

Damh the Bard:

I am sitting here on Zoom with my old friend, JJ Middleway. Both of us, I think, have got colds, so I'm sounding a little nasally. I don't know about... You sound okay though, JJ, to me. But welcome to DruidCast. It's been a long time to get you back on here again.

JJ Middleway:

It has. It's been, well, I don't know how many years. Well over a decade. I was living in a yurt the last time I was on here.

Damh the Bard:

Amazing, amazing.

JJ Middleway:

So that was a long time ago.

Damh the Bard:

Well, we've known each other a long time. But what I love about these interviews is I get to sit down with my old friends and really pick their brains and understand them a bit more than I ever did before, really. So what I'd like to know is a bit about your journey and the way you approach your Druidry, that kind of thing. So maybe we'll start with that question first. What was your journey to Druidry and the order, how did that happen?

JJ Middleway:

Okay, gosh, I'll try and keep it succinct. I mean, I was brought up a Catholic, but I had an atheist father, strongly atheist father. So I had these comparators, these extremes if you like. But they were united through love, that was the key to them. They loved each other, so that didn't matter. So as I look back, I can see that I always felt something, I didn't have a name for it. Mystic, a connection with the mystic realm is the best way to put it. A connection with spirit or the divine or the nameless.

And in my early teens, I rejected Catholicism and Christianity. And I went on a journey into exploring a spiritual path of my own. I think it started with what I'd call hippiedom. Because in looking back it did fulfill some sort of sense of connection. That's what it's about. But that wasn't really a spiritual path, although it gave me an insight into some aspects of it.

And then over the years, I explored Buddhism quite strongly and deeply. Sufism, silly fool-ism as I like to call it. Because I think that plays its part too. And by my, when was it? Late thirties, I was thinking, "Oh, there's nothing quite fits, doesn't quite do. I'm going to have to just develop my own style, my own path." And I was doing that. And then I came across, lo and behold, OBOD. I forget how, my entry into it.

I mean this here, talk about synchronicities. I turned up in 1994 at my first Druid grove meeting at a house in Bristol, someone called Julie Britton. And on that night, two other people turned up for the first time in their lives at a Druid gathering. One was Adrian Rooke, we've been lifelong friends, deep friends throughout. It was coming home, we know that's a cliché, isn't it? OBOD. We all come home and it was a homecoming. I feel like home-

Damh the Bard:

It's a cliché and it's true. It is a cliché, but it's very true.

JJ Middleway:

It's totally true. I'm at home, I found my home because OBOD reflects my path and my way of being. So that was my path to Druidry.

Damh the Bard:

When you say you were into the hippiedom, what era would that be? What decade is that you're talking about?

JJ Middleway:

I'm talking about the mid '60s. Well, yeah, I mean mid '60s to early '70s is what I class as that period. It was at its height for me, I was a teenager. It was at its height, for me it came to a crescendo, '67, '68, '69. But then it eased a bit. Although as you know, I've had the privilege of sharing some very beautiful spaces with some amazing musicians. Well, you know one of them, at least.

Damh the Bard:

I do.

JJ Middleway:

Yeah, I was at Jimmy Hendrix's last concert, three weeks before he died. Slept through some of it because I'd been awake for three days and nights listening to other artists. Joni Mitchell was there, and many others. It was a beautiful time. But that was a spiritual time. There was something in the air at that time.

Damh the Bard:

That sounds like a song.

JJ Middleway:

Yes. Yeah, yeah, it does indeed, doesn't it? Something in the air tonight.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. Because you had The Doors at that time as well. You had the early Zeppelin coming out as well. It must have been... I mean, I was too young to remember that. My awareness of that kind of music started really with glam rock in the '70s. But yes, I am extremely jealous. Not really jealous, but I think, "Wow, that must have been amazing to be." Because I think The Doors were at that same festival as well.

JJ Middleway:

They were. Yeah, they were amazing, incredible.

Damh the Bard:

And there must have been an incredible energy. Would you say it was of hope? Was that what was being felt at the time, or something like that?

JJ Middleway:

There was an optimism. There was a celebration. There was joy in the air. I mean, compared to now, there was this real shift. There was something flowering. I mean, it was the flower power era. But I mean, there was something flowering. There was something, and we weren't really... You can see it more clearly in hindsight, there was something because it was transitory, it was like a blossom blooming. And then it was over within a very few years.

I mean, one thing I'm just reminded, on my 16th birthday I got to play with Incredible String Band on stage in Birmingham. They invited me up because it was my birthday. I mean, they were a crazy bunch. They were epitome of hippiedom. And I got to play the maracas. But it was... Anyway.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah. So you'd go on stage with The Incredible String Band, and of course Robin Williamson is an honorary bard of the order. So that connection continues from back then to now as well.

JJ Middleway:

It does. And I was there for his crowning when he was offered that at the 50th celebrations or whatever.

Damh the Bard:

It is interesting that when you are in that moment, you can miss how things like that change things forever. There's no doubt that the hippie movement changed things forever. As did punk, which was my experience of about that time. 1977 when The Pistols came out and The Ramones and all of that. It was literally just maybe a year and a half, or even at the most two years. Not even that, I don't think, when punk was actually at its height. But it changed everything in the... But it was a little bit more angry.

JJ Middleway:

Yes, yeah. But you're right. It comes into fruition and then it passes. And it's transitory. So it's about enjoying the moment.

Damh the Bard:

And when I was in it, seeing all my friends dress up in black bin liners with safety pins and going off to their gigs, I didn't realize at the time, probably like you standing there watching The Doors, what a momentous occasion that probably was.

JJ Middleway:

No, I wasn't really aware of it. I look back and I think it's almost like a dream. I was lucky.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

JJ Middleway:

So a strong part of my path is song. So here's a song from that time with the Incredible String Band, just very briefly.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

JJ Middleway:

(Singing).

And just singing it now, I see how it fits.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

JJ Middleway:

Holds good.

Damh the Bard:

Timeless. And I can hear that being written by a modern day bard now, the same words, same words.

JJ Middleway:

Yeah.

Damh the Bard:

So how would you describe your Druidry now? How has it developed over the years since that first visit to the Grove with Julie Britton back in the day?

JJ Middleway:

Okay. I mean, following the course, again, it's easy to dismiss those things. It's a written course on paper. It is transformative. I look back and I did delve into the bardic, the bardic course is the key. I mean, I think bardistry is the key to Druidry in a way. And it's the foundation to enabling other things to happen.

I regard the bardic as flowering unto thyself. For me, the bardic is that flowering onto thyself, the divine part of one's self. And then through the ovate, which is a completely different experience and really goes very deep. And there's no spoilers though on here, but it is one heck of a journey. But again, it's a deep and profound enabler to the Druid, which is service. It's about being in service.

I'd like to, here's a quote. I mean, this is an adapted quote, but, "I'd like to believe that when I die..." This is my Druidry now, "I'd like to believe that when I die, I will have given myself away as an oak tree does every season. Scattering its acorns without fear of loss, for it's not a loss. It's contributing to new life. It's the tree's way of being strongly rooted in the ground and spilling out its treasures on the wind."

Now, that's a May Sarton quote adapted. Actually, she didn't talk about the oak. I've adapted it. But for me, and this is just in the moment in response to your question, the oak, and here's the ogham around my neck, which I carry with me, it reminds me of the beneficence of the oak, the benevolence. It gives itself away more than any other tree, for me. It supports more life. 512 species is it, or something phenomenal, compared to about 12 for a conifer.

I mean, I'm not dismissing conifers because they're beautiful too. But the oak is this absolutely abundant tree giving itself away, giving itself away. And the other thing I'd say here at this point, druid, my own interpretation of the word druid, and this wasn't from any book. This is because I was lucky to study with someone who taught Sanskrit and we learned some Sanskrit chants together. And it came to me that in Sanskrit, tara is the word for both truth and tree. And if you say taruid, Druid, you see where it...

For me, it goes right back because the uid in Druid is wisdom. And so it becomes truth, wisdom, and tree wisdom combined for me. And my connection and learning from trees, trees are key to my Druidry, and the ogham grove and the whole ogham. So there's a snapshot of what Druidry means to me now.

Damh the Bard:

I often think when you look at history, you see that the Druids never wrote anything down. And on one level, that is extremely frustrating because obviously we want to know what they did. And we want to know all those things that we can see, the writing of the ancient Egyptians and the Greeks would've been, in a way, a beautiful gift. But on the other hand, I square that up with myself in as much as they felt maybe they didn't need to write anything down because all the wisdom that needed to be written down is in the book of nature itself.

JJ Middleway:

Totally.

Damh the Bard:

And that's the book that they learnt from. I don't know if that's true. It's true for me. I'm taking that as a truth. Do you know what I mean?

JJ Middleway:

Oh, completely.

Damh the Bard:

And so the oak can be such a great teacher because of the way it is. And when you look at the various trees, animals, plants, the seasons, the turning of the sun and moon, there is such a huge amount of learning to be had for that connection with nature. And I think to me, that's what Druidry does. There is a book and it's everywhere.

And I've often said, if Richard Dawkins said, "Prove to me your God exists." I would just say, "Well, look around you. There is the great big whatever it is." I won't pretend to entirely understand it, but I feel it, and I feel that connection with it.

JJ Middleway:

Totally and utterly agree, 100%. That is me as well. The book is everything. Nature is my life, my teacher. And I'm part of it, that's the thing. I think Druidry, I am not separate or divorced from any of this. I am integral and associated with, and part of the beauty and mystery of it all,

Damh the Bard:

A part of it, yeah.

JJ Middleway:

Teach me How to Listen is another song, Dave. In answer to the question.

(singing).

Anyway, there's hundreds of songs and hundreds of poems and hundreds literally. And you talk about Druidry being an oral tradition, over the years I've learned there's loads in me. I have a book, have

various books that I can refer to where I've noted things down. I call them Book of Shinings. My Druid Book of Shinings. Wicca has a Book of Shadows. So the Book of Shadows sits with a Book of Shinings for me, and they both have their place.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah. You said earlier that you find the bard is like a foundation. And I find that too. One of the things that I always try and say is that there's a perception of a graded system, a grade of bard, ovate and Druid, that somehow you move from one to the other and it's a progression. But actually when you look at the Gwers and when you do them, you can tell that you don't move from one to the other. They build on each other.

And actually, the bard is the foundation of everything that comes afterwards. So the ovate is built on the foundation of the bard, and the Druid is built on the foundation of the Ovate and the Bard.

JJ Middleway:

Absolutely.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah

JJ Middleway:

Andinteresting.

Damh the Bard:

Sorry, go on.

JJ Middleway:

No, after you.

Damh the Bard:

No, no. Okay. My friends in everywhere in the world, this is a total English moment. No, after you, please. What were you going to say?

JJ Middleway:

So it is. What I was going to say is, this is really interesting to me because recently I was listening to the indigenous wisdom of South Africans, the ancient indigenous wisdom. And it's so in accord with Druidry, it's phenomenal. But there are five keys to creation, keys to the kingdom in a way, and keys to the magician. They list them as this, number one, song. Number two, dance. Number three, prayer, or at least a connection with something greater than oneself. Number four, sacred ritual. And number five, story.

Now, that's from a completely different thread, but how true is that? That completely and utterly encapsulates the bardic for me. And there we have it.

Damh the Bard:

Absolutely. And I think another thing that people, when they look at that and say, "Okay, so the bard is the foundation." Well, I'm not a poet, I'm not a storyteller, I'm not a songwriter. Of course, the journey of the bard is to step into the flow of Awen, step into the flow of sacred divine breath or inspiration. And of course, it's elusive. It's not always there. It's something that has to be opened up to and allowed to flow through you.

And I think that that creativity obviously can be expressed through songs, through dance, through poetry, through storytelling, through story writing. But it can also be expressed by how you cook your food. It can be expressed by how you raise your children or how you interact with your friends or the world around you. There's a creative spark of authenticity that comes from that relationship with the Awen and with whatever it is that you are creating.

And I always feel that, that moment, for me it's songwriting obviously. For me, it's songwriting. When I am opening up and I feel in the flow of Awen, that is the closest I get to feeling at one with the great big whatever it is. And that's the Bardic tradition to me in a nutshell, really.

JJ Middleway:

Yeah. And I equate with that. I write some songs, but I love singing song. And I love poetry as well, writing poetry. So that's an expression of some of my Druidry. I mean, okay. In the moment, this relates to the question as well.

Several poems come to mind, but I wrote this when I was looking for the way, I wrote:

I'm not a Christian, yet Christ is all around.

I'm not a Buddhist, yet Buddha is my ground.

I'm not a Muslim, yet Allah's here in all I see.

I'm not a Hindu, yet Krishna speaks to me.

I'm not an atheist, but nothingness counts too.

I walk the path of Yahweh, although I'm not a Jew.

None of these and all of these. All of these and more.

If one excludes the others, loves truth goes out the door.

Come build a mighty rainbow embracing all beliefs and creeds.

Form something even greater than our wildest dreams exceed.

Dream this mighty rainbow encircling the earth.

Sacrifice our dogma, celebrate, rebirth.

And that was the poem. But I added two lines after in years later, because I said:

I'm not a Druid, but the oak is all I am.

I'm not a Wiccan but I love where ere I can.

I mean, the point of being a Druid for me encapsulates and honors all other parts and all the whole. So yeah, it's moving beyond that in a way. Anyway, yeah,

Damh the Bard:

That is beautiful. Seriously, that is such a beautiful... And when I first found OBOD, I confess I found some of the openness frustrating, because I wanted to be told what to do and what to believe. I think that's what leads people to the books. It's like, "Oh yeah, to be this, you need to do this."

And then I got the gwers and of course, that's not what it does at all. It's all about that kind of thing on the temple of Delphi, "Know thyself." It's about knowing who you are and how you personally create and connect with whatever it is that you believe. And as I've gone through the years, I've realized the absolute power, potential and blessing of that universalist approach of openness and acceptance of other paths. That you don't have to be a pagan to be part of OBOD. I am, but that doesn't mean to say that I can't stand in circle with Christians and Buddhists and all the other people who are in that circle with me. I think that's such a gift that, like I say, when I first joined, I didn't see it. But now I see it very, very clearly now.

JJ Middleway:

Yeah. And it reflects like the word educare, everything's been turned on its head in that time. Educare means to bring out that which is within, to bring out. So true education's about bringing out that which is within. We impose that which is without, as in outside and without meaning after time. And that's what Druidry does, it's bringing out the truth of who I am. And it's unique, we're all unique.

Damh the Bard:

And that's definitely a thing with modern Druidry now, of how we, since the 1700s have recreated it, I think with a little push from nature herself saying, "I need people like you. So here it is, here's the connection you need." And if somebody says to me, "Sum up Druidry to me?" It would be a set of skills and feelings and techniques that allow you to develop a deeper relationship with the natural world, seen and unseen. Because I do think it also includes the other world as well as the tangible stuff you can see and touch. It's also the stuff that hides, that's in exactly the same place but just slightly to one side.

JJ Middleway:

Yeah, totally. Absolutely agree with you, Dave. I mean, this relationship with nature, I mean, I lead a singing group, over the years singing and celebrancy and Sovereign Earth. But what it's become, it's become song lines of Albion or song lines of Avalon. In singing to the Earth, in offering it. I mean, this sounds fanciful at one point, in one way. And if I'd said this years ago, I might have laughed at it, but I feel it to be true. Offering the song to the Earth with the right intention is reinvigorating, rehonoring the song lines which are latent and present.

And in doing that, we heal not just the earth, but we heal ourselves. It's reciprocal that some energy flow takes place beyond words that is just a medicine, is healing. And the earth is crying for it just as much as we are.

Damh the Bard:

Yes, yes. Beautiful. So wherever I've traveled and you've been there, you always have your drum with you. Doesn't matter if it's over in the Netherlands, Germany, Glastonbury, wherever it is, you seem to never, ever travel without your drum. So can you tell me about your relationship with the drum? Because it seems to always be this one as well. How your relationship with the Drum, how did that develop and what is the drum to you?

JJ Middleway:

Well, let me play it first to partly answer that, and then I'll speak in English.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

JJ Middleway:

Can you hear it?

Damh the Bard:

Yeah.

JJ Middleway:

(Singing).

I could go on for half-an-hour just with that one, but I'll spare you. But something about [inaudible 00:25:34] over time, but you get a flavor of it. Okay. This drum, my gosh, I don't know how long I've had it now, but probably getting on for 20 years, I imagine, something of that order. It was gifted to me by a fellow OBOD-y as it happens. Although that seemed, I didn't realize that at the time. Chris, Sky Ravenwolf, she lived on a boat. She's dead now, she's passed on. But a beautiful soul, crafted loads of... I suspect quite a few people here may know of her or have items made by her.

She was really gifted. She said she wanted to make a drum for me. And she asked for a few ideas at the time, and I gave her the ideas I was living in the yurt. And I said, the white horse and oak trees. And I said a few ideas. And then she went away and she produced this amazing drum. I mean, it's half the size of me. I mean, it's not insubstantial. And do you know what? Here's the thing. I think she presented it to me at one of the assemblies down in Glastonbury, summer assemblies. And I was disappointed. I was disappointed because it didn't reflect what I thought I was at that time.

It's full of ravens, moons. The intricacies, the spirals of the white horse, the phases of the moon. The elements are represented here, but particularly the ravens, comes back to the ravens. What I've learned is how much she saw into me. She saw me. Raven is so integral to my path now.

Damh the Bard:

And you didn't know it at the time?

JJ Middleway:

I didn't know it, but the drum helped me see it. And this drum is almost part of me. You'll understand as a musician. I think people used to marry their harps, didn't they?

Damh the Bard:

Yes.

JJ Middleway:

In the old days. I'm not quite in that place with it, but I have a deep, respectful and loving connection with this drum. And it serves me. It serves as an expression of my soul. But in doing that, it serves as something wider. It serves as an expression of life force and life soul. And yeah, it does go. I'd be lost without it. Yeah, non-attachment and I could live without it I'm sure. But I'd be pretty upset if I wasn't... I need a drum, it expresses something of me.

Damh the Bard:

When you play it, do you feel it moves into some kind of rhythmic heartbeat of the earth beneath you and that kind of stuff?

JJ Middleway:

You've said it. Yeah, you've said it. I mean, yeah, it absolutely does. So there is a heartbeat to the earth. It's much slower than ours. I mean... It helps take us on a journey. When I'm in community, it immediately takes us deep, me deeper. It is resonance. There's a resonance and a quality that vibrates with the bone and also transmits through the waters of our being. We're so much water and it... Yeah. (Singing).

Hold my hand, that's also what Druidry does, and song.

(Singing).

Yeah. I could go off on one, but you get the idea. Song is really such a beautiful medium of expression and translation, and medicine and harmony. Even when-

Damh the Bard:

When did you discover that connection with song and chant? Was it during the bardic course or was it later on in your journey?

JJ Middleway:

Well, here's interesting. As a young boy, I had a really beautiful voice, so I was told. So much so that I was chosen to sing solos in this choir that ended up going to the Vatican to sing for the Pope. But I wasn't part of it, and I'll tell you why. Because as part of the rehearsal, we sang in the Cathedral in Birmingham. Well, it wasn't the Cathedral, where was it? The Oratory in Birmingham, Edgbaston. And I was put up front to sing the, so one of the verses solo. And I completely froze. I was scared stiff and couldn't sing.

And that set me back for quite a while. I lost my voice. But it was always deep within me. And I mean, I've always loved song and song's been a big part. But what happened, I lived in a yurt for several years as you know, but most people here won't necessarily know.

Damh the Bard:

In a yurt. Some people might not know what a yurt is. What is a yurt, JJ?

JJ Middleway:

A Yurt is like a fancy tent. It comes from Siberia or Mongolia. It's a beautiful structure. It's a circular round canvas and pole dwelling, which I really love the circularity of it. There's something beautiful about it. It's brilliant against wind and cold. It's not so good in our climate against the damp and the wet. Although I survived for four and a half years in the yurt.

Damh the Bard:

Wow.

JJ Middleway:

Great time. Really powerful time to reconnect with the earth. I really learnt who I was. And that was a deep, dark time. I went there in a place of sorrow and came out as I see it in a place of not so much joy, I came out in a place of song. I came out in a place of song because in that time, again, another OBOD-y someone used to host some chanting in the town. And we used to go there once a week. And then that migrated into the yurt. And we sang in my yurt.

And then when I was obliged to leave and come to where I am now, Stroud, because my daughter was very ill and I was visiting her in hospital two or three times a week. And I came up here and Becky, who led these chants, she said, "I'll give you a gift. For the first year, I'll come once a month and sing some chants." And they were mostly Eastern chants, that sort of thing. But within them were some, what I would call Western indigenous.

What I love is what I feel it's an indigenous form of native song, native wisdom in our language. Devotional Druidry, I'd call it. And she did that. So once a month, she came up and at the end of the year she said, "Okay, it's over to you." And I kind of thought... And I started a singing group, which has blossomed and led to all sorts of beautiful things. But there we go.

Damh the Bard:

And did that lead to your Enchanting the Void workshops? Is that how that developed from there?

JJ Middleway:

Yeah. So there's different strands have spun off from that, starting with Enchanting the Void, filling the gap. Yeah, an enchanting through singing, reimagining, remagicalizing. Come dream the world anew, for the time it is upon us. As the land cries out, let consciousness now stir. Redream the sacred sites, so long silence, so long dormant. For the time is ripe. Moonlight dance is in the air. Reimagine rivers flowing, reenvision forests merging as the drums now beat reincarnate goddess earth.

So that was a poem of mine that came in the moment. So the song, Enchanting the Void. So it started with this desire and wish to contemplative Druidry, devotional Druidry, but also joyous the whole range of songs. But it's taken off in different ways. I do live sessions in Stroud in the Roundhouse. They've been in yurts or whatever over the years.

And that's become song lines of Avalon or song lines of Albion as well, earth songs. I do an online one, which has become something called Earth Service, where we connect all around. It's become the global grove. I mean, it sounds fanciful, but that's what it feels like. Everyone connects in the global grove and we sing, but it's also an act of service. It's called Earth Service, it's in devotion to the Earth.

You see much of what happens in not just in Druidry, in our lives, much of it's head-based. But the beauty with song, it's embodied, it's experiential. And I think the key to Druidry is the experiential bit. I can read whatever in a book, but come the crunch if I don't live it or experience it, "Oh yeah, now I get it. It's in my body. It's in my bones." The body keeps the score.

So song somehow is an enabler to that and goes into the... You could call it somatic, you could call it embodied. It's something resonant beyond the head, that includes the head because it vibrates do, but it's more heart-based. More heart-based.

Damh the Bard:

What I've noticed when I was at one of your Enchanting the Void workshops, and I think it went on for an hour-and-a-half, I think it was planned to go on for, over in, I think it was in the Netherlands. I think it was, if I remember rightly. And what I've noticed is we all came into this room together, we sat in a

circle, you led it. And we started to sing to your drum and to your voice, these chants that were very easy to slip into.

But at first, there was a certain level of self-consciousness in the room. Even there was this, "Oh, I'm singing with people." And occasionally they would have their eyes shut and they'd open it up and look around to see if anyone was looking at them or noticing them. And I think one person might have left. But on the whole, everybody stayed. And after a while, there was a moment where it just stopped. And I felt totally at one with everyone in that circle, our voices singing together, the drum being the glue that held it all together and our voices joining. And it was absolutely beautiful and blissful.

JJ Middleway:

It's true. And that is something that I find happens. It's like a magic ride, a magic carpet ride. You can't ever know where it's going, but magic and mystery comes in and this deep healing and something else takes over, which is the muse. The muse kicks in. Funnily enough, I'm off to Holland in June. They've asked, they want some more of this.

One wonderful thing. I sang a song out there many years ago, a tree song as it was, and then everyone was there, families. And then I went back a couple of years later and the kids had adopted it as their mascot or their theme tune, and they sang it back to me.

Damh the Bard:

Wonderful.

JJ Middleway:

As if it was theirs. And it was great, it was theirs. It had become theirs and just wonderful. Here's the other one. It's true that this self-conscious thing, I think we all have a voice and we all have song within us. And the thing with the sessions are, people can come and just be bathed in song. They don't have to sing. There's no expectation. But I remember clearly, I remember this really clearly. One woman came once and she said, "I can't sing at all. I really want to listen, but I can't sing, really the worst voice you'll have ever heard."

And fair enough, just took her at her word. Probably it was more than halfway through, probably two thirds of the way through, this angelic voice burst out. I'm not kidding, angelic. And everyone astounded, literally like having an angel in your midst. The voice was... Because it had this resonance and harmony, harmonic, and it was her. And she was absolutely dumbfounded with herself. She said, "I never knew that." And she had the most incredible voice. Sort of transformative. Anyway and that's an extreme, but I think it tells the story.

Damh the Bard:

It does. And singing is such a beautiful expression. And group singing is very bonding and it's just a lovely thing.

JJ Middleway:

Community, yes.

Damh the Bard:

Well, we've been talking for 40 minutes and it's been fantastic. But I need to know, it might be hard to have a favorite chant because you've probably got hundreds literally sitting in your brain. But one to connect with the earth, if you were to go off to the woods with your drum and just sit by an oak on your own and just try to connect with the land beneath you and around you. If you were in Australia, it might be a gumtree, but wherever it is in the land, is there one that comes to mind to connect for that?

JJ Middleway:

There's loads that come to mind, but there's one coming through.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

JJ Middleway:

I mean, there are literally half a dozen here.

Damh the Bard:

I'm sure there are,

JJ Middleway:

But this is the one for the moment.

Damh the Bard:

Okay.

JJ Middleway:

(Singing).

Damh the Bard:

Thank you.

JJ Middleway:

And that's great because, in the moment, again, it takes us down. Connecting with the earth, lying on the earth going low. Lifts us up, the paradox.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah.

JJ Middleway:

There's a beautiful... Here's another one. This is a beautiful Druidic one for me. "Be bold enough to be small enough to let the world be awesome, and it will. Be bold enough, be small enough to let the world be awesome, and it will." There's something in there as well about Druidry's enabled me to step out of my shyness and my fear and kind of, "Sod it, here I am, warts and all." Be bold enough to be small. But with that, it also strips the ego, I think, Druidry, in a healthy way. I think we need ego to be in the world.

Can I just share, I know time's going on. This is an ancient poem, but it speaks so much wisdom and it speaks to this in the moment. This was written in the 13th century by someone called Mahmoud Chabestari, In the Secret Rose Garden. And I just love it. It goes, "The stakes are high for real prayer. You must gamble yourself and be willing to lose. When you've done this and the self shakes off what you believed yourself to be, then no prayer remains, only a sparkle in the eye. Knower and known are one. If you penetrate the center of time and space, you can bypass the addictions of the world. You can become the world yourself."

Now, that was written several hundred years ago, but that reflects for me the... It's wisdom embodied in it, but it's also the Druid path. It's also the life path of all of us. You don't need to give it a name in a way. "Stakes are high for real prayer. You must gamble yourself and be willing to lose." Druidry, the OBOD as I said, enabled me to do that, or at least in part. It took me into those places.

Damh the Bard:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JJ Middleway:

You get it.

Damh the Bard:

I do get it. And with that moment, I think that's a good point to stop the interview. Thank you so much, JJ, for spending the time and talking with me. It's been a great, beautiful connection. You're a lovely man, and I love you loads, my friend. And I will see you along the road. All right.

JJ Middleway:

I love you too, my brother. And lovely to see you, fantastic. Love and blessings all. Bye-Bye.