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### [Episode 59: Rachel Nwokoro](#) - (February 2016)

Host: Lizzy Palmer – LP

Guest: [Rachel Nwokoro](#) – RN

Transcript edited by David Turner – 17/02/2017

#### **Conversation:**

**LP:** Hello my name is Lizzy Palmer and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. We're in my house again and today I'm joined by Rachel Nwokoro. Hi Rachel.

**RN:** Hello!

**LP:** How are you?

**RN:** I'm good thanks. How are you?

**LP:** Very well, nice to have you. As usual we will start with a poem.

**RN:** Okay, so this poem is called Baby Blue.

**[The author has not given their permission for this poem to be included in this transcript]**

**LP:** Lovely, thank you.

**RN:** Thank you.

**LP:** So, my first question for you Rachel is; Why poetry?

**RN:** Why poetry? Curiosity, I think, more than anything for me. I remember when I was in Birmingham, it must have been a year ago actually. I was going to say a few months ago but it was a year ago. My friend Kate sent me a passage of Jeanette Winterson's book, [Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?](#) It says something like, a tough life needs a tough language.

It just spoke about the fact that a lot of people think that performance is a place to hide, behind characters and masks and some people use it like that I think. But ultimately, I use it to find things that I can't find when life is busy and there is so much going on around you. When I get to write, I get to ask questions and I quite like that when I write poetry I don't need to have answers. It just allows me to tell stories and be honest. I think that's why [poetry].

**LP:** Great. What have been your main influences as a writer, since you started writing poetry?

**RN:** I think, I feel like I'm supposed to say some of my favourite writers but I'm not going to. One of my role models, Daniel Hoffman-Gill, is now a dear friend of mine but he used to be my acting coach and I think he influenced me a lot when I was younger. Just giving me courage and allowing me to see that I had something that I wasn't quite sure what it was. But when you see someone see something in their eyes it helps you to find it and that's really useful. He's been a good friend of mine for many years.

Also, Simon Stevens, who's an amazing playwright. I met him years ago at The Lyric in Hammersmith and he encouraged me over coffee and doodles in my Tracey Beaker notebook to keep writing and that made a huge impact on me.

**LP:** It seems like, for you, the writing is quite heavily tied in with the performance side of things as well. Is that right?

**RN:** Yeah, it's huge for me because the way I write is... I more see myself telling a story rather than... I am no visual person. So, I write in a way that I feel I can speak so that it translates quite similarly to the way that I speak. It's very conversational sometimes. Yeah, it's really important because I find that when I write that way there's an element of honesty in telling the story.

**LP:** Yeah definitely, great. Well on that note we will have a second poem please.

**RN:** Awesome. This poem is called Oh Dear.

**[The author has not given their permission for this poem to be included in the transcript]**

**LP:** Thank you.

**RN:** Thank you.

**LP:** I met you, I think, not long after you had just done your first open-mic performance at Ronnie Scott's. Is that right?

**RN:** Yeah.

**LP:** So, what I wanted to ask was how you feel your work has developed since that first time you got up and performed poetry.

**RN:** Yes. Well, it's weird because at [Jazz Verse Jukebox](#) I remember I had this phone just inches away from my face and my hand was shaking. I was reading a poem about sexual assault at the speed of lightning, light I mean, not lightning and I was shaking, I was terrified. For a long time, when I was circling the open-mic nights and trying things out, I was doing a lot of shaking legs and shaking hands and very fast speaking and being terrified.

It's very exposing reading poetry [publicly] and I suppose over the last year I've, kind of, learnt how to embrace that. It's all right to be scared. I've thought before that I had to be on stage and act like I wasn't terrified of telling people how I felt about things or didn't know how I felt about things and that's just ridiculous. So, I think allowing myself to be confused and be awkward and be frustrated and going with that has meant that I've been able to write in lots of different ways.

As well as dedicate different writing styles to different topics, as is appropriate for me. And not put myself in a, kind of, box that's like, "Okay, so this poem is good for slams so now all of my poetry has to be slam poetry". you know. Sometimes I write much more literary, beautiful things and sometimes I'm frustrated about the world and it's nice to be free to do that. [LP: Yeah.] So, I think I've grown in confidence, mainly, over the last year a lot and that's been really nice.

**LP:** It would seem that way because you've been winning things left, right and centre, which leads me on to my next question quite nicely. So, you've just won the [Farrago](#) UK Slam Championship. Congratulations.

**RN:** Thank you.

**LP:** Maybe you could tell us a little bit about that and also what else you've got going on at the moment.

**RN:** Yes. So, John Paul O'Neill has been running the UK Slam Championship for a very long time and I won a slam last year or a couple and so qualified for the final, this year. The whole thing was very overwhelming, I'm still pretty overwhelmed by it. Especially because this year has just been a whirlwind and I'm always very critical of the stuff that I do.

Slams are quite weird in the way that they score poetry and in a way, validate the story that you're telling or the emotion that you're feeling. It's a really weird thing but performing at the championship and winning was really nice. I had Duma, who is a mentor of mine, in the audience and someone very important to me, Chris Lawrence was there and it was really emotional. So, it was great.

Stuff that I'm up to at the moment? I'm doing a lot of projects and I've got a lot of gigs coming up, I'm hosting International Women's Day in Brighton, 5th of March which is amazing. Also, a lot of poetry gigs and training at drama school, that's obviously a huge part of my life. So, I'm just pursuing a lot of creative projects at the moment, it's very busy but really enjoyable. I'm very lucky.

**LP:** Yeah I think it's always a huge shock to our listeners to find out that our guests don't always have poetry as their only soul commitment in life.

**RN:** Yes! I've got so much that sometimes it's hard to juggle but it's really nice to have the opportunity.

**LP:** Yeah that's great. So, I think we'll have your third and final poem please.

**RN:** Okay. So, it's weird, this is the poem that gave me the most confidence about my work and it's always a favourite of mine to do. It's about a really unbelievable guy that I met on my way home one time and sometimes I think it's great to dedicate a person like that to literature. So, yeah, this poem is called How Much?

**[The author has not given their permission for this poem to be included in the transcript]**

**LP:** Thank you.

**RN:** Thank you.

**LP:** Finally, where can our listeners find out more about your work or find more of your work? Do you have any blogs, websites, Twitter?

**RN:** Yeah, so I have a [YouTube channel](#) and it would be great if anyone likes my poetry. There will be more footage being uploaded shortly and it's easily found on YouTube as

Raynwoks. So, that's R-A-Y-N for Nigeria-W-O-K-S. If you type that into YouTube, then you'll find my YouTube channel Rachel Nwokoro and then subscribe and you'll get updates about videos that I upload. Also, I have a Twitter [@RachelShapes](#) and an Instagram but that doesn't tell you anything about my poetry, it's just nice pictures. Oh, I've also got a [Facebook page](#). So, any of those will tell you what I'm up to with gigs and things like that.

**LP:** Thanks very much Rachel, it's been a pleasure.

**RN:** Thanks for having me Lizzy.

**LP:** You're welcome. And as usual we will put all of those links underneath the description. Thanks for listening.

**End of transcript.**