



Scottish, part Croatian and part Samoan. Patel has south Asian roots. One of the many pleasures of *Starstruck* is the way it doesn't feel the need to even comment on its character's ethnicities. "I think it feels real," Patel suggests.

It was Patel who suggested that his character's surname should be changed to one reflecting his own heritage when he came onboard.

"I didn't want to ignore the fact that I'm brown and I'm cast in this part, but nor did I want to insist that a whole host of other things have to change.

"Without being glib, I don't set out to do things in a south Asian way. I exist in the body I am in and me being in this story on screen does a lot of that work. I live in London. Our mayor's a Khan. We have a Sunak and a Patel in the cabinet I don't think it's going to break people's brains that I'm [playing] a Kapoor."

It's a good time for British-Asian actors, he thinks. This is the year that Riz Ahmed was an Oscar nominee after all, he points out. "I think maybe a few years ago the term colour-blind would have been held up as an end goal. But actually, I think there is something more nuanced which is about being colour-conscious."

The filming of *Starstruck* happened

between lockdowns. But like many actors he's been cooling his heels for much of this last Covid-infected year. It's been a struggle for many, he says, but there has been the odd, good thing to come out of it.

"There was something about the start of lockdown when everything just stopped. There were weeks when we didn't have to worry about checking in with our agents. And that allowed space and time to step back.

"I think one thing I realised was one benefit of having done this for 10 years now is I've formed relationships and I've become aware of brilliant people I want to work with. Getting more of a sense of a community, particularly for my fellow south Asian creatives.

"As it stands, we've not really had the chance to collaborate before because the system is such that the stories we get cast in there's space for one of us. There's a change I've noticed in the last years. More stories are being told that value or seek to improve representation.

"And I think I've really taken that away from lockdown. It's going to take a bit of time channelling that energy, but it definitely has got my juices going to create and collaborate."

Starstruck is on Mondays on BBC One at 1055pm. The series is on BBC iPlayer

Singing helped me during lockdown

KENNY Douglas is a consultant haematologist with the NHS, based at the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre in Glasgow. His work involves various treatments where blood is processed outside the patient's body, either to remove specific cells or harmful antibodies. Much of his work has to do with blood stem cell collection for transplantation, either from patients with various types of blood cell cancer, or from their healthy relatives. He is also a keen hill-walker and Munro-bagger.

How did you begin singing, and become involved with Bearsden Choir?

"I've enjoyed singing since my school days, and once upon a time also played French horn in the Strathclyde Schools Orchestra – I even did my Higher Music exam (albeit way back in 1983!). A lot of my family are musical, all keen amateurs. Mum was a stalwart of Kilmarnock Operatic Society, so I grew up with singing in the school choir and in shows at Marr College in Troon and then in Glasgow University Choral Society. When I was a junior doctor working a 90-hour week and then having a young family there were five or six years I wasn't singing, but I was keen to get back to it and I knew Bearsden Choir were good and we lived nearby in Milngavie.

"I auditioned and I have been a member ever since. I don't think of myself as in with the bricks, but I suppose I am – it is just that there is a generation who are ten years or more older than I am. What's lovely about the choir is that since Andrew Nunn took over as director he's brought a whole lot of young folk in, which has made the whole experience better for everyone."

What has being in the choir meant to you during the pandemic?

"The choir has been a bit of a lifeline. There was a period towards the end of last year when I was verging on mildly



depressed as a lot of medical staff probably were. When the second wave kicked off and it had all dragged on so long, having a regular weekly thing that was carrying on as normal to the best of our ability – and was full of fun – was precious, and I can't really overstate that. It kept us all going.

"When we managed a couple of choruses from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* as a 'virtual' choir it was a proper performance, for all that we were recording separately at home. I am a dinosaur in terms of technology, but when it was all put together, there we all were – and it sounded like a choir. Not to have lost that was very precious; that performance thing is what it is all about for me.

"Communal singing is good for you, and I'm sure human beings have been doing that since the Stone Age. That's what we are risk of completely losing because of the pandemic. OK, it isn't live for an audience and it is much more hassle to do, but it feels pretty similar."

What has been your personal highlight of singing with Bearsden Choir?

"Quite early on in Andrew's tenure, perhaps about five years ago, we did some Holst choral pieces, his *Rig Veda* settings of Hindu hymns, which were really tricky with complex rhythms. The first one, for the thunder god, *Indra*, is in slow majestic 5/4 time and has a fantastic bass line.

"You felt like you were marching into battle on the back of an elephant – it was fantastic."

The Bearsden Choir's "virtual choir" performance of Vivaldi's Gloria will be free-to-view online at 4pm on Sunday May 30. www.bearsdenchoir.com



Consultant haematologist Kenny Douglas says the choir has been a lifeline during the pandemic