problem saying that. I said, if I have to. I think. It's happened.

Sid

Really? I don't think so. I mean, I might say that to you today, but. And also in the lessons, sometimes I do raise my voice.

Erin

You go. Come on. Yeah. You know, we can do this. Yeah. But there's been a few times where I've tried since patience, because I think of music in a very different way that Sid does. And that's it. That's neurodivergent. Right? And because Sid can hear tones better than I can and I'm like, yeah, I don't get it. And they were trying to tell me the differences in these on the piano different Ds and like, no, they're different notes. And he was trying to tell

me no, they are the same note. And he was trying to explain it to me intellectually. And I'm like, yeah, I don't get it. Yeah.

Sid

And I think that's it. And it's breaking down concepts to someone, you know the language, you know the English language. But now you're trying to learn Shakespeare. And I think everyone does understand tone and can hear it. It's just breaking those concepts down in an interesting way is really important. I feel like it is frustrating when you can see someone's talent and you can see their growth as well, because I think in coaching it's not about the end goal, it's about the journey and it's about how progress happens.

And I think, I think sometimes Ery's really hard on themselves and will tell themselves that I'm just never going to be able to do this. There's something uniquely flawed about me, and I think that's the most frustrating thing to experience as a coach, because you will never believe that about a student.

Katie

I like that a lot. One of the things we wanted to ask about is, what are the different lived experiences or cultural touchpoint for you both, and how do they kind of feed into your friendship?

Ery

I live alone because, as you know, I've been widowed and I can get quite lonely a lot of the time. I think Sid has has a bigger circle of friends than I do, and has more connections than I do. I do have quite a lot of connections now compared to what I used to have. I tend to clam up and go into myself a lot when I'm feeling isolated, and it's difficult for me to reach out, whereas I know I can always reach out to Sid, and even if they're not in a position where they can connect with me, I know that once I've said to them, look, I'm struggling, Sid will always come back to me. Yeah. So out of anybody who I can think of, if I'm feeling low to reach out to, it would be. It would be said. Because I know that they're not going to tell me sorry, sorry, you know I'm not interested. They'll always say, look, I can't speak to you right now, but I will speak to you when I can, and I and they won't mollycoddle me either, but at the same time, they won't dismiss me.

Sid

Yeah, because I met you when you were in the period of grief. It was really interesting because it enabled me in some ways to tell you the hard truths. If I had been there and seen an awful situation and you're going through a really scary time, then I may be be more careful. But I don't think you should necessarily be careful with someone when you care about them. You should be real with them. We've seen so much growth from Jessica, and that maybe wouldn't have been possible if I was being walking on eggshells, right? Yeah, but having said that, it was really interesting. I was on Ery's true crime YouTube channel, which is incredible and you should definitely check out. And I went back a few videos and saw a video of you talking about your life from, I guess, 2022 or something, and it was a really, really hard watch and reconnected me with the truth that you are a completely different person now and you've gone through so much, and I'm so proud of you becoming this person from that experience. A year and a half later, it's absolutely wild. It really is. Yeah, maybe I take that for granted sometimes. How big of a shift that was for Ery. But it's one that we performed together. And yeah, I'm happy with where it's headed now.

Erin

Yeah. Thank you. We're doing very well.

Tan

And you mentioned that age difference between you. Do you think there are cultural touchpoints from that perspective that differ and or feed into your dynamic.

Sid

The true crime thing? That's a whole different world for you. And when I go around, what show did you put on? And I'd never seen that.

Erin

Miss Marple. Oh.

Sid

What in the world is Miss Marple.

Tan

Iconic.

Erin.

I introduced Sid to things from, you know, from my childhood because I used to watch Miss Marple and Poirot and I used to watch all those other stuff with my mum. And also I kind of like tapped out of the music scene in the year 2000 whereas Sid has kept up to date and knows a lot more, like you were lip syncing a song to me yesterday that I'd never heard of.

Sid

And I guess I take you along to my gigs and the events that I put on. I put on this little show called Low Tide recently. Yeah. And I guess the cultural touchpoints that I have in my life are typically a lot more local and not so, so much kind of phenomenons and like trends. I love the local music scene and the local drag scene and local performances local queer. And for example, Ella is a touch point, I'd say for both of us are incredible queer mother mentor. She's the creator of London contemporary voices and trans voices, and she's just the best. That's also fever dream our drag mum. She does. She wears so many hats it's crazy. And we go and see her performances a lot together. We just went, I think I mentioned this already, we did a choral sound bath in London and it was just incredible 19 trans singers all around us doing these incredible swirling shapes. And we were there meditating, eyes closed.

Erin

And yeah, I think art and live art is kind of one of our jobs, I think, as well, rediscovering my singing voice, because I sang a lot when I was in my teens, and then I stopped when I joined a quiet because I compared myself to the others saying I must be shit then, so I stopped. I didn't even sing at home anymore. Then I realized actually, I could and said has made me realise actually, yes, I do have an ability which I didn't think I had, but also going through the queer scene and speaking not only to Sid, but also our drag mother and other people, is I've learned a lot about gender identity because I'm cis gender. I can't understand it firsthand, but I've had to understand it from an outside point of view. But now I am a real pro trans ally. I do everything I can to help people who are trans non-binary, because I think it's only fair that we will treat each other as equals.

Sid

When you mentioned kind of cultural touch points, I guess maybe the answer you would you wouldn't be expecting is like, yeah, trans people and helping trans people. But I think that is a major underlying. We were just with a new a new trans lady who's moved into town last night and she's an absolute riot.

And it's just so nice to be able to invite and kind of include these people that are often lost and need direction and need community really desperately. I think that's been healing for both of us to be able to kind of be part of that change for someone else.

And I think that's that's really something I think we've learned maybe from Illa, who, again, has mothered and fostered kind of confidence in so many young trans people. And I think that's really important work, because drag could seem quite shallow. People could see it and think it's just chucking on a wig and some lipstick, going on stage and pretending you're the sexiest in the room. Right? But I think it's genuinely got so much depth to it. And I think maybe you didn't realise how much depth it would have for you and the changes it would bring into your life. That's how you know, it's got the community side still there. And I think that's really important. And I think in big cities and different models of drag that's gone now, and we really do have quite a kind of cliquey scene underneath it. I'm so glad that's not the case in Folkestone. Yeah, we're a big family in Folkestone.

Katie

What would be your motto or strapline for your friendship?

Sid

No topic too big, no question too weird.

Erin

Yeah I love that. Making and everything. And I never have any issues saying to Sid what I think. I won't get judgment from Sid was exactly the same with me. I can be judgey sometimes.

Sid

We're all guilty sometimes. Oh, and I'm sure right back. I'm sure right back at myself. Right. I would say the reason we're able to get along so swimmingly is because we're quite honest, and we aren't weirded out too easily. And I remember when we were in the kind of early stages of our friendship. I think the way we bonded was through telling all of those little stories. First crushes. First times, all of that, like, and I think I think that side really kind of added depth and some understanding of who he was.

Sid

And yeah, I think you're so confident now and you're really coming into yourself in a way of like allowing yourself to refind connection and look for some light after a period of grief.

Erin

Right?

Sid

Yeah, and that's really fun, too. We're both little slags, you see. Yeah.

Katie

We wanted to invite you to plug each other's passion. So plug something on behalf of your of your friends.

Erin

I'll go. Sid is part of a band called Oscar, and they've had a they've released their debut single called China Bird. I was in the music video for that. That is on YouTube and is on Spotify. And yeah, so check that out. Sid has an insane voice, incredible range. It's amazing. Also Sid does do these shows called Low Tide in Folkestone and we'll also I think you were

part of a film was premiered in a place called Collective in Folkestone. Sid is also a vocal coach and is grade eight qualified vocal coach and is available for vocal coaching. Sid is also a fantastic dancer, singer, vocalist and their drag persona Catastrophe is such a riot available for drag performances to. They're so artistic and musical, very, very proud of said.

Sid

Oh, that's lovely of you. I would like to shout Ery Berry true crime. Yes. Incredible first video out, Lord Lucan. Been like a year and it was such an interesting case. And I actually watched it yesterday in the Hilton Hotel where I was staying, darling. And it was very fun whilst I was in my bath in this hotel I could never afford. And I was listening to Ery Berry and it was all very fun. I'd say as well, you're making jewelry now, making some really fun crafty bits.

Erin

Yes, and I love making jewellery. I think that's going to be a long term kind of thing of mine is to make statement jewellery, statement earrings for people.

Sid

They're really special. They're so unique. And we like the song Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend. But at the end of it she says, I don't mean rhinestones. And we always swap the two because Ery does mean rhinestones. She loves the stuff. She covers everything in them, and these earrings are no exception. They're very heavy because they're just covered in stones everywhere.

Erin

Sometimes I think, shall I swap it out for glitter? So it's not so weighty. I'm like, no, it's got to be stone.

Tan

I think our last question is, what is your friendship theme tune?

Erin

The A-Team.

Sid

Yeah. Or Diamond's are a girl's best friend, you see. Yeah.

Ery

That show that last night that we were watching and we were just sort of like little in-jokes a bit where she goes, Tiffany's. We usually say TK Max, then Primark, then it's ours and Cian Temu, talk to me Poundland. Tell me all about it. So we would. Yeah that would be our theme that and the A-Team.

Katie

That's great.

Tan

Brilliant. Amazing. Yeah. Thank you. That was wonderful. Really really wonderful to hear your friendship journey and to like, really see how much you care for each other. And it's obviously a very special friendship. And I think that comes across really, really clearly.

Katie

Yeah. It does.

Sid

Nice to have the chance to be able to like reflect on it. And it was just a joy..

Tan

Queer as Friends was brought to you by Tanith Ilesley and Doctor Katie Hall. If you want to hear more brilliant conversations on the beauty of friendship, then please subscribe and review the Queer as Friends podcast wherever you listen and tell your bestie about us so they know you've been thinking of them. You can also follow us on Instagram and threads at Queer as friends, and if you have any feedback, you can send that via email to queer.as.friends@gmail.com.

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