Eddie Lockhart and Yvonne Taylor (SisterMatic)
The Congregation
Oral History Transcript

Eddie Lockhart and Yvonne Taylor are founding members of SisterMatic, a sound system which started in the 1980s providing a safe space for Black Lesbian women. This then grew into intergenerational queer nightlife in Brixton and other areas of London.

EL: Hi, I'm Eddie Lockhart, actually known as DJ Shineye, very much relatively, well, born and raised in London.

YT: My name's Yvonne Taylor... along with Eddie, one of the people involved in running SisterMatic. I've spent most of my 40 years promoting parties, using it as a tool to break down barriers for us as Black women because we didn't have those facilities.

I'm originally from Nottingham and when I arrived in London, I just left the army. I went to Brighton for a year, hated it. I was like, if this is what being a lesbian is all about, I can't stay here, so I came to London, and I think I came here in '83, early '84 maybe. And I had a job which meant that I met this other lesbian who was well established in the community.

And then I was dating this woman who then took me for dinner at Eddie's house. She thinks it was somebody else's house, but it was at her house in Kennington. I remember because I was thinking, God, there are other Black lesbians out there who are into music.

EL: Okay, SisterMatic is, actually was then, a collective of Black and Asian women.

And what I was doing at that time was gathering a lot of Black women within my home.

When I approached Yvonne, I was actually looking for particular people to be honest, yeah, that I felt would be able to work with me.

So, there was Lorna Edwards, there was Sharon Lee, there was Sheila Edwards, and obviously Yvonne, those are the women that I more glued to in regards that we can talk politics. We can look at changing things for women who look like us, who can recognise themselves within us.

I was wanting to be focused, for Black women, run by Black women for Black women.

I need to break down these wonderful barriers, simply because I was a bit sick and tired of going to clubs that were out there, if you want, but not really welcoming for people who look like me.

And I wanted a space where women could come with their children. Yeah. Because I knew a lot of women at that time who had children but could not obviously let their partners, male partners know about it, or where they were taking their children.

So, the people at South London Women's Centre opened the door for me.

So, it was good that we had a space where we could have a creche, where we had a qualified worker, where we had a cafe, where there was fresh food being prepared every single time on that day before the evening doors opened. Yeah. And that was euphoric. And people felt welcoming. We had it, we kept it, cheap so people can afford the entry. And equally be able to get something to eat and buy a drink, whether alcohol or non-alcohol. That was important.

YT: So here I was in this building, and the building was a beautiful building. It belonged to the timber yard next door, Foxes I think they were called, and they leased this building to the Women's Centre for many years. It had a soundproofed hall, you know, so when we did the dances there was no, nobody knew we were in there really.

But it was, you know, we made that centre, we brought people into the Women's Centre through the SisterMatic parties.

It was a big thing because it meant people started coming regularly to different events and they started using us regularly as the people that played music. And what happened was quite a few of the other Women's Centres around London would invite us to play because it brought different people to the women's centre. So, for me, SisterMatic was fundamental in kind of creating visibility for black lesbians because we hadn't really had that.

So, the South London Women's Centre was one of many Women's Centres but I would say hand on heart, that was probably the most politically active around Black women, [...] women from Africa and Caribbean, Asian women, it was most active in supporting us and ensuring that we knew our rights, had somewhere to go to get advice.

EL: Wow. Well, Brixton has kind of changed. Nothing ever stays the same. You've got the obviously regenerational stuff still going on. I think it's become, you know, more expensive. But what I still love about Brixton, I'm seeing me. Yeah. That's what I like about Brixton, even though generations have gone, they've sold up, they've moved on and you've got the whoever's moving in now. I hope it will remain keeping it's a visible diversity. Because I do worry about that.

YT: Brixton is always going to be the closest thing I'm going to say to home after my original home of Nottingham. [...] It's had its faults, still got some faults. But I think for the better, you know, in terms of us being able to walk our walk loud and

proudly, whether you're a trans person, whether you're bisexual, it doesn't really matter. I've seen it every day that I walk down there. And also, I've seen a change in the way that Black people are actually employed. And I've gone to spaces where I'm kind of going, God, they've got a Black trans person working there.

We can get access to venues. It's no longer like, you know, we're going to get some back-room stuff. Now, younger generation are definitely accessing spaces that are being used every day by other groups. So, I have to look at the positives that have come with some of the changes. [...] Yeah, I love Brixton. It's always going to be my favourite place in the UK.

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