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John Moe: A note to our listeners—this episode contains discussion of suicide. Let's get this out of the way right at the top. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: It's kind of preposterous, the names of some of the people that Shanti Das helped bring to your ears in her long career as a music industry executive. Outkast, Erykah Badu, TLC, Usher, Toni Braxton. I'm just scratching the surface here; the list is long. Shanti Das was on top of this very competitive, very high stakes industry for many years. Then, in 2009, she quit for her mental health, which was not in a good place. But that move didn't solve things. After that, Shanti experienced some rough years, some personal tragedies, some periods of suicidal ideation. Eventually, she found a combination of things that helped: good therapies, meds that worked, and some assistance from a pastor who is now a US Senator.

Her recovery led Shanti Das to start a nonprofit advocacy organization called Silence the Shame. So, now instead of promoting Usher or Outkast, she's promoting positive mental health and suicide prevention. Her organization has a new app, called Silence the Shame.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Shanti Das, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Shanti Das: Thank you. And I got to tell you, John, when I heard the title of the show—I'm sorry I'm not a listener already, but I'm definitely going to subscribe and tune in and go back and listen.

(John laughs.)

But growing up as a young girl, I used to listen to Depeche Mode, and I thought, how brilliant is this? So. *(Laughs.)* It’s an honor.

John Moe: Yeah, you and me both. I think we're of roughly the same generation. I think we're at those same listening experiences. So, I want to take you back, because it seems to be a pivotal time. At the end of 2009, you left your job in the recording industry. And I want to ask about your mind at that time in a minute. But first, what was your professional life like? Who was Shanti Das in the recording industry at that time?

Shanti Das: Wow. Shanti Das in 2009 was Executive Vice President at Universal Motown. And that was probably the highest position that I had reached in my almost 20-year career in the business. I got my start in 1991, just as an intern at Capitol Records and working at LaFace Records in the early ’90s, helping to launch the careers of like Usher and Outkast and Toni Braxton and TLC. Some pretty cool artists,

(John agrees.)

But by the time 2009 rolled around, I was overseeing an urban marketing department, probably overseeing about—I don't know—eight staff members, including administrative roles and working directly with the president of Universal Motown and chairman Sylvia Rhone, who was one of the top female executives in entertainment. And so, I—you know—again, kind of had—I wouldn't say peaked, but it was the highest position that I had gotten. But it was just a really stressful time for me personally and professionally.

John Moe: Yeah. What was happening with your mind that led you to leave?

Shanti Das: So, I think it's important to note that my dad died by suicide when I was just—I was seven months old. And it was difficult for my mom, and we kind of buried a lot of those feelings. So, I never dealt with that unresolved trauma. And when I first moved to New York city in 2010 is when I kind of started experiencing like anxiety and stress in the workplace. Because working for LaFace Records, it was more of a boutique situation. So, once I started working at the larger companies, I thought, "What is going on?" *(Laughs.)* There's a lot of, you know, drama in the building, a lot of yelling, a lot of arguing. I was like, okay! This is a dysfunctional family! I'm happy to be here, but this is new to me, working at the larger companies.

And so, I remember, John, in 2010 first saying—like, when I was dealing with a lot of stress being at a new company— Because after LaFace Records was sold, I moved to New York City with LA Reid, and he replaced Clive Davis. And so, remember one day kind of having a meltdown at the airport going, "Ugh! This is just too much!" And when I got home that night, I told my boyfriend at the time, "Maybe I should just kill myself."

And he thought, "Wait, what?"

You know, and it scared me just even saying those words out loud, because it was the first time I had even just, you know, uttered those words. Right? And after my dad taking his own life, you know, he took it serious, and he was like, "Well, wait a minute. We need to call your sister."

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—who was like my best friend and confidant. And so, that's when she was like, "You need to go to therapy, young lady, and finally deal with dad's suicide and kind of like how it, you know, prevents you—if you will—from dealing with your own emotional stress and wellness."

And that's when I first went to therapy. But over that kind of 10-year stretch of being in New York City, from working at several large record companies, I wasn't engaging in self-care. When I did go to therapy, I think I only went for like three months, and I stopped. So, my mind was—it was just a lot of stress, a lot of pent up anxiety, of I think depression. I was starting to miss home. My mother was developing Alzheimer's, so that was happening. But I just didn't know how to deal with a lot of the stress in the workplace. And so, it was manifesting itself both physically and mentally for me.

John Moe: What was it doing physically?

Shanti Das: So, I remember in 2009 riding—and I was going to a meeting. Our offices were in Midtown Manhattan, and I had jumped in a yellow cab going up to Harlem to a meeting, and my entire right side went numb. Like, I couldn't feel my hands, my arms, my legs. And of course that freaked me out, and so I went and got all these tests that day—MRIs, CT scans, that sort of thing, and I was diagnosed with cervical spinal stenosis. And it was like the fluid wasn't getting properly into one of the vertebrae in my neck, but my doctor said it was all a direct result of stress. And I'm in my late 30s at this time. And he was like, "That is nothing that someone your age should be dealing with. Usually most of my patients are like in their 60s, 70s, 80s,"—right? Being diagnosed with that.

And so, it was directly stress related. And again, it was a lot of politics in the workplace. Me being a young African American female, trying to navigate my way through the corporate politics of the record companies was difficult at times. And again, I didn't know what to do with that stress. I wasn't eating much. I wasn't sleeping a lot. I was traveling all the time. I remember not too long ago I ran into one of my drivers that used to drive me to the airport and stuff like that in New York. And you know, we were just laughing and getting reacquainted, and I share with him some of my story. And he was like, "I don't know how you did it!" He said, "You know, I drop you off at 1AM." And one of my other drivers was coming at 4. So, in addition to just the workload of the organization, John, I was completely stressed out.

I was literally going into the office—and I had a pretty cool office. You know, a sofa and a big screen TV. But John, I was taking naps 'til like one o'clock in the afternoon. And anybody that knows me, I'm type A personality. I am everybody's worker bee, right? I'm always on point, and I took my job very seriously. And I think that's why I was able to—you know, to achieve a title like executive vice president. But you know, the mental health wasn't mental healthy for me. *(Laughs.)* It wasn't working for me, and I wasn't addressing anything.

John Moe: So, was leaving just a result of a considered change that you needed to make, or did you break? Did you just—were you just not able to do it anymore?

Shanti Das: Oh, I didn't have like a psychotic break or anything, but I did have a meltdown. And it was a serious consideration after my sister said, "Look, you're getting diagnosed with things that are now starting to affect you physically. We know that sometimes you can't focus mentally." And I had been in New York for 10 years, and she was like, "It's time to let it go. I mean, 'cause clearly, you know, you're not taking care of yourself. You don't really have the support system in New York that you need. You haven't really gone back to therapy." You know, I only did that once.

And so, I made a really tough decision. I walked away from a half a million dollar a year job, corner office, and said, "You know what? I'm just going to go back home to Atlanta and figure it out." And that's what I did. Of course, it was a shock to not only my boss and, you know, some of my colleagues, but folks that I had worked with in the industry for so many years.

They were like, “You're doing what?!” Like, who does that?! No one walks away from the music business at this level! *(Laughs.)* You know, having achieved a great amount of success, launched the careers of some really important artists. And quite honestly, you know, I had the opportunity to make a lot of money and travel. But I didn't care anymore, John. I had to walk away and figure out life for me and what that looked like. And at the time—you know, we're talking 2009. Mental health wasn't a word that was thrown around. Nobody was talking about it, and nobody even talked a lot about, you know, the promotion of self-care and even physical health and eating for your health and wellness, both mind and body.

So, I just kind of went back home, like just trying to figure it out. And so, I think it's important like that those next four years for me, now becoming an entrepreneur and then dealing with some financial ups and downs.

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Because the nest egg eventually goes away. And the straw that broke the camel's back for me was in 2014. My best friend died by suicide. And I talked to her like 12 hours before it happened. And so, that of course was like one of the hardest things I've had to deal with. And I kind of blamed myself a little bit, because I had talked to her. So, it was like I was running through that conversation in my head like what did I miss?

John Moe: Right. What could I have done? Yeah.

Shanti Das: Exactly. And so, that made it difficult. And I think that really was the catalyst for sending me into a downward spiral in 2015. And even though I was, you know, still high functioning, I was really hurting on the inside and withdrawing a lot from friends and family, not wanting to get out of the bed at times. I mean, it would be sunny and 80 degrees, outside and I'm like in bed. And so, I knew that was a problem. And then one Saturday in 2015, September of 2015, I had counted up all the pills in my medicine cabinet—no matter what. You know, prescription drugs, over the counter. I was counting them all up. And I seriously considered taking them. And I just kept hearing these like thoughts in my head of like, “Kill yourself. Kill yourself.” And I had been having those thoughts kind of throughout the summer. I had even shared with some of my friends that I just didn't really want to be here anymore, and I was kind of not feeling like myself.

And so, we went through that. But that was the closest that I ever came to like kind of having a plan. Right? And so, that night, I don't know what got me out of the house. I just—it wasn't that I wanted to die. I just wanted the pain to stop, and I wanted those thoughts to go away. And so, I just started driving around town in my area, and ironically I went into like this store called At Home. You know, like one of those home goods type stores and just started walking around. I mean, it's eight o'clock at night. I just was like—I knew I needed to get out of the house, because I just didn't trust myself, and I thought that I would carry out the act. And so, I ran into a friend who lived way across town, and I'm thinking what are you doing on the side of town?

And could just see it all in my face and knew something wasn't right. And I kind of shared a little bit with her. I don't recall the exact words, but she knew that I was in crisis, and she was like, “I need you to call your sister immediately.” And so, I called my sister from the parking

lot. I was sitting in my car—or I was in the store and then went to my car. And she said—you know, and I told her what was going on, and she said, "Okay, well, right now, what I need to do is hang up and call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline." Which is 1-800-273-TALK, and that was, you know, well before 988.

And so, I called them, and I talked to a crisis counselor for about 25 minutes. And they kind of like talked me down throughout the crisis. And then once we hung up, I texted my pastor. Which is interesting—and I know you've heard this before—that a lot of times people in the African American community, you know, we're just taught to pray our problems away. Although I think that narrative is shifting now, but it still holds true in some areas of the community. But I texted my pastor, Dr. Raphael Warnock.

And he said to me, he said, "I'll pray with you, but you need to get help." And he and some of the other clergy at the church had seen me coming into church on Sundays, and I'm bawling. Just, you know, any little song would get me to cry. And I'd go down to the altar. And so, I think they could see that I was in some sort of emotional turmoil. And so, I took his advice and my sister's advice, and then that Monday morning or the next day I had reached out to my primary health care physician who recommended a psychiatrist. And so, I went and saw the psychiatrist, and that's when I started on Zoloft, on my antidepressants. And was the beginning of my wellness journey and trying to just get back on track. And I'm just grateful that I did not attempt suicide, but I came really close to taking those pills.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Just ahead, trauma is a powerful and tricky thing. It has long term effects.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Shanti Das, who lost her father to suicide when she was a baby.

I want to ask about the trauma of your father's death by suicide. It happened when you were a baby. But trauma is such a tricky thing, and I think a lot of people don't understand how it can get passed around and passed down like that.

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How did that death stay with you and affect you so profoundly when it happened when you were so young?

Shanti Das: Thank you for asking that question, John. And I think a lot of people would think, oh, well, you were only a baby. You didn't know it shouldn't be a big deal. How did that affect you?

I've heard all of that, right? And I'm like, well, so I recall being like—*(clears throat)* excuse me, four or five years old when my mom really kind of explained to me what death was, what that meant. I remember being in the kindergarten, and I was in a group circle of friends. And

you know how you kind of get in that circle and you talk about what your plans are for the weekend. And I said, “Oh, I'm going to go—my dad's coming to see me.”

And so, my teacher was like, “Mm.” You know.

John Moe: “I don’t think so.”

Shanti Das: Yeah, and so she was like, “We really need to address this.” So, after that, she called my mom, and they came up and sat me down and told me that, you know, dad wouldn't be coming back and kind of explained to me death and heaven and all that kind of thing. But then the kicker was when we got home and I was like asking all these questions like, “Well, what happened to dad? Why isn't he coming back? How did he die?” And when she—and she was honest with me. She told me that he took his own life. And boy, I got so mad and so angry, and I was like, “What do you mean? And why did he do that?!” And so, I was then dealing with that one stage of the grief journey, which is anger. And then that just caused a lot of shame and a lot of trauma within my household.

Even my sister, who was eight and a half years my senior, you know, once we got older, we were talking about how embarrassed we were about dad's death. And you know, you'd meet people in the community or at school, and they'd say, “Oh, well, what happened to your dad?” And it’s interesting how we never talked about it together, but we both eventually realized that we were both lying to friends and family saying, “Oh, he had cancer,” or “Dad had a heart attack”. Anything other than telling people that he had died by suicide. So, that level of just trauma and anger and disgust and fear was really kind of just manifesting on the inside. And because we didn't talk about it and we didn't get it out in the open, it’s like we compartmentalized it, but we hid it and buried it. And so people know that when you don't deal with those sort of traumas, eventually they will manifest itself later in life when you start dealing with other types of anxieties and traumas.

And that's exactly what happened, you know. Nothing traumatic per se happened to me in the workplace, but it was just this prolonged level of anxiety and stress that I was dealing with. And it kind of got me to my breaking point. And that's when I started looking back at myself going, well, is something wrong with me? And you know, was I predisposed to something mentally because my dad took his own life? And when the going got tough, you know, sure enough, it's something that—you know, I thought about it. I considered it. So, John, I always thought something might be wrong with me, because of my dad. And I wasn't studying genetics, and I didn't know anything about being predisposed to trauma or that sort of thing. I just always was afraid that something was wrong with me and that I would do the same thing that my dad did.

John Moe: Were you angry at him?

Shanti Das: Oh, yes. *(Chuckles.)* Incredibly angry. I used to tell my mom—because she always used to say, “Oh my gosh, you remind me of your dad. And he loved you so much.”

And I would say, “Don't bring that man's name up to me. And I don't want to talk about it.”

And my mother never went to counseling also when he passed. And so, like I would see her crying at times. But my mom, instead of going to therapy, she kind of dived straight into her faith and used her faith as a way of coping, which a lot of people do. But I do wish she had coupled that faith journey with, you know, therapy and even family counseling for us, so that we could kind of understand what it meant as children to grow up with a father who had completed suicide and kind of what that looked like. For us to deal with that anger and that shame early on, so that we didn't have to carry it on into adulthood trying to still figure it out.

Like, my sister went to counseling for her first time in college. And she said—I guess at a recommend of a recommendation from a friend—and she said changed her life being able to finally forgive dad. Whereas I was well into my 30s when I first went to therapy and forgave my father as an adult, and I was weeping like a baby! *(Laughs.)*

John Moe: I bet. Well, people misunderstand what trauma does. That it's not a matter—especially, you know, if it's that foundational to who you are, you were built on trauma. Like, so of course it's going to show up, you know, later on.

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The people raising you were traumatized. So, it gets soaked into the bones so deeply. I think people don't realize that all the time.

Shanti Das: 100%. And I do recall like one of my uncles telling me that—so, my mom was Black, but my dad was Indian. He was South Asian from Kolkata or Calcutta. They'd call it either name. And so, you know, mental health was dealt with very differently over there. And I remember my uncle saying that my dad, you know, had been depressed. He didn't leave a note. But I don't know if, you know, genetically depression ran in his family. Again, because they didn't talk about it. We didn't know a lot about it. And this is sad. Like, I remember my mom saying at times that like my dad's family—we would only kind of write to them. We were talking early ’70s, so we would write by mail, handwritten letters. But they blamed my mom for a short period of time, not really understanding.

And that was traumatic in and of itself, because my mom was already dealing with the shame and guilt that, you know, his family thought that she did it, but then having to deal with the fact that they blamed her? You know, that was just like a double whammy. And again, I hate that she never addressed all that. And she never remarried. And I really think that had a lasting effect on her as well.

John Moe: It's interesting that, you know, you've got this advice from your pastor—who of course is now a US senator—that it wasn't an either/or. It wasn't, you know, if you have prayer, you don't need medicine; if you have medicine, you don't need prayer. It existed at the same time.

What role—and I know you're a person of faith as well. What role has prayer and religion played in your recovery?

Shanti Das: So, I will say prayer and just my relationship with God—not necessarily a specific religion per se, because I was raised Catholic, and then went to a non-denominational church, which helped me a lot in New York. And now I'm a member of Ebenezer, which is a Baptist church. So, for me, it's my relationship with God and understanding His place in my life. You know, a firm believer. Again, I never try to impose my beliefs or positions on other people. But for me, it's been profound. And there is—on this journey, it hasn't been an either/or type situation, right? They have both coexisted in terms of my recovery and my wellness journey. So, I start my mornings, you know, just thanking God for waking me up.

And I felt like, you know, God created all these wonderful people and, you know, doctors were a part of that group, right? And so, why wouldn't we utilize therapists and, you know, psychologists and that sort of thing to help us through our journey? So, it's been great. I've had an ongoing relationship with going to therapy when I felt like I needed it. If I need spiritual counseling, I'll talk to my pastor or other friends of faith that I fellowship with quite often. And also, I'll tell you like over the last 5 years, I've had to really go through a tough grief journey. Because my sister, who I was speaking about recently, she passed away unexpectedly from a blood clot. And that was like one of the hardest things. It was the hardest day of my life and probably the worst day of my life. And I still struggle with that, but I lean heavily on my faith to help me get through it. But then I also lean heavily on, you know, seeking therapy or support groups when needed.

And then I became my mom's caregiver through the pandemic, and she had Alzheimer's, and she passed away two years ago. And so, there are times where I still just question my existence, like why God left me here and allowed my sister and mom to—you know, to go on, and then I'm here. And then being an advocate, which we haven't really talked about yet, but I do work now in mental health. And this is like my life's work now. But it's still hard and heavy at times. So, being able to pray and ask God to give me the wherewithal to get the help that I need or to just clear my mind when I need it—like, it's a huge part of my life and a part of my daily regimen.

John Moe: I want to ask about Silence the Shame and about the work that you're doing with that, because it's so wonderful. But has your recovery been kind of a smooth journey upward? Or has it been kind of a two steps forward, one step back kind of thing?

Shanti Das: So, I would say in the beginning it was pretty smooth, before I—and because I started doing this work around Silence the Shame. I think that indirectly was a part of my recovery, just being able to pour into other people and see the positive impact of really sharing my own journey and story around emotional health and wellness and how it's helping others.

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But when I was having to deal with the death of my sister, I think I started drinking a little bit more. I never had a problem with alcohol, but sometimes I would have like—you know, we drink casually. And working in an industry like entertainment, we're always like socializing and having to go to dinners and conventions and that sort of thing. And so, for me, I started like—you know, that one occasional drink at home turned into two, two turned into three. And alcohol was a natural depressant. So, I saw myself having to really climb out of the funk,

if you will, at times and being even more depressed during that grief journey. And so, I think that is probably the biggest issue that I've had.

And so, now I really am mindful about really being intentional if I do have a social drink, that it is social and that I'm not using it as a means to cope. I've never been a drug user. I mean, I smoked a little pot back in the day, *(chuckles)* you know, but nothing heavy. And again, not judging anybody, but for me, I know that alcohol is a natural depressant. And so, I try not to use it in ways of coping. I try to go out and take walks. I immerse myself in nature. I get out there and get that sunshine on my face, because I know the vitamin D is going to put me in a better mood. And so, I know better now, so I think I can do better. But I think the ups and downs would probably just be my relationship with social drinking and how I had to kind of like really get a hold of that before it became a problem.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More from Shanti Das in just a moment.

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Back with Shanti Das, mental health advocate and founder of the group Silence the Shame.

When did Silence the Shame start?

Shanti Das: Silence the Shame—so, I came up with the term right around, I think, the end of 2015—you know, after my suicidal ideation. And I was doing a radio interview in Atlanta, Georgia, and we were talking about mental health, and I said, "You know, I don't know why it's such a big deal that people are afraid to talk about their mental health." Because shortly after I had contemplated suicide, there was a music industry event in Atlanta. And it was a lot of my peers there, and I received an award. And I revealed for the first time that I had heavily contemplated suicide not too long before that. And of course, you know, you could hear a pin drop in the room—*(clears throat)* excuse me. And people were very surprised, of course, but very empathetic.

So, when I did this radio interview, I was kind of talking about, you know, other things. And I said, "You know, I don't know why it's such a big deal talking about mental health. Like, why are people so embarrassed about us?" I said, "We just need to silence the shame." And then of course, me having the marketing background, I thought that's actually… *(chuckles)*.

John Moe: That's catchy!

Shanti Das: Kind of catchy there! I should do something with this. So, I started utilizing it as a hashtag, John, just on some of my social posting and that sort of thing. And then the next year in 2016, when May rolled around, I said, "Well, let me try to kind of create a movement and see what I can do." So, I enlisted the help of like, Nick Cannon, who became our first kind of celebrity ambassador. And he recorded a PSA with us, and we put that out in the city

of Atlanta. Well, we put it out virally. But then we did—I did a lot of local press in Atlanta, Georgia, around it.

And then by 2017, I started meeting other likeminded individuals in Atlanta, different women from all walks of life. One lady, her daughter had taken her own life. And then another lady, her son had attempted. But it was a very serious injury, and he's still living with a brain health injury and still goes through a lot of ups and downs from a depression perspective. So, we all just kind of came together, and then I formed an organization, and we started doing community conversations and, you know, just getting other folks on board to volunteer. And that's when I formed my 501c3. And because I worked a lot in hip hop back in the day, I had named the organization The Hip Hop Professional Foundation, because I started doing a lot around Atlanta too, like supporting the homeless community and other efforts.

But it was really—Silence the Shame was just really starting to catch on. And so, we rebranded the name. I got a board of directors, and the rest is history. We're like seven/eight years in. And we have our own day, which I made up *(laughs)* in 2017. I said, "I'm going to make May 5th National Silence the Shame Day, and just see if anybody will post. So, we created this little Instagram graphic that literally all it said was "May 5th National Silence the Shame Day".

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I said, it's an opportunity to talk about it. So, I reached back into my digital Rolodex from the entertainment industry and got different artists like a Usher and a Big Boy and other folks in Atlanta and some athletes and stuff just to post. WE got 90,000,000 impressions in one day!

John Moe: Wow!

Shanti Das: I thought wait a minute! This is kinda cool!

This is way before, you know, TikTok and all these other platforms that was starting to garner millions of views and stuff like that. So, I knew then that I had something special with this organization and that it was really a gift from God, and I needed to do more with it. So, I started reaching back out again into the entertainment community and doing more, you know, collaborations with like MusiCares, which is the foundation arm of the Recording Academy. We partner with various organizations. In 2020, we were the mental health partner for the NFL Players Association. So, we've had some really great opportunities to partner.

And then for me, you know, being able to share my story has really been therapeutic for me. Sometimes it can be re-triggering now and then, but for the most part, I have positive experiences from sharing my journey. And then just to see the people and their interactions and perspectives on like, "Oh my god, thank you for sharing, because it's something that I've been wanting to share" or "I've been dealing with this with the family member or myself for so long". And so, just being able to see that positive impact has had a profound effect on my career.

And so, I speak now at major colleges and universities, for major corporations and organizations like the NBA and HBO and EA Sports and a lot of other cool places. So, I've really created a platform for myself as a mental health advocate. And so, I'm so excited that, you know, yesterday we just launched our first app—a mental health app—with our partner, Microsoft. And it's a free resource to the community that has content and resources around education, teaching people in the community about the various mental health challenges and disorders. It'll have, you know, affirmations and daily doses, and we're going to include like really cool content from other influencers and some celebrities and athletes on how they manage their mental health and, you know, how they go about their daily affirmations and that sort of thing.

So, again, I know there are a lot of apps out there, but we're just trying continue to build a great resource for the community and bring, you know, other folks that I think people look up to and find out how they're dealing with their emotional health and wellness. So, hopefully that'll set us apart a bit.

John Moe: I've been talking about mental health into microphones, I think, for—right around the time that you started, right around the mid 20-teens. And I often feel like things are getting better, like people are more open, people are—you know, like ten years ago, five years ago, you wouldn't see pro athletes talking about being vulnerable to mental health conditions.

(Shanti agrees.)

But at the same time, suicide rates are rising. And mental health—mental illness rates are rising. Do you get discouraged by seeing the numbers? Do you ever feel like, "Ah, man, you know, I'm working so hard, but the numbers are going in the wrong direction."

Shanti Das: Thank you for that. And let me just thank you for your voice too, John, and what you've been doing and how you've been helping to erase stigma with your podcast. I mean, it's definitely appreciated. I do get discouraged at times, and sometimes I'm frustrated. I'm like, gosh, we're doing so much good in the community, but are we really moving the needle?

You know, a lot of the work that I do is in vulnerable communities and communities of color. And to your point, you know, we're seeing suicide rates rise by 30% among Black youth and so many others. And it's like what else needs to be done? And I find—which is why I feel like an organization like Silence the Shame is still so important, because we do education and awareness. We don't do direct services. But I'll talk to some of my colleagues who still may work in entertainment, and then they have these great, you know, resources from the HR department or these EAP groups. "And they'll go, "Oh yeah. You know, I see they offer that, but I don't use them." But then in the next conversation, they're like, "Oh my god, I'm feeling anxious. I'm depressed."

I'm like, "Why aren't you using these free resources?" And so, I still think it's a lot of stigma there that is not seen and not talked about, even though we have so many other people—athletes and entertainers starting to open up. And especially this young generation, you know, they're very vocal about their mental health. But I'm like you're vocal about it, but why aren't

you going and actually getting the help that you need? So, I think there's a lot of work that still needs to be done. We have to continue these conversations.

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It's like, you know, we've kind of gotta keep beating ourselves over the head. But the more you see it—right?—the more it'll hopefully sink in as to why it is important. And I think also we're just—you know, the world, we're still living in crazy times. Even though we are technically post pandemic, you know, there's a lot of war going on in the world. I think some of our young kids don't understand conflict resolution, and they don't value life as much for whatever reasons. I'm not fully blaming social media, but I do think that, you know, social media has some say in it, whether you're a young person or an adult, You know, constantly looking at this—I like to call it the highlight reel for people's lives. They're only showing all the shiny and, you know, really cool vacations that they take, but not showing you all the crap the rest of the time.

And, again, people don't have to share their personal lives. But like, let's just remind people, though, that if they are only going to show the shiny parts, just know that no one's life is perfect, right? And so, you can't compare yourselves. Because I think as humans, we're constantly comparing ourselves to other folks, and so that's why I think the rates are still there. And some of the suicidal ideation is circumstantial. It could be the loss of a loved one, something traumatic that happened, the loss of a job. People think you have to have a specific mental illness to contemplate suicide, and that's just not the case. We all know that sometimes, you know, suicidal ideation is just based on circumstances and something that may have happened, you know, very traumatic in one day and how that could lead to—you know, we see CEOs of major corporations deal with, you know, financial setbacks and different things within the company. And for whatever reasons they may contemplate suicide or take their own lives.

So, you know, it's still a lot of education that needs to happen. And again, the world that we live in—as some of these young people say, life is life-ing.

(John agrees.)

And life isn't easy at times, which is why we do need sometimes to talk to a therapist, someone that is objective and that can talk through our problems with us. And I tell people, you know, it's not like the therapist—it's not their role to fix your life. They're supposed to provide healthy ways to cope and to get you to understand things differently and to think about things differently, right? And to unpack the reasons as to why you're either exhibiting certain signs or behaviors or thinking a certain way. And so, it's still a lot of work to be done, John.

John Moe: Yeah, there sure is. How about in the music industry in particular, I'm sure you're still very much of that world, and you've been talking to artists for a very long time. How do you fight the idea of the tortured artist archetype? This idea that if I go on meds or if I get therapy, then my creativity will die, and I won't make such great art. And it ain't true. How do you—*(chuckles)* what do you do when you run up against that sentiment?

Shanti Das: Yeah, that's a tough yet fair statement, because I do know how sometimes medication can affect your body or your mind. And of course, every person is different, right? It depends on the chemical makeup of your brain and your body. I do think also that it's incumbent upon these, you know, medical companies—right?—and big pharma to try to figure out some better cocktails that can have better outcomes for people, just as individuals in general. Because even some of my family members I know have been on, you know, either antidepressants or other medication, and it has either made them gain so much weight, or they—it's like they're walking around like zombies, and the dosage isn't right.

So, I get it from a creative perspective. What I try to talk to artists about and instill in them is, okay, so first of all, whatever you're doing is not working, right? If you're still depressed, and you're drinking a lot, and you're turning to drugs and alcohol, that's not the answer either. So, let's try to find some sort of happy medium, if that's the case. Right? Maybe consider talk therapy, and then if you still feel like you need medication, do that. I volunteer with a couple of organizations who do a lot of work with musicians and songwriters. And I find that so many of them still are turning to unhealthy ways of coping—you know, prescription drugs and alcohol use and in and out of inpatient treatment facilities. And you know, to your point, it's like they are super afraid that if, you know, they do get on these other medications that they're not going to be able to think and that, you know, these mushrooms or other drugs that they're using still keeps them vibing and creative. But essentially, it's like you're killing yourself. Right?

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So, it's a tough conversation, but I think the more open dialogue and conversations that we have, the more we can also bring other artists and musicians that have had positive outcomes from utilizing talk therapy or medication is needed. But again, making sure it's the right cocktail. That's the other thing too. I think sometimes we get on these medications from a mental illness perspective, and it's not the right cocktail. So, if it doesn't make you feel good, you immediately say, “You know what?! I'm just—I'm going to stop cold turkey. I'm not taking that.” And we know that—

John Moe: Right, right. You say meds don't work for me, but you've only tried one sort of med. Yeah.

Shanti Das: You’re not giving it a shot, right! But have you asked your psychiatrist to tweak that dosage, right? Maybe take it from X amount of milligrams to this amount, right? To see if that kind of works with you. And so, I think it's—again, it's the education. It's being able to talk through that process and get people to know that, look, you're either gonna continue down this one road, or you can try to get some help that you need. And so, I just try to meet folks where they're at, introduce them to other people that have been creative. So, I do a lot of the panel discussions and creative conversations and community conversations, so that we can bring others into the fold, so that hopefully they'll be an inspiration to others that are not trusting of utilizing either medication or therapy.

John Moe: How do you sustain yourself, I guess, spiritually while doing all this work? Because you must talk to a lot of people who are in rough shape, or at least have stories from

when they were in rough shape. How do you not take on that psychic damage and get crushed by it? How do you keep your head up?

Shanti Das: That's a great question. So, my pastor, Dr. Warnock, had this notion of the wounded healer that he talks about—right? Because we're still kind of healing ourselves in this journey, but trying to help everybody else. And I'll admit, I'm a Pisces, so I'm sensitive. And I'm an empath, so I take a lot of this in. And then I also get a lot of friends and family who text me at, you know, all hours of the night or any day just trying to get support or help for crisis for a family member. And I just can't seem to tell anyone no. I try to set up healthy boundaries for myself. But that is the one thing that I just don't want that guilt on my heart that if I don't answer this particular call and something ends up happening, then I'm going to try to blame myself again.

So, I just try to be really intentional, John, about stealing moments for myself. You know, if I am doing several events where I know I'm sharing my story, then I'm going to make sure that there is one or two days in the week that, that evening, I'm just sitting out on my couch and Netflix and chilling, or I'm taking a trip, or I'm hanging out with family. Or more importantly, I have a lot of friends that I grew up with, and so sometimes we just get together, and it's like we're in high school all over again—in a good way. And we laugh, and we dance. And so, I try to do things that bring out the inner child in me, because to me that's like—from a positive perspective, things that were joyful for me during my childhood. So, that is dancing, that is hanging out with friends. I'm going to concerts, listening to music.

I absolutely love music. Music, it transforms us, right? It allows us to escape. And so, I'm constantly listening to—whether it's gospel music, hip-hop, R&B, pop, you know, rock music. I mean, growing up in the early ‘70s before, you know, radio stations were so fragmented—you know, I listened to a station here called The 89. So, I listened to everything from Bon Jovi to Run-DMC, you know what I mean? *(Laughs.)* So, I have a really, I think, broad palette for music. And I love jazz. And so, it helps me stay happy, and it helps me stay centered. Again, sometimes, if I'm feeling bad, I'll just go to church. I like physically being in the building. It's something about that presence.

And so, I have to be—I think intentionality would be the big word for me. Because I am busy as a CEO and founder of a nonprofit. I also have my own podcast, called *The Mibo Show*, which is M-I for mind and B-O for body. And I talk to celebrities and athletes around both mental and physical health challenges. So, again, I have to establish boundaries for myself and just take time for me. Because it gets to be a lot. Suicide and mental health, as we know, can be a heavy topic at times, especially if you're dealing with people that are in crisis. And so, if we don't take time for ourselves—

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—then I think it allows us to like internalize everything and then get discouraged about the work. But I have to find the wins in it and just, you know, really like pour into Shanti. I have to love myself first. And I also have to recognize that if I feel myself slipping or getting in trouble that it's okay to like go back into therapy or, you know, seek a support group or, you know, talk to my pastor. I'm not afraid to ask for help anymore. I think that was the one thing, there was a lot of shame around asking for help. And for me, somebody working in music

that had marketed all these careers of artists, I'm like why do I need somebody to fix me when I've like helped all these other folks!? And I just realized it was only helping them from a career perspective.

But I think one of the best things I can do is understand that, you know, my life is the most important project that I will work on. And if I have to restart, reset, and refresh my life over and over again, that is the most important thing, that I actually never give up on me and that I get the help that I need constantly since I have committed to being this mental health advocate. And it is a life mission and not just a fad for me.

John Moe: Ready for one question that has nothing to do with mental health?

Shanti Das: I am!

John Moe: Best concert you've ever been to.

Shanti Das: Prince! *Musicology*. *(Laughs.)* Or Prince, *Purple Rain*. So, when I was in the eighth grade, my sister took me to see *Purple Rain* at this venue called the Omni in Atlanta, Georgia. And it was like she was with all her friends and her boyfriend. And I was a little shy at the time. And then I got my uncle to buy me a ticket. Two nights later—this is a true story. I lied to my mother, and I said, "Oh, I'm meeting some friends!" Again, I'm only in the eighth grade. I went by myself, John. And I rocked out all night to Prince by myself. Fast forward as an adult, big girl Shanti—I actually did the marketing on *Musicology* with Prince. So, I got to tour and do most of that run.

John Moe: Oh, wow.

Shanti Das: And that was probably one of the most exciting times in my life. Just, I can't—I was like in the dressing room; it's just Prince and I looking at photos on the internet. I'm like this can't be my life right now, but.

(They laugh.)

It's pretty awesome. What about you?

John Moe: Oh, wow. Soundgarden, 1989. Just before they signed to a major label, they played a sweaty, intense show in an underground gym at the college that I was going to. And it was probably maybe 200 people there and just basically on top of the band. Probably the loudest and best concert I've ever been to. It was glorious.

Shanti Das: That's amazing.

John Moe: Yeah.

Shanti Das: Yeah, I've been to some pretty cool shows, and I—

John Moe: I bet you have.

Shanti Das: I have this quote on my wall, and it really speaks to mental health for me too. It says, “Where words fail, music speaks.” And so, sometimes when I'm feeling really sad or down, I just turn on the music so it can speak to me.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: Silence the Shame is online at SilencetheShame.com. Shanti's podcast is *The Mibo Show*, M-I-B-O.

Our program exists because people support it with their financial donations, and we really appreciate everybody who has done so. If you have not yet done it, it's fine. You can do it right now. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join, find a level that works for you, and then pick *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Thank you in advance. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews. It helps get the show out into the world.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the United States and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack, search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, @JohnMoe. Be sure to join our Preshies group. Just head on over to Facebook and search up Preshies and join in. A lot of great conversation happening over there, people sharing wisdom, people supporting each other. It's a beautiful place. Our electric mail address is depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I recommended a movie last week called *Fashionista*, but that's not the name of the movie I was thinking of. The name of the movie, the correct name, is *Problemista*, which is a better name for a movie I have now recommended twice.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now!

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I’m always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

[00:50:00]

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

Jeremiah: This is Jeremiah from Seattle. And I love you, and I care about you.

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!