

Founder's day 2018

In reference to influence of Frances Mary Buss and you're own personal influences.

A seat at the Table

Childhood is the most ambitious time of our lives. Our aspirations have never been higher, passions and dreams changing on the daily, to be astronauts or firefighters or teachers at fine institutions like *Camden School for Girls* or, in my case, to be a dancing penguin. Watching *Happy Feet* there was something about the combination of the way these penguins moved and the hit songs of the 80's that touched my soul like no other. I became obsessed, watching the film repeatedly, dreaming of too graduating from *Penguin High* and finding my soulmate. One idea particularly stuck with me growing up: the notion of having a heart song. Penguins, (if you didn't know) are born with one of these, a song that represents their individuality, presaging their path in life, whether it was Seymour rapping, 'The message' by 'The Grandmaster Flash' or Gloria hitting the high note in 'Boogie Wonderland' creating a pin-drop silence throughout the penguin valley, I suddenly found myself, at the mere age of six, questioning my own identity. What would my heart song be? When would I discover it? what if I, like mumble was forever left without one? In short, *Happy Feet* seemed to have inspire my first existential crisis.

Growing up it became evident that this supposedly innate ability was not as easy as the movie made out. Navigating through the constantly shifting landscape of pop culture was not a task for the faint hearted, dodging the bullets of Jason Derulo while falling folly to the sweet melodies of Justin Bieber but alas, all was in vain; how could 'Baby' be my heart song when the closest I had ever come to love was when James Perrett had given me half of his chocolate cake. I was back to square one or rather had never actually left it.

Arriving at Camden felt like I had *finally* entered penguin bay, accompanied by a similar breed of girls determined on discovering our heart songs and in turn finding out what our identities were. Different approaches were taken to this of course, fashion being one. Around year eight, Camden became a parade of bright orange tights, purple tie dye jeans, shoelaces tied round our heads and for some, who will remain unnamed, wearing bear hats all year round, indoors as well as out. Developing our interests and tastes, whether it be through setting up our own clubs or by seeing who could stuff the most marshmallows in our mouths, we started to grow up. Watching our teachers dancing to 'Who run the World (girls)' inspired our own passions to move, proudly starting our club called 'not in dance company' which was short lived but impactful. Finding passions for things we'd never before considered, playing the triangle in orchestra or being able to sing with our mouths, and finally coming to terms with what that strange word 'feminism' actually means. At camden there was always a sense that things *were* actually possible, a desire to push the limits, that if you wanted something you could get it, being actively encouraged and inspired to do so, to be bold and creative, to progress forward to go 'onwards and upwards', as some may say. ;)

But still something wasn't quite right. Life was good. Camden, great. But that niggling of self doubt, that need for a heart song still prominent so I kept reaching and reaching....

Until one day in my 15th year I found it; listening to *A Seat at the Table* by Solange Knowles I knew, finding not only a heart song but many wrapped in an album of truth. Solange provided me with a sense of catharsis, a releasing of something that I had always been aware of but never fully understood; like a frog leaping from one lily pad to the next not acknowledging the ones passed, but always preoccupied with stepping forward. This album forced me to stop and think. Solange taught me what it truly means to be not just a woman but a black one and in turn, what it means to love that.

In her music, a multiplicity of definitions were offered to me, suggesting that unfortunately, my childhood dream of having one single self-defining label was false. Encapsulated in this album drenched in honesty was an unknown pride and joy as well as an unknown pain, forcing me to go back turn over those lily pads and look at the roots. Teaching me that I've got 'the right to be mad' and not be silenced by that white patriarchy attempting to oppress me to stillness, that I do actually have 'a lot to be mad about' and that I could and should express that freely. Feelings were articulated that I had never been able to express myself, 'It's like cranes in the sky sometimes I don't want to feel these metal clouds' with the repeated phrase, 'away' speaking to the desire to escape negativity and thrive, discovering the universality of this experience as black woman striving but feeling a constant prevention. Teaching me about black pride in her song, '*Don't touch my hair*' with the words '*this hair is mine*' providing me with a new ownership of self, my '*crown*' becoming a symbol of defiance and confidence; tending to my roots became a way of caring for myself, my blackness and my womanhood: a practice of self love. The statements she gave me were statements of undeniable truth, a form of self-education, offering me, as the title of the album suggests *A seat at The Table*, an invitation to pull up a chair, to uncover these truths and let them be shared. A statement to be demanding, to be heard, to give a voice to thousands of young black girls reminding us to not 'let anybody steal [our] magic.'

And although Solange Knowles is an American black singer and Frances Mary Buss is a British white educator and the two come from completely different lifestyles, separated by centuries; their sentiments began to appear quite similar to me. Ms. Buss also demonstrated that we as women have, 'the right to be mad' fighting for our voices to be heard, pushing uncomfortable truths out to create a school where that spirit of defiance is vested in the walls; instilled into every girl that walks through those gates in year seven and carried with us until we leave our school in year thirteen.

She taught us to uplift one another and not cut each other down, to thrive in our differences, that we are sisters united in our womanhood. Providing us with a platform where our voices can flourish and strive, a space in which we can think freely, breathe, grow and be heard without the pressures of the outside world.

Connected by a thread of understanding, these women rejected societal norms to make bold statements. Following their own heart songs to give us the power we deserve.

Thank you, to the girls that have inspired throughout my time here
Thank you, to my mum and grandma for raising me to be the woman I am today,
Thank you, to Solange and to Frances Mary Buss for uplifting us

Thank you for providing me with *A Seat at The Table*.