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DATE OF INTERVIEW: 21 February 2017
LOCATION: Birmingham (Her house)
TRANSCRIBER: Mogs Russell PROOFED BY: n/a
Duration: tbc

This is Mogs and Tim, Mogs Russell and Tim Hollins, interviewing Katherine Rogers on Tuesday 21 February 2017. So, Katherine, to start off, you were a Banner baby. Can you tell us a little bit about what you can remember about your early childhood growing up in a Banner household because both your mum and dad were involved in Banner at the start.

Katherine: Yes, as you say, I was a Banner baby. I was born roughly at the same time when Banner started. I was born in 1974 and my earliest memories really are being in that community because it was a community. My mum relates the fact that when I was born they were doing the Chile show and she was still in hospital and she was translating songs from Spanish into English, and that was when I'd just been born ... (laughter). So, it really was something that my parents lived and breathed at that time, and because they lived and breathed it so did I, and, you know, when my brother came along similarly really. I remember from very, very young there being sessions in the house, music sessions, so probably some of my earliest memories are of hearing music downstairs, people coming to the house, sitting in the front room and, you know, singing folk songs, and lots of people in and out of the house. It felt like... it was a busy creative environment with lots of different people. And their children, you know. I think I was one of the first, but then quickly other children joined the community, and they became part of that community.

Similarly, I remember holidays. We used to go camping with that community and from very, very young going to Talybont in Wales, and running around wild with the other children, really. You know, we were pretty ... we were very free. It felt we were very free. It felt like a really good time in my life, I have really good memories of it. And music, again, being integral to that environment, so we would always find campsites that had the potential to have a campfire. And dad is a big fan of fire, having fires and that being a central point for the community, really, and for discussions and, you know, for laughter and sharing - and community I suppose. And the kids were part of that, we weren't separate from that, so there were songs for us too, you know, folk songs that scared the hell out of us, songs about creepy people, babies being stabbed! All kinds of crazy folk tales that had our imaginations running wild.

And pretty much as soon as I could talk I was singing, and from a very young age I think my favourite song, from before Keith was born so I would have been, what, 2 or 3, and I used to ask for it every evening, was Dirty Old Town, a Ewan MacColl song, and of course Ewan MacColl was the founder of the folk movement, the folk revival moment, and Banner was very much informed by that movement and was involved in that movement, was integral within that movement, so that was my favourite song, Dirty Old Town, and I used to ask for

that song every night before I went to bed. And ... what was I saying about that? I was talking about ... Yes, music being all around really.

5mins And also the folk club being really important, and again some of my earliest memories were – I think they were every Sunday, the Grey Cock folk club nights, and I remember the one on Hurst Street which was possibly the first place where we all met for the weekly folk club nights, and I remember being put on a stool, and I probably couldn't have been more than 3, and singing Dirty Old Town, and then gradually I learnt other songs, so that also became part of my routine, really, was to learn a song a week, in the way that everyone else was learning a song a week and the folk club was a place where you could share what you've been learning, sing it, and always be well received. People would really listen. It was quite a different environment to the way a lot of music is produced and heard now. It was a pub, and yet people were sitting around and they would listen – they would be there with their drinks and their crisps and whatever, but you'd be careful to ... you learnt as a child you not to rattle your crisps when people were talking and singing, you know! So from a young age I learnt how to listen, to appreciate music and to really listen to music, to listen to the words and I think that something that's different to the way other people received music, received art: the lyrics meant a lot, there was always something that was being communicated - a story, a folk tale, a particular struggle that was going on at the time, you know, and I sort of learnt my history through songs because we learnt songs all the time. We learnt songs about the cotton mills, we learnt songs about apartheid as I grew up, songs about people's struggles in different parts of the world, American history, Latin American history, and then of course my mum and my dad singing songs that they'd written together or written separately. And that was my kind of political education was through song...

Mogs: You talk a lot about community. What do you mean by the Banner community? It obviously struck you and was obviously an important part of your childhood and growing up. What was it?

Katherine: I guess I've kind of reflected on it in more recent years that it was a community but at the time it was just ... they were just the people I always hung around with. But I suppose ... now looking back on it, it was a community, quite a strong community, because they had that common bond of the interest in politics and music and culture, political culture, and that was quite incredible. And it was something that - certainly my mum and my dad - but everyone around us seemed to live and breathe it, so it felt like . . it wasn't something that you fitted in to your life as ... I'm aware now we kind of try and fit politics in: it was an integral part of what we were doing all the time , it was like living and breathing it. You know, every week I'd have contact with the other children whose parents were involved in Banner, every holiday we would be - pretty much every holiday - we'd be together, my parents were on tour a lot, so we'd inevitably be on tour with them, so we'd be going to gigs and we'd be parked somewhere with our colouring books and colours while they were performing. Through the miners' strike that kind of continued, so we got used to . . we saw a lot of the country and we connected with other communities who had similar outlook - or different outlooks. But it felt like ... I suppose it felt different because it was very open and

there was a sense of almost living kind of communally, although we didn't: everyone had their own house and things, but we did connect a lot, and we also opened our house so the house was open for song sessions.

11mins: I remember during the steel strike we had strikers come to the house, and stay in the house for periods of time while they were doing picketing, doing rallies or speaking, so it did feel really different to the way that we live now. It felt ... it felt like you were part of something big ... yeah, it really felt like its own little world, really, there was a sense of solidarity, there was a sense that all of us were in it together; the kids were a joint responsibility, everyone took turn looking after us, babysitting the Banner kids, and we'd watch a video while parents were doing other stuff related to Banner. It was really a fantastic way to grow up, really ideal way to grow up, surrounded by other children, surrounded by similar minded people ... Very free.

Mogs: You touched on the Miners' strike and obviously for Banner in some ways this was one of the high points that they've had in their history, the work that they did, their commitment to the mining communities ... and one of the things that I thought would be interesting was to find out, given that it was a very intense time, what was it like for you at that time? You were about 10 then, presumably, when the miners' strike was on?

Katherine: Yes, in 1984, yes, I would have been about 10. It was an intense time, it was an intense time. It was quite a hard time personally because my mum and dad had split up, and so ... and that happened at about the time of the miners' strike, so it was kind of a year of a lot of change - there was a lot of political change, there was a lot of personal change. You know, we were young so we were living in two separate houses, and yes, it was intense. I would say the miners' strike was a kind of defining moment for my dad. I remember there was a lot of activism around that time: there was a lot of phone calls, there was the miners' support group in Birmingham, the Birmingham Miners' Support Group, very active, very passionate. For example, we used to go busking every Saturday in Birmingham city centre for the miners, to raise money because they were on strike and they needed funds, they needed to eat, and so there was a lot of activism in Birmingham around that and I've got very strong memories of that time.

15 mins: We had a phone tree, I remember, to arrange meetings and also the weekly busking sessions, and there'd be a big group of us would go into Birmingham city centre and sing, you know, play music in very prominent locations I remember! We'd have the collection tins out, and me and Keith, and some of the other Banner kids, our role was to hold the collection tins as well so that people would think, 'Ah kids ...' you know, kids, give more money! So we had to shake the boxes and shout 'Give to the miners' or some such thing. 'Collecting for the miners' that was it. And we'd sing as well, you know, so we were involved in those kind of ... those weekly sessions. And I remember travelling a lot as well, so I remember going to miners' welfares, getting in the Banner van straight after school or whenever it was, the weekend, all piling into the Banner van and we 'd be off - Wales, Yorkshire, Nottingham, wherever it was. Every week it felt we were like in different

locations. And we'd pile into some poor miner's house, and take it over, basically, with our sleeping bags and our junk and whatever, so we'd be all over the shop. And that felt.. that felt perfectly normal to us, it was quite exciting actually, and in the evening there'd be a gig and we'd invariably stay up till far too late and see everyone singing... There was a sense of optimism, a huge sense of optimism, you know, despite the fact they were quite turbulent times politically and personally, and for my dad as well and for my mum. There was a lot of optimism around in that community. It was wonderful to be part of those times. In a way, they were very optimistic times, there was a lot of unity, there was a sense of the world could change, that.. you know, people had power to have ... to make a difference over their lives, that ... that Thatcher could be overthrown .. Yeah, there could be a really different society. So that was kind of amazing really.

What else to say? I remember we used to ... as I say, it was jubilant and turbulent times. Going to demonstrations, I remember going to demonstrations with dad, big demonstrations, huge demonstrations, people were very angry. I remember the police charging at us ... on a big demonstration in London, on a big demo in London and us being just nippers and someone throwing us over a fence because the horses were coming. What else do I remember? I remember us drawing pictures of picket lines and coppers and miners getting beaten around the head, you know, not the kind of things that 10 year olds and - what would Keith have been ? 7? 6. Yeah, 6 - 6 years olds see on a daily basis but that was kind of our the reality. That wasn't the reality of a lot of children in our school, so it made us quite different. So that was another dimension completely, but we still had that community as well, you know, that continued, and so there was that sense there were other people in it as well.

Mogs: Obviously moving into teenage years, that becomes a different thing, you are much more aware of the outside world and teenage years are always a bit difficult .. So how did Banner affect you, as you were going into your teenage years, in terms of your politics and music?

Katherine: Well, music has been part of my life from day one. As I said, in the hospital my mum was translating songs for the Chile show, and then there was all that growing up with music, you know, around me, singing and music from as soon as I could talk, music being part of the tours, the holidays, every ... music was always there. So, I guess it was natural for me to seek music as a lifeline. I had quite troubled teenage years, and I think music was a real a lifeline for me, and I think Banner gave me that. So I started learning to play instruments, I learnt... my parents had taught me folk guitar from when I was about six or seven, but when I went to secondary school I started learning other instruments. And that gave me a place to belong because I didn't really feel like I belonged in the school system, and I found relationships with other kids difficult because I was different. Something set me aside from the kids: I couldn't see the point in some of the things that they were stressing about, you know, at the time all the girls were into sort of ... pop culture, and, I don't know, fashion stuff, and make up, and boys. I didn't feel I could relate to them, I didn't feel like I had that stuff in common with them, which was quite isolating ... Because I'd grown up in the folk idiom that had already set me apart musically, and, of course, music is a big ... it's

one of the ways that teenagers relate to each other as well, and my points of reference were very different from my friends.

23 mins So what I did was to go and learn an instrument and get involved in another music community with peers, albeit not one I was at school with, but to find those connections musically. Politically, I think I just was very, very alone in terms of ... other young people didn't really give a shit, or if they did, they just didn't have the points ... again the points of reference that I had, the experiences I'd had. So it was quite lonely. Obviously, I'd had that political education, you can't undo that and I didn't want to do undo it, so ... I was learning all the time, you know, being around the Banner community I was learning all the time about different struggles, you know, resistance, local resistance, international resistance, and I suppose I became ... I was interested in that stuff. And that kind of ... so the lines of politics and music kind of guided me through quite a difficult time in my life, and I sort of found my way, and music, I would say, very strongly gave me a direction, so ... being part of a wider music community through the various bands I played in and orchestras, that gave me a direction and the political stuff was always there, the political interest was always there and that sort of didn't stop really ... Have I answered the question?

Mogs: Yeah. Brilliantly! You were interviewed by Dave for *We Demand a Future*. What was that like? What can you remember of that time when you were doing that?

Katherine: Again it was the time of the miners' strike, I think. And ... yeah, it was like kids had a point of view as well, you know. I say my school friends were not in that in that place, but there were other kids who were experiencing the strike, so the kids of miners were really experiencing those issues and tackling them, you know, and also experiencing the inequality of what was happening and the violence towards their communities. And they were in those ... they were part of those discussions as well, they were party to those discussions, so, yeah, it was ... there was a sense that we were part of that movement, children, young people were part of that movement and we had things to say about it. I can't remember that much about Dad ... I know he did interview me for the song - and Keith as well, I think - and I think somewhere there's some ... we're on one of the albums, whatever we had to say about it which I can't remember what I did say! But, yeah, it was nice to be given a voice. I mean, again, at that time young people weren't given a voice as much. There wasn't that awareness of kids' rights, children's rights, young people's rights, so it was good to be asked - and it was good to have a song written about it.

27 mins: Mogs: The song was *We Demand a Future*. *Reclaim the Future* was the project that you got involved in wasn't it? How did that project come about?

Katherine: *Reclaim the Future*, so ... let's think back ... that would have been about 2000, the year 2000, wasn't it? It came about because I'd been to El Salvador through contacts with Mogs and Tim and ... actually, again, it was that political interest and the fact that you two had been over during the Sandinista years in Nicaragua and then you'd met the Salvadorean communities in the Bajo Lempa, and they had been rebuilding ... they had built their own community on the principles of cooperativism and socialism, really, on socialist

principles, and I remember during the strike you talking about that, about those communities and their ideals and how they were building their communities from scratch and it really, really appealed to me because I thought, 'What am I doing here? It's shit. This is a shit country'. And I suppose that really '.'. Going over there, to cut a long story short, was another way of bringing that political culture to life for me, you now, living that political culture. So I went over to El Salvador and I started the Music For Hope project which was a project with young people, looking at ... giving them a voice through music and culture but also looking at their own political music and culture and celebrating that. So the Reclaim The Future project came out of doing that work, that initial work in El Salvador with young people which was kind of ... a little bit of music education, sharing songs, writing songs, and then I'd been working with a band over there, so there was with this brilliant band performing political music that I'd helped to set up. I also made links while I was in El Salvador, bizarrely enough, with East Germans because there was a lot of solidarity and activism around supporting the Bajo Lempa communities to progress at the time, so it was a kind of ... an amazing place to meet other like-minded political people really. And young people, political young people. So, the East German connection came through my work in El Salvador and then when I came back to England having been in El Salvador for a year I decided that I wanted to build a project, an arts project which linked the Salvadorean young people with East German young people and then with British young people to ... sort of looking at political culture but also looking at where ... the kind of world that people wanted to live in, young people wanted to live in, so from a youth perspective. So that's kind of where it came out of - two very strong political youth cultures, the Salvadorean youth culture and the East Germans who were very cultural ... cultural activists, you know, painters, mural artists ... what else did they do? A bit of drama...

32 mins: And then I had to build that community in England. The difficult bit was the English bit because we haven't got that in England, so I went and recruited young people to get involved in an international project that talked about their futures and about how they saw the world. We managed to get the money, we managed to overcome all the visa barriers which now would be ... these days would be virtually impossible, but we managed to find a way to bring the band from El Salvador, to bring a group of young East Germans and then we recruited a group of young people in the West Midlands who were involved in culture in one way or another.

Mogs: what was your role in the project?

Katherine: Project coordinator and also I was doing the music direction. And a lot behind the scenes! And translating a lot of the time as well. I think we did bring in a translator for some of the ... no, I think I did all the translation... No, we had a young Spanish guy who got involved - can't remember his name- great guy, but he got involved as a translator so we took it in turns to translate for the Salvadoreans because, of course, they didn't speak English. Or very little.

Mogs: Looking back at it now what are your views on the project? What do you think it achieved?

Katherine: Oh, it was an amazing project! I mean it was huge undertaking because it was kind of ... there were probably around 20 young people, possibly slightly less – anyway those sort of numbers, on the road, aged between 13 and 25, speaking a range of languages, from completely different cultures, I mean so different. Weirdly enough, the German and the English young people were the ones that clashed more than ... You know, there seemed to be bigger cultural differences between the Germans and the English than there was between the Salvadoreans and ... It was very weird! Anyway, but it was an amazing project: really exciting, so you had that mix - of music, so there was the Salvadorean music and dance that was kind of a real powerful force through the show. And then there was the Germans' kind of very heady kind of ... political take on stuff: they were very into thinking things through, you know, thinking of the bigger picture, and structure and form, and it was important to make it abstract and not too ... They just had a completely different way of approaching, creating a piece of theatre and music than what our frames of reference were, so the whole devising thing was quite hard work for them. But they brought that, an amazing really well worked through political framework and that kind of ... abstract take on things. So in the end I think we went for quite an abstract form, the play took on almost a fantastical form because they needed that, they didn't want it to be too obvious.

And then the British young people really threw themselves into it, they were fantastic. There were a couple of singers, all doing ... they were all doing acting ... I think they were all on a performing arts course, as I remember - I recruited them from different places. But they were really fantastic, they really got a lot out of it. I would say probably the English young people got the most out of it. Because for them it was a political education. We were looking at issues of globalisation, we were looking at ... the history of struggle in El Salvador, at the experiences those communities had been through, we were looking at Berlin, the Wall and what had happened for those communities and exploring ... also exploring issues that were relevant to their political history, so we looked at the experiences of Black and Asian people arriving in to the UK and why they'd come and the kind of issues, the racism that they faced when they came here.

37 mins: So we looked at The Windrush - one of the young people, one of the young British participants went and interviewed her grandmother who was Jamaican, and talked to her about why she'd come, you know, about the optimism that she'd had leaving Jamaica, the ideas that she'd had about Britain and then the reality that she faced when she came here. So, we were looking at all that kind of ... so it was a real heady mix of different cultures, and different music and different practice, really, different community arts practice... It was a good team on it, they worked hard, the artist team worked hard to get over ... to find a narrative, a common narrative - and it was crazy going on tour with them, it was absolutely bonkers! People falling in and out of love with each other and, God ... dramas, with so and so fancying so and so and so did his brother. Oh God, It was crazy, really, going on tour with them, and, you know, then the Salvadoreans getting drunk when they didn't know how to drink and going crazy and being sick, and ... It was bonkers going on tour with them, but they always managed to pull it together for performances. And I know that ... 3 of the young people from Reclaim The Future, 3 of the British young people, after it had finished they

came to me and said, no we don't want it to finish, what can we do next? We've learnt so much, and we'd really love to go over to El Salvador and learn more about those communities.

So I worked with the 3 of them – it was called Changing Minds, I think, the project we put together – I worked with the 3 of them, and we put together a project to go over to El Salvador and we were going to do more research about the communities in El Salvador and also about the war, and, you know, how the war had come about and what had happened to the communities, and resistance and all those kinds of issues, and then they were going to bring the learning back from that and they were going to do a tour in youth clubs and schools to share what they'd learnt, and, again, it was a sort of ... a devised piece, followed by a workshop. And, yeah, we did it! We got the money together and we took the 3 of them ... I mean, real working class kids: I don't think Vicki had been outside the UK, I think Ilwesi had been to ... had been to Jamaica - she was of Jamaican heritage - but she'd never been to a rural community, such as, you know, the Salvadorean communities where we were going, and I think it was a big shock to her. And then there was Andrew who was brilliant – he was a working class lad from Dudley, very political astute because his parents were trade unionist activists, but, again, he'd never been anywhere like El Salvador. So, it was amazing taking the 3 of them. At times I found it very frustrating because they would ... they would, you know, fuff about the toilet situation, and they couldn't deal with the mosquitos, and they whinged about the heat, and ... Oh, they did my head in really! Because it was so, so different for them, it was a massive culture shock. But they did their workshops, they did their workshops over there with young people. They were leading drama workshops, that's what they went over to do, and somehow they found a bond with the young people over there. They were really taken in, they were really well looked after, and despite it being very, very different for them and a very big learning curve for them.

43 mins: And then they came back to the UK and they ... they put together a piece, and they took it to youth clubs and they sort of ... they spread that message out there. But I know from the 3 of them – I'm still vaguely in touch with them – that that project had a huge impact on them, you know, an absolute, huge impact on their lives and what they've gone on to do next. Ilwesi is now ... she went on to learn Spanish, and she's teaching – I think she's teaching Spanish in a school in Dubai, so she's gone off and is doing international stuff, albeit not very political, but it kind of ... it kind of really gave her a political education, I think. Andrew is doing really interesting stuff: I think he's working for a theatre company in the West Midlands, he's interested in doing political stuff, very much politically involved and active. I'm pretty sure it's a theatre company, but it might be community arts related but, anyway, he's very much involved in arts and politics. And Vicki, I'm not sure what she's doing now. But, again, it was a really big ... it was a life changer for the 3 of them, and I think, you know, all of the young people involved from Britain got a hell of a lot out of Reclaim The Future.

And I know the Salvadoreans did, too. They always ... whenever I go over there they talk about all their memories, you know, about getting drunk! But I think it was amazing for them to have that ... for them to be involved in an international project which looked at

political culture, which found communalities in experience, albeit very disparate experiences, really, but it gave them a completely different view of the world. I mean, for them it was the biggest culture shock going to England, and ... you know, *campesino* young people, and then all of a sudden they were in this urban environment with very different ... completely different world for them. They were very culture shocked. But then I suppose, you know, doing ... going on the road, that experience of putting something together collectively, I mean they got that, they completely got that: the community arts ethos for them was nothing new, it was something that they lived and breathed, so they found it the easiest throwing themselves into devising and creating and, you know, working with what they knew and adding that in and then creating something new, they totally got that. And sharing issues, sharing stories, sharing concerns - all of that was natural, very natural for them. But I think they found it amazing to work with young people, international young people and share ideas and views and - love! And politics and, you know, share living space: they stayed with the East Germans, they lived together with the East Germans for a while ...

47 mins: Mogs: Can you tell us a bit about your career in community arts and how it relates to Banner?

I suppose my career really started with that project, the Reclaim the Future project, and I just loved ... I've always believed in the power - because I grew up with it - in the power of music and arts to change people's lives and for people to have some say, to have a voice to have an expression, to communicate their ideals, their challenges, you know, their optimism, their despair. I suppose to me that's what I've lived and breathed, really, from childhood, so it was only really an extension of that to go into that myself, to be more involved in that, and I think it's that desire to ... it's that belief in communities, in the power of community, belief in what comes out of working collectively, you know, the incredible resilience of communities, and I suppose that kind of ... the learning, the shared values, the shared optimism, the shared worlds that you can achieve through community arts. So, yeah, Banner has really informed my whole career - that and also the work in El Salvador which has been really important. But I realise that even that is sort of informed by Banner because, well, first of all, the fact that you both introduced me to those communities, the communities in El Salvador, and that had such an appeal to me. But the fact that that had an appeal was because of ... because of my own personal history of politics and art.

And then also formative memories of the Chileans being in Birmingham and their kind of ... their political culture, their songs and their dance, and I remember that so clearly as a child. Again, as I said, really formative memories of the solidarity movement around them as well, but also in their strength of community as a kind of political and cultural community. And I think that kind of informed my interest as well in both the community arts work in El Salvador, to having that international perspective and seeing that as relevant and connected to where we are here and not as something separate, but absolutely a part of what we should be doing as human beings, as reaching out to other people and making those connections, making political connections, making social connections, you know, caring about what's happening in another part of the world, caring that it's relevant, that what

happens somewhere in a distant corner of the world has some relationship to how I live here, you know.

52 mins: So I think that's also informed some of my choices about where I've gone in my career. I've decided to dedicate a lot of voluntary time, essentially, to develop a community arts project in El Salvador that gives young people a voice, that connects them with their ... that values their political past, that values their political culture, that seeks to give them some control over their lives and within their communities. And then, similarly, with the community arts work I do now with, I suppose, with some of the most disenfranchised communities, those who don't have necessarily much access to mainstream arts provision but who've got incredible ... incredible stories, and also incredibly, culturally rich... amazing forms of cultural expression, I suppose, and I think we're all enriched by that. I think it's to our enrichment as a society to hear those voices, and to me, in many ways, I'd rather see an amazing piece of community theatre, or something that comes from the grassroots, that's tangible, that's got a message, that's so direct, that's so authentic, I'd rather see that than a mainstream production in a big venue. I'd rather see something that touches me, that speaks to me, that says something about people's lives. Yes, I think that Banner has totally informed that decision, and informs a lot of my values in my work around believing in the power of community, believing that we're all created equal. There are massive inequalities in society we all know about, but we're all the same, we are all humans, we all breathe, eat, sleep, shit. And I suppose I have a desire to see a world, where we would be more equal, and that defines my decision to be involved in the arts.

Mogs: Brilliant! Thank you. I think that's it. Anything else? Anything you think we've forgotten? Anything around Banner that you think we've forgotten? How Banner has touched you in a different way or where you had an involvement in a different way?

Katherine: No, I don't think so. I think we touched on quite a bit there, haven't we?

Mogs: Thank you, Katherine

Katherine: You're welcome!