

See you down the road: Episode 6: Adam Kuchler

Book Kennison: This is the Circus Voices podcast, from circustalk.com. I'm Book Kennison. Welcome to the season finale of *see u down the road*.

Before we get started, my co-producer Zoë and I wanted to let you know that we're going to be releasing a compilation of our favorite music from this series as an album, also called *see u down the road*. We're starting with a series of singles, the first two of which are available on streaming services now. Our musical project is called Zobot (like robot with a Z), it's a brother-sister band. So follow Zobot on Spotify or Apple, or wherever you stream music, and you'll know when the album comes out.

Here's Zoë to introduce today's guest.

Zoë: Our guest today is Adam Kuchler. Adam is a clown and a juggler who currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada. He's worked for Ringling Bros., Big Apple Circus, Circus Flora, and Seven Fingers. He spoke to us about some of the transitions he's seen in his long career in show business, including the one we're all currently experiencing.

Here's Adam Kuchler, on *see u down the road*.

Adam Kuchler: Lets just do it. Lets just do it.

Our identities get so tied up in circus that—well now who are you? You know, even right now, we've all got the same amount of work. You know, if you're a kid with a dream, who's never performed in a show—you now have as much work as the best people in the world. That's wild.

If you're doing a contract on a show it often becomes your whole life. You keep in touch with people on the outside, but your routine—you share a routine, you spend so much time together, often because you're working so hard, or because of all the travel as a group or whatever, so when a contract ends, in a sense your whole life disappears.

If I have any space between gigs, I'm always afraid that I lost it. I've never been respected as someone who was like, great, or even necessarily better than other people, but I've always been...when I was at Circus Smirkus, I remember someone coming to the show and telling me, like, *you've got something*. I remember at Clown College this Russian coach that was so upset with me—he had been a director for Yengibarov, one of the greatest clowns to have ever lived—and he one day came up to me: *I don't know what it is, but people like you*. I think about that all the time. He had no idea why people liked me; he couldn't imagine why audiences liked me, but they did. But that's not a seven ball pattern, that is something completely intangible that I'm always afraid of losing.

I know I'm not old, but I mean, I have been working professionally in circus longer than a lot of circus performers have been alive. Like, I get that. I grew up loving three-ring circus. Of course, that was the only circus I knew existed. When I started—another reality that's changed—when I started in circus (I was in Ringling) Ringling had a more recognizable brand name than Sears. Well now they're both gone. These were both...yeah, OK boomer, but for real, these were

institutions, like baseball, we couldn't imagine them disappearing. And yet it did, and yet we continue. Right, if the only kind of circus you wanted to do was three-ring in Madison Square Garden—yeah, it's gone. The likelihood of that happening again is low. It's of course not impossible, but it's low.

Chuck Barnes was the last living clown to have worked Ringling Bros. under the big top, and we just lost him last week. There are now no clowns alive that worked Ringling under the big top. It's possible that the circus that you loved won't exist after this. And so what happens then? Will you be upset that the thing is gone and never do it again? Or will you be curious about what it becomes and continue to find a way to keep going?

The Smirkus tour is cancelled. There you go man, the Smirkus tour is cancelled. I... that's terrible.

Circus is a thing that has always evolved, and so it has to continue to evolve. And so artists and creators need to create that. We might not have a big company to hire us and give us jobs; we might have to create new things to fulfill our need to create—and also there's that money thing. Some of us don't know how else to make money.

If you got that fire burning, the fire of artistic passion, it's going to find its outlet—it just has to, or else you don't get to do it. If you go onto the ring or the stage with an open heart, that's the most valuable thing to bring.

Moving forward, I suspect that we're going to have to be really flexible as far as what we do and we're gonna have to adjust to whatever the reality is. Like, let's say everything was gonna come back in three months. Well, we don't know where society is at in three months, you know, so we're going to have to be ready to make stuff that they're going to want to see. I'm really excited about connecting with people in the after days. I'm really excited about exploring our hearts, minds, and bodies. It's gonna make us deeper, as artists, there's gonna be more layers in our performance, there's gonna be more access to emotions felt than before. We get to redefine ourselves, potentially, and define the art again, and that's really exciting. Yeah, I can't wait to find out, I cannot wait to find out what happens—what are people gonna laugh at, what are people gonna be looking for, are people gonna want to applaud physical feats? We'll find out. But I do believe circus will continue to be relevant and important, as long as we continue to feel that way about it.

I've always hated saying goodbye. Not on every gig, but even some gigs where I couldn't wait until the end of it, the end of it is still hard. The first big one that I had was the end of my first tour of Ringling. So we had a whole cast that had been together for two years. Hundreds and hundreds of people worked on that show. And the last show, man, I was on the arena floor just like, crying—I've cried on stage or in the ring for the last show for a lot of different shows, but this one particularly was really hard for me. And I was never gonna see these people again. I was gonna continue, but it was really hard—anyway, within three months I had seen most of those people again. One of the things with circus, whether you stay in it or not—if you stay in it you're going to be moving around, and so you're going to see people again. If you leave it, other

people will be traveling around and you'll see them again. Everybody's roads are different and you have no idea, when you meet people, what they will have been through, but you will meet people again. That's a truth.

That phrase "see you down the road" sticks around because it's true in more ways than we might realize, even. It's brilliant in its simplicity. First of all you don't have to say goodbye, because saying goodbye is terrible. It's a way that we can not say that; it's an acknowledgment that things end, and that things begin, and that even endings aren't endings; often endings are beginnings.

For me, the romantic vision of circus still has the ring. One of the things about a circle is that it doesn't really have an end or beginning, it just goes and goes and goes. You just hop on wherever you are, and hop off whenever you want. We have such a rich history to draw from. In life, I've looked at history often to find peace for myself. And with circus too. I find that the future can be a really terrifying place, because we don't know what's going to happen. But you can find peace in history. This stuff has happened before, and artists have gotten through it before. We are going to be telling these stories to our grandchildren to the point that they're not going to want to hear them. It's terrible, but artists are going to be better for this. I do believe a renaissance is coming.

You know that no ones going to hit a green button and then like *whoop*—back to the way it was! It's just straight-up not going to happen. So maybe it takes more time. I just feel like the future is going to happen, and that we need to be ready for it. And so if that means like—what's the thing that bears do in the winter? If that means hibernating...It's the same thing between every gig, you know, making sure that you're ready when it does happen, which now—no judgment of how people have to do that. Some people are preparing for a new reality, some people are maintaining to return to the reality, some people are just balling up and trying to emotionally take care of themselves, because that's important too, man. So just however people are getting through it, that's good. Just don't forget, like, we're gonna have to get through it.

I hope people are managing their self destructive tendencies. When we spoke before, that was one of the things that I talked about, and I think it's important. Artists can get into trouble in times like these. We need to be able to be present when that renaissance happens.

Hey Book. I was just making some dinner, and I thought about another thing that sort of connects these things, at least a little bit, and again it's like looking back to history. Everybody at all levels of circus understands this—that circus is not easy. Circus has never been easy. The history of circus—they used to have derailments, they'd have stampedes, fires—the things that people have gone through to make circus...if we continue, if we circus artists continue to want to make circus, there will continue to be circus. And that's a fact. Because it is such a beautiful thing, and it is so worth fighting for. And it's not gonna be easy, but that's not why we got into it, and that's not the reason that we've kept doing it, and that's another truth that has existed since the beginning of circus. I'll see you down the road.

Book: Thanks to Adam Kuchler for talking to us. For more about Adam, check the show notes at circustalk.com/news.

We also wanted to let you know that we've included transcripts of each episode, along with the show notes.

That's it for this season of *see u down the road*. I'm so proud of this series. Thank you for listening.

see u down the road is produced by me and Zoë Kennison. All of the music you've heard in this entire series was composed and produced by me in Chicago, Illinois—including the theme music for CircusTalk. Here it is. We're just gonna let this roll so you can hear the whole thing. I have some people to thank.

Thanks to Peter Bufano for making circus music and for helping me make music. It was talking to Peter last summer that I first had the idea for this podcast.

Thanks to Kim and Andrea at CircusTalk for supporting this project since the day I pitched it. Our executive producer is CircusTalk.

Thank you to Joy Powers for providing me with a bunch of nature sounds from Costa Rica. Most of the music in this series contains samples she's been sending me for the past year.

Zoë: And I would like to give a special thanks to Barbara Youree. She is our most devoted fan and the person who first taught us the importance of art and storytelling. Thanks for listening, Gigi.

Book: Thanks Gigi. Finally, thank you to everyone we interviewed, everyone who sent us a voice message. We didn't use every interview or every voice message. We were learning on the job for this. But your words were an essential part of this project nonetheless.

Thanks again for listening. I'm Book Kennison.

Zoë: And I'm Zoë Kennison

Book: We'll see you down the road.

Book: One more thing. CircusTalk has added a Covid resource page to help you find out about funding and other resources in your area. You can also send them resources that you want to share. Also, CircusTalk has a new service to help you get paid for your work, even during the pandemic. They've added a ticket sales option in events so you can earn an income from your live-streamed or pre-recorded circus shows, classes, and workshops. Check it out on CircusTalk with your free membership.