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[Episode 99: Come Rhyme With Me; Anthony Anaxagorou \(15/05/2017\)](#)

Producer: David Turner – DT

Transcript edited by David Turner – (15/05/2017)

Introduction:

DWT: Hello, this is episode 99 of Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. A special hello to anyone tuning in as a result of meeting us at the Free Verse, Poetry Magazine Fair in London on the 13th of May. Thanks for joining us.

It's been a little while coming but I've finally made a website for the series. The main purpose of the site is to house all of our episode transcripts of which we have about forty up online. A big thank you to Arts Council England for making that possible. I'm also going to

endeavour to keep a blog running on that site so if you want to follow that or download episode transcripts you can go to www.lunarpodcasts.com

As well as that web-site you can find us @Silent_Tongue on Twitter and Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook, Soundcloud, iTunes and Stitcher or wherever you access your podcasts.

Today's episode is in two parts and in both interviews our guests talk about putting on poetry and spoken word events, how they view the organisation of these events as acts of curation and the role that open-mic does or doesn't play in these nights.

First up is Dean Atta and Deanna Rodger talking to me about their regular night Come Rhyme With Me which takes place at Ovalhouse Theatre in Kennington, south London. I refer to the theatre at times as the Oval Playhouse because I'd been editing our previous episode in which there's a lot of talk of the West Yorkshire Playhouse and it would seem I can only hold one place name in my head at any one time.

If you enjoy this episode then please tell your friends it helps a lot and is much more effective than advertising. Your friends are going to trust your opinion much more than any of my Twitter or Facebook updates.

As I mentioned before, go over to www.lunarpodcasts.com to download a transcript of this episode.

Coming up in the second half is Anthony Anaxagorou but first here are Dean and Deanna.

Part One (02:04):

Host: David Turner – **DWT**

Guests: Dean Atta – **DAt** & Deanna Rodger - **DR**

DAt: Hello, I'm Dean Atta. This poem is called The Black Flamingo and it's a three-part poem from my forthcoming collection;

The Black Flamingo

1.

April Evening in Cyprus

Your grandfather draws

your attention to the news;

the story, a black flamingo
has landed on the island.

An expert on screen
explaining it is the opposite
of an albino. Too much
melanin, he says. Camera pans

the salt lake full of pink
but the eye is drawn
to that one black body
in the flamboyance.

2.

I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo

Pink. Definitely pink.

I want my feathers to match the hue you imagine.

I want to blend in.

Nothing but flamingoness.

David Attenborough would say,

Here we see the most typical flamingo.

Though I don't want to be 'the most', just typical.

A wrapping paper pattern.

I don't want stand apart.

Nothing different about my parts.

My beak just a beak, my head just a head.

My neck, body, wings. Simply fit for purpose.

Standing on one leg, just like the rest.

Pink. Definitely pink.

3.

Another April Evening in Cyprus

Your beach towel and shorts are dry now.

Couples on mopeds ride past the house.

The dogs walk their humans before dinner.

Your grandfather coughs violently

and then lights another cigarette.

Your grandmother calls you both in to eat.

The black flamingo is on the news again.

You pick the dining chair facing the TV.

Grandfather asks, Why does it matter if he's black?

Adding, The other flamingos don't care.

And you are certain what he's saying is, I love you.

©Dean Atta

DWT: Thanks very much Dean.

DAt: Thank you.

DWT: Hello both Dean and Deanna.

DR: Hello.

DWT: How are you both doing? Thanks for joining us.

DR: Thanks for having us.

DWT: Not at all, I've been really looking forward to this.

DAt: Me too, I'm a fan.

DWT: Oh, that's brilliant. It's really weird when I actually get to meet people in real life that have listened... That I wasn't necessarily friends with before the whole thing started. I just assumed it was my dad and a couple of friends [listening], multiple times.

DAt: It's great to put a face to the voice I've become so accustomed to.

DWT: It's really nice to be meeting at my local theatre which is in south London which is always a pleasure, to not have to cross the river to meet people. The reason for that is because you both have a regular event here, so maybe Deanna you could just tell us a bit about the event.

DR: Dean and I run an event called, [Come Rhyme With Me](#) and we've been running this for about five years...

DAt: Since 2010.

DR: Seven years! We've got a residency here [at [Ovalhouse Theatre](#)] and the night runs every... **[DAt: Season]** Yeah, every season.

DAt: We're in a theatre now so it's seasonal.

DR: It's the first Saturday of every 'season-month'. **[LAUGHTER]** This is really great promo, isn't it? It's a really fun, relaxed event which... I love it, I hope Dean does.

DAt: I love it too!

DR: We've combined food and poetry in order to create an atmosphere which is quite communal and welcoming and, kind of, eradicates those boundaries pretty quickly... I mean, when you've got to stuff food in your mouth in front of strangers... Yeah, I mean it's like a first date, isn't it?

DWT: Yeah, it's interesting because I used to run a monthly poetry night with my partner Lizzy, in Lambeth, and we tried to find ways to break the formality of a poetry night. Even if it's spoken word you still have that formality sitting down and if you're in a theatre space people respect that boundary between stage [and audience]. It seems like a really simple,

and now I've heard of it, obvious thing to do is to get people to eat. Because you can't be formal necessarily and share [food] and break bread in that way.

DR: Break bread, that's it.

DAt: Yeah, when you come in, you're with other people around the table or on a sofa with other people... We have a couple of sofas at the front and we have tables and chairs and people just sit together, eat together, chat in the breaks. We make sure there are breaks so that people get to chat to each other. We try and be there after the event, as well, so it's not like, "The poetry's done, go home". It's more like, "The bar's still open, we're still here, let's have a chat. Let's hang out, talk to the poets, talk to each other", that kind of vibe.

DR: Because Dean and I know each other so well... We've known each other for ten years now... We're really comfortable with each other on stage and being friends on stage and I think that translates to the audience in terms of just creating an atmosphere where you can just have fun.

DAt: There's lots of banter.

DWT: But it's poetry, it's not supposed to be fun and comfortable. It's supposed to be awkward and isolating. [LAUGHTER]

DR: Sometimes I do go to events where it feels awkward and it's not anything that... I'm sure for other people it doesn't but for me, I've certainly sat in that audience and felt quite stiff and not relaxed and not laughed with my belly.

DAt: We just smile a lot, we laugh a lot. We make jokes, even ones that aren't funny but we laugh at each other's jokes, even when they're not funny.

DR: What? I thought my jokes were funny!

[LAUGHTER]

DWT: Deanna, I've heard you're very funny!

DR: I've heard I'm funny too!

[LAUGHTER]

DAt: It's really good fun and I think whether it's someone in the 'appetiser' section, which is what we call our open-mic, or someone that we've booked to perform, I think we give everyone really nice introductions and make everyone feel welcome. We thank them for coming and for performing and just, kind of, make sure people know they're welcome back and they can bring friends. Last month, one of my friends who had come the month before and had brought ten people this time. It was just so good to see [that] people love it so much they're going to bring ten people.

DR: Even coming for their birthday, which has been marvellous to see.

DWT: Poetry birthday?

DAt: People celebrate wedding anniversaries at our night, people have office parties, like bring their whole office with them to Come Rhyme With Me, so it's good fun.

DWT: What's the structure of the night? You were just saying about the 'appetiser' section.

DAt: Yes, we set it out like a menu. So, we have 'appetisers', that's the open-mic section.

DR: Six slots.

DAt: Six slots of three minutes and then we have our 'starter', 'main course' and 'desert' and that is just a way of, kind of, giving a different flavour to each performance. And it gives us a way to think about who to book alongside each other, like, do they complement each other.

DR: Like a meal.

DAt: How will it flow? Like a meal, would you want to have that, then that, then that?

DWT: So, you try to curate the evening as it were?

DAt: Yeah. You know, it's not just about who's available, it's about who's going to go well together. It's not just about who asked us to do the gig, it's about who we feel would fit in that particular line-up. So, yes, it's really fun to make that menu and be the 'chefs.

DR: Or the waiters.

DAt: Or the waiters, we didn't cook it up.

DR: I think it gives a really nice flow to the event and there's no hierarchy, if that makes sense? Sometimes you're waiting for a headliner and actually... Even the appetisers has a real status to it and a role to play in, kind of, whetting people's appetite and getting our minds in tune [for the event].

DWT: I suppose using that analogy of a menu it does link the open-mic more to the features, doesn't it? Because you can't get away from the fact, if you've got open-mics and then the features... Those are two separate things at any event, aren't they? Even if they happen in the same night. You are, sort of, getting one out of the way to move on to the next section and quite often open-mics are just used as a way to keep people in the door anyway, aren't they?

DAt: Well for us, I think it's great to be able to see fresh performers, see people try out new stuff, you know, meet other people. Because some people will only come if there's an open-mic because they do want to perform and I think that's fine. That's great and I like that

we have that section but it's a limited section of six performers and I think that's good because enough variety comes out of that and it gets everyone excited.

But also, you know, there is a case for having feature acts because you can guarantee something about that, you know what you're going to get there. We get wonderful surprises in the appetiser section but usually our features do what we asked, or not asked but what we would expect. [LAUGHTER] I make requests, I'm not going to pretend.

DR: Do you make requests?

DAt: I request certain poems sometimes from a feature.

DR: Wow!

DAt: Because if I've loved hearing it before and I'll be like, "I think our audience will love that poem. Will you please do it?" You know, I sometimes feel funny when people make requests of me when they're booking me, so I know it's not ideal always. But sometimes I just think, I'd be so upset if they don't do that poem, our audience would love that poem.

DR: I also think that it's like, you're being booked based on your work and what people have seen. So, you do want it to be... If I've booked you because I've seen you do a set and thought, that's going to work at the night and then you rock up and do a whole 'nother thing.

DWT: It's like the cliché, isn't it? Going to a concert and the groan that goes out when someone says, "And now for a new one" and everyone [collectively] goes, "No! We came for the album".

DAt: I went to see Erykah Badu live once and her new album had just come out and I hadn't listened to it. She only did that album, pretty much, and I was so upset and it wasn't until I went home got the album and listened to it for a long time that I started to appreciate those songs. But on first listen and done live, I wasn't into it because I couldn't sing along. I didn't know it, I didn't feel involved in it.

There's something to be said about getting the chance to hear new stuff as well and I like when a poet will bring in, you know, a couple of new pieces into a set. So not just like, their 'greatest hits' every time. I think it is nice to have that opportunity for them to even open their notebook and share something fairly fresh.

DR: Certainly. This is sometimes peril of not going to open-mics once you get to a certain place because then the stakes to try out new stuff become greater. We had a really fantastic performer, one of my favourites Disraeli, who dived in and just said, "I'm going to just do new stuff". That was in December [2016], maybe, and it was fantastic and it was such a honour to see a great performer be so vulnerable with new stuff and to really bare open their soul without it being edited and crafted into the final polished piece. So, there's pros and cons.

DWT: I just wanted to ask about this idea of thinking about the night in terms of curation. Was that a reaction to anything else? How did that idea come about?

DAt: Our first venue for this night was a restaurant and I think because... Naomi Waddis who is a poet, a photographer and a wonderful person, she knew of this venue that now is close. It was a restaurant and in the basement, they had a space for performance, with a stage and DJ booth and it was just really lovely. It was a Caribbean restaurant and Deanna and I are both part Jamaican and that factors into our tastebuds, I think.

So, the fact that we could have an event in a place with Caribbean food [**DR:** Spoke to us.] yeah, it spoke to us. I don't know how [it came about] but, 'Come Rhyme With Me' and it all just fell into place, you know, and doing it like a menu. I mean, there have been times when other people have suggested, "Oh, if you made this some sort of competition this would be really good for TV or radio" but I think competition isn't part of our event. It's not a slam, it's just a showcase of talent and an opportunity for open-mic, as well.

So, yeah being in a restaurant, Caribbean food and now we've moved to different venues we always keep the Caribbean food element of it. If the venue doesn't have it we get it catered in because it's just so important to the identity of the night and it makes us feel good. Some people, genuinely, they are as excited about the food as they are about the poetry.

DR: So you get an eclectic audience.

DAt: Yeah, definitely.

DWT: You've got an event coming up on the 3rd of June, that's your next event here, isn't it? What's the best way to check that out, is it through the Ovalhouse website?

DAt: Yes, the Ovalhouse website or Come Rhyme With Me is on Facebook and Twitter.

DWT: I'll post all the links in the episode description so people can just click on those.

DAt: Yeah, but it is advisable to book.

DWT: Yes, it's a busy event, isn't it? And don't be ridiculous, book the ticket with food, right?

DAt: Yeah! Are you coming to the next one?

DWT: I was so ill for the last one, I was really bad. Yes, I am coming to the next one. We should talk about yourselves as individuals now. Dean what are you up to now and in the future?

DAt: I am doing quite a few things. So, I'm working at Tate Britain, I've got a residency there with a wonderful artist called Ben Connors and he's illustrating my poetry on the walls making a mural in the Learning Gallery at Tate. We're having something called an open

studio and it's for my new collection, The Black Flamingo. So, people will be able to come in, hear my new work, write with me and contribute poems to a zine that we're producing.

As well as do art, talk to Ben about his process and we're going to be having workshops for school kids and we're also going to be having 'pop-up' events featuring Travis Alabanza at one of them and Keith Jarrett at another. The Black Flamingo zine will come out at the end of May and the deadline to contribute to it will be the 25th of May [2016], so if anyone wants to find that, find me online and find the call-out for that, or you can post that.

DWT: Yeah, I'll definitely do that.

DAt: You can just email your contributions to theblackflamingozine@gmail.com and it's anything, really, about identity. We're specially asking queer people of colour to send stuff in but we're going to look at everything from everyone because everyone has something to say and I would love to read it and hopefully put some of it in the zine. That will be given free to people at Tate and there will be a PDF of that online as well, so that's something for people to be part of and that's what I'm most excited about. But there's other stuff coming up as well that's kind of not quite begun. So, there's a lot going on in Brighton for me and it will be announced soon.

DWT: Is this the first time you've worked in an institution like the Tate?

DAt: No, I've worked with plenty of institutions. I've done stuff with National Portrait Gallery, with Tate Modern and Britain before, with the British Museum before. Deanna and I were part of Keats' House Poets which was... You know, Keats' House is funded, well supported by the City of London Corporation. So, we've been involved with these establishments and it's always very controversial amongst a lot of poets, in general. Don't you think?

DR: I think I just filter out stuff like that. [LAUGHTER] I mean what are you going to do?

DAt: I see it as reparations. Like, you know, there's a lot of these institutions that have benefitted from, you know, our ancestors and I feel like if I can get something back from that and my voice is still valued... You know, I don't feel like I've ever felt 'token' or, you know, my words have been used out of context. So, the work i get to do is predominantly writing poems and they don't edit my work and doing workshops with young people and they don't edit my workshops. So, that's, you know, a chance for me to put my voice into these institutions.

DWT: What I was also wondering though is, it's one thing feeling respected in those spaces because, you know, you've been invited or commissioned or whatever and it would be some pretty crass behaviour to not feel welcomed in that situation. But do you feel like, especially with this call-out for this zine. Do you feel like you were able to get the audience that you want in those spaces? Because it seems that those spaces still intimidate a lot of people, did you find that you've been able to bring in the people to work with you that you'd like to, for that?

DAt: So far, yeah. I mean, audience foot-traffic, you know, people coming into the exhibition we don't know yet, we're still getting it all going. But in terms of collaborators, everyone I've asked to be involved has been like, "Yeah, great". They have money so I can pay people to be involved so that's been good. It's obviously an interesting time at the Tate, they've got their Queer British Art exhibition and that's had some mixed reviews about the diversity of that exhibition and whether it is representing Queerness at all. So, that's going to be really interesting that my exhibition with Ben is along the same time as that, so it will have a conversation, I guess, with that work.

DWT: So, Deanna what have you got coming up?

DR: I think most excitingly I've got a collection coming out.

DAt: Woo!

DWT: Who is that with?

DR: It's with Eyewear and it's really exciting. It's currently called, The Mariahs and I'm trying to think of a little tagline to follow a colon, like, 'Iconic Poems' or something because it's my greatest hits. I've been writing for ten years and never released a collection, so this is going to be all those ones that you 'throw out', that lots of people know and have heard thousands of times. So, it's really exciting for me to release that in book form and also clear [the] way for new stuff to grow through it. So, I'm working on that at the moment.

DR: We'll be pulling together a tour over summer of some sort. At the same time [I'll be] working closely with, I say my punk band but it's our punk band in terms of it's with three of my best friends called Sh!t S!ck. Some music videos have been released already, I was out of the country whilst they were being filmed so check them out, they're absolutely awesome.

DWT: Where can people find those?

DR: If you type in, 'Sh!t S!ck', with the 'i's as exclamation marks.

DWT: You'd have to be pretty careful googling 'shit sick'.

[LAUGHTER]

DR: Why? Can't do it in schools obviously.

DWT: A lot of stuff is going to come up.

DAt: Grim.

[LAUGHTER]

DR: Yeah, don't click on 'images'. I mean, I might click on 'images' now and there's a YouTube channel and you can see stuff from the launch party which went really really well.

We're going to be doing stuff over summer, kind of, looking at how we can build on these characters that we are... But [mainly] performing and finishing up workshop programs that have been working on and stuff.

I'm going write a musical with the Young Vic [theatre], which is really exciting. So, I'm looking forward to that process and it'll probably kick off in September but we've got some workshops this side of the year. **[DWT: Busy!]** Yeah, busy. It's interesting because there's so many ideas and semi-started ideas that I really want some time and space to sink into myself and rediscover myself as an artist. What my voice is and what I'm drawn to when I'm not being governed by paid work.

So, I'm seeing that at the moment and that's why this collection, coming out, is really great because it feels like, "Okay there's an object I can just, kind of, use that as a tool to swing myself into a new current of expression and be braver". I think I really want to start thinking much further out of the box and pushing on ideas.

DWT: Do you find it's easy to maintain a balance between paid work, relevant work and being brave as an artist?

DR: I feel that I have to stay up 24/7 in order to get that balance sometimes and I think that is a discipline. I think, for me personally, it's been a journey of worth and understanding what my worth is and where value is and trying to place that as an internal thing rather than an external thing. So, rather than letting people dictate what I'm worth and where my time should be spent, taking back the reins maybe for the first time in my life. So, it's still an ongoing battle because there's so much pressure to be earning and be successful.

DWT: It's tiring fighting against those expectations, isn't it?

DR: Yeah, but it's an exciting in challenge to have.

DAT: I think, for me, it's just reached a point where I just have to say no to lots of things even paid work because I feel like, I've got to go where my energy will take me, where I feel excited to go. I don't want to drag myself into work because it's paid, equally I don't to miss out on things that are not paid but I'm really excited about. So, I kind of have a balance of, more having enough things that bring me joy.

You know, whether they're paid or not paid. Whether that's work or not work, you know, whether it's people, whether it's activities. Whatever it is, I just think I've got to be putting joy into my life because I don't think anyone else will necessarily prioritise that for me. So, you've got to think about that. There is that pressure on us or expectation on, you know, "What have you got coming up? What are you doing next?" I think, I've been fortunate recently that I have something to say to that question.

[In the] last year or few months there was a time when I didn't know and so many things were not sure and not confirmed or couldn't be announced and when people asked that question I've just been like, "I don't know, I'm just writing". Or for four years I've just been

saying I'm working on my new collection because I am and at the same time I'm not in a rush with it. As soon as you mention a new collection ever like, "When's it coming out?"

I've had chance to explore it, the residency at Tate is exploring it further and the visual element of it being illustrated. However, I'm not going to rush to publish it just because people are expecting it and I think with everything I'm doing I'm not going to rush to write a one man show just because people want me to. I'm not going to rush to release this or that I'm going to just take my time and do things as I feel they should be done and I think that's important as well.

DWT: It took me a long time, with the podcast, to get past the fact that I didn't have anything tangible to show. Especially with my background as a furniture maker. You know, all of my toil and endeavour resulted in tables or chairs on windows, there was always something to show for it. But with this digital medium... And the amount of thinking that goes into this and the amount of time you have to ruminate on stuff and just fighting that pressure to not produce physical objects.

DR: For me, I almost have to, in order to celebrate something and it's a practice that I think became clearer through this training that I did. There's a project called, The Agency at the Battersea Arts Centre and the methodology comes from this guy called Marcus Faustini who's based in Brazil. It talks a lot about getting the young people to create objects along the way so that their learning and their transformation is being consolidated even if it's just kind of a tiny model that you can just put on a shelf so that there's a visual reference.

So, within that I was working on a longer project which has taken me years and will probably take my whole life and there's a lot of pressure, "When's that going to come out?" and I feel like I'm failing because... And I'm not failing, I'm stewing, I'm marinating. But to, kind of, counteract that I've developed a new show with a performer called Gemma Rodgers called, Earth which is a complete left turn, right turn however you want to put it. That allowed me to consolidate learning from another process in that which I found really useful to create something just off the cuff and that was really fun. In order to take the pressure of feeling back I was able to create things, if that makes sense.

DAt: I think I did the same with drag. So, I recently did a drag performance at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. It was a ten-week course run by Michael Twait and it's called The Art of Drag. We went every Monday and learnt different parts and elements to drag, did lip-syncing, looked at characters and costumes, comedy, everything and it was fantastic. I saw it advertised in January and I just signed up to it. Then, you know, as it was building up it got really exciting.

But then it got to be a pressured thing because I'd mentioned to people that I was doing it and then people wanted to come and I'd decided that I was going to do something around this Black Flamingo character that I am writing about. Then suddenly it was like, "Oh your drag show, that's from your book" and it got attached to my work. Then it wasn't just doing drag for fun, it suddenly became drag as part of your practice as an artist and I was like, "I just wanted to do something fun" but I turned it into work.

I do the same thing when I go away. I went to New York on holiday and ended up doing a school workshop and a performance at the Nuyorican because you don't want to miss the opportunity to make it about work. Because you're always thinking about poetry, you're always thinking about creating and collaborating. When things start firing you don't want to miss that spark of inspiration.

DR: Yeah, there's a lifestyle to it.

DWT: I think that's a really nice place to stop actually. With this idea that if it all feels too much, getting yourself out of your practice and getting into something else, finding that break and working together. So, everyone can check out Come Rhyme With Me at Ovalhouse Theatre in Kennington and I'll post all the other links to the stuff we've been talking about in the episode description. We'll finish with a reading from a Deanna.

DR: This is going to be in The Mariahs and it's called London Landlords and it was originally written as a commission for the Guardian and annoyingly I'm still in this position. This poem is maybe three or four years old but I'm still there.

[LAUGHTER]

[The author has not given permission for this poem to be used in the transcript.]

[30:48]

DWT: Thank you very much. Thank you, Dean, thank you Deanna. Thank you for joining us. That was good fun.

DR: Yay, woo!

Part Two (28:58):

Host: David Turner – **DWT**

Guest: Anthony Anaxagorou – **AA**

DWT: Up next is poet, podcaster and founder of Out-Spoken, Anthony Anaxagorou. We chat about putting on spoken word events, organising writing masterclasses and his motivations for deciding to move towards publishing. This interview was recorded in February and at the time I wasn't sure when I'd be publishing it so we didn't mention any dates regarding events.

The next Out-Spoken Live event will take place May 31st at Union Chapel in north London featuring Inua Ellams, Amy León and Simon Armitage. Go to www.outspokenldn.com to

book tickets for that and for information regarding upcoming writing masterclasses. Here's Anthony.

DWT: Hi Anthony, thanks for joining us today. How are you doing today?

AA: Not too bad.

DWT: Good good. Because we're not doing any readings today we'll start off with a brief introduction.

AA: So, I'm a writer of poetry, fiction and prose. I do a lot of teaching in schools and universities around poetry and creative writing. I run Out-Spoken which is a night that I founded in 2012 that's subsequently gone on to have a, kind of, master class element to it as well as a publishing house, Out-Spoken Press that we launched properly last year. Between all the other things I, kind of, sometimes work in different disciplines as well, using poetry and music, poetry and theatre and film.

DWT: We briefly discussed, 'off-air', what we might talk about and we're not going to focus too much on your work or your writing, personally, we're going to talk about a few of the things. Just as an opening question, how long have you been writing before you thought, actually I'd quite like to run something on my own?

AA: I think in 2009 is when I said I want to try and somehow establish myself as a professional poet and I set up Out-Spoken in 2012. I think the inspiration behind it was that I was, obviously... You do a lot of gigs and I was doing a lot of shows in different parts of the UK and everywhere had an open-mic element. As a lot of poets know, when you're featuring sometimes it can be quite a taxing process to sit amongst the open-micers.

Not because people aren't any good but because they're still learning and a lot of them are inexperienced and the writing is quite rudimentary. So, yeah, I just figured maybe start a night that didn't have that and just have, kind of, like a premiere night that had three feature acts, complemented with two musicians to break up the density of poetry. That was the initial idea and from there I just, kind of, worked the format out.

Obviously, you had Tongue Fu, they didn't have open-mic but they had a band, so they had their own thing that they were doing. I'm sure there's been other nights that have done a similar thing but people obviously rely on open-mics to bring the punters in so I just figured, let's just rely on the weight of the poets.

DWT: It can be a tricky thing to explain to people that you want to cut out the element of open-mic and it doesn't necessarily mean that's how you want every night to run. You're just trying to offer a bit of variety, aren't you?

AA: Absolutely yeah. I figure that you're not really doing a disservice or harm to anyone or anything because there's so many open-mic nights. So, I figured, just have one that doesn't have open-mic and there are some people, you know, members of the public,

poetry lovers, readers, listeners who don't want to listen to open-micers. They just want to hear professional poets read their work and perform their work, so I figure just offer that.

DWT: Today is the 28th of February. [LAUGHTER] The reason I'm laughing is because I never look at my calendar and I never know what day it is and I miss a lot of nights. Your last one, I saw on Twitter, a tweet about and I was like, "Yeah, I'm going to that one" and then I realised it was pictures of the event that happened the night before. So, again, I've missed it but I'm definitely going next month. Maybe explain a bit... Just tell us who was on that night and how the night ran.

AA: So, the format's always the same, we invite three poets to read for 15 minutes and then two musicians with a break in between and it starts round about 7:30. We also have what we call like a floor spot or a sacrificial poet who is someone that we've either seen, an emerging open-micer usually, that we offer five minutes to right at the beginning as a way of showcasing what they're doing and offering them a bit of a platform.

So, yeah, we had a young guy called Jamal who came down and did five minutes and then we had Selena Nwulu, the last London poet laureate Peter the Temp, Peter Bearder and then we had a guy call Nia. He's a young singer-songwriter and I think someone saw him at Sofar Sounds, he did a gig there and he was recommended to us and we thought, "Yeah, he'd work". Then we had a break and then John Hegley was the the main feature act and then Eliza Shaddad and her band took us out with folk-alternative-indie rock, kind of, vibe.

DWT: Yeah, so you do have that sort of intermediate spot where you've got five minutes that's given up to someone...

AA: We introduced that later on simply because I, kind of... Again, to have a more of an exclusive feel to it, like you're being invited as opposed to this and that... It's not an elitist thing, I mean, I've heard through the grapevine people, kind of, say that it's become an elitist night because, I guess, of the dynamic of the poets that we have there. I mean, my real intention is to try and bridge the dichotomy between the stage and page debate and that's what really irks me to the point where the actual debate itself is ludicrous.

It's exhausted and it's ludicrous, so I figured to try and have a space where you invite people that win accolades and whatever else and have them alongside, what other people might refer to as being spoken word artists. Just to show that they can all be appreciated in their own capacity, you don't have to have these stupid distinctions that become separatist and try and undermine and, kind of, ridicule people who are seen as being spoken word or more performance based as not been strong writers and having to rely on the histrionics of a performance to carry it through.

So, yeah just having Emily Berry and Sarah Howe in the same space as what you might have a 25-year-old spoken word artist from Peckham would also be, you know, it's an important thing.

DWT: Yeah and as we know all the finest spoken word artists are coming out of Peckham anyway. It's the best part of London for that.

[LAUGHTER]

AA: Yeah, it's a good little talent pool there.

DWT: It's interesting the point you made there about this, sort of, resentment maybe towards a kind of exclusivity. It's hard to take that step without getting that, kind of, resentment from some areas.

AA: But I think you're always going to get that, I think it's inevitable. I think when you create something that is of a certain calibre you're going to get people who haven't performed there who feel that they should have been invited [**DT:** Yeah] and it creates a kind of resentment. We're getting around to booking as many... Obviously, there's a lot of poets to get through and there's poets that are coming up. You're trying to keep a balance and curate the show, so the poets complement each other stylistically rather than just whacking everyone in and hoping for the best. We do take into consideration the styles of each poet, the poetics, the themes that they explore and try and create a healthy contrast between them.

DWT: I think, also, people seem to forget how an event works and that by virtue of having a stage and a seated area for an audience there is an exclusivity and a separation between performer and audience member, isn't there? That's how things work, isn't it? If you're not curating a night properly and trying to offer that distinction then you can't really justify a fee to get in, can you?

AA: Exactly, that's what I'm saying. I mean, people are paying 8 to 10 pounds to come in and see this stuff, so it's important that we do get the programming right and it doesn't feel like a botched job where everyone's just stuck onto a stage because, "He's your mate and you know her and you owe him favour because he gave you a gig and blah blah blah". You know, it has to be as objective as possible and [you must] think broadly about what you're trying to create as an overall experience.

DWT: Yeah. We were both in Birmingham recently, I don't know what your feelings are, you can give your view first but I felt like Verve Poetry [Festival]... Stuart and Cynthia who organised it did a very good job at offering a stage for both spoken word and page poetry if that's how you still want to view it. We'll leave that debate aside but they did a good job. Do you think that there still needs to be more done? Because I think maybe in London we take for granted that that happens because it does happen quite a lot but maybe it doesn't happen further afield?

AA: Yeah, I mean, I spoke to Stuart at length after the festival and from what he was telling me they are the first ever Waterstones to do that. That has never happened before, usually the deal is that an independent press will approach a Waterstones store and they'll put an event on but there will be no money in it. No one will get paid, there'll be no sponsorship, there'll be no subsidies. It would all just be, "You lot come there, read out your poems. We'll stock your books. Thanks for coming".

Sometimes they give you a little cut of whatever tickets they're selling but the capacity and just how inclusive Verve was regardless of it being at Waterstones. It was definitely the best and the most thoughtful programmed event I'd ever been to. I'm really really happy that that exists and that, hopefully, it'll set a standard and other Waterstones and booksellers will take note of how you do things. When you pay people properly and you get people in a space where you're offering all the different stylistic variants of what constitutes modern day contemporary poetry you will get a healthy turn out.

DWT: Yeah. I did a short interview with Stuart and we also talked a lot at the festival about how, when you go to an event like that, it's great being there and there's great community but you do come away afterwards... It's hard not to feel bitter that that's not happening more because it's a pretty easy thing to organise. Like, if you're booking 70 acts over a weekend, the hard bit is booking 70 acts, finding the right mix and range of voices and representation and different parts of the community that's easy because that already exists that's what poetry is. That's what art is, those voices are there.

AA: And it's very insular, I think what that did is it really opened it up to the general public and it made people aware of poets they might have not known about, poets who they thought, "Hmm, this isn't really my kind of thing but having seen it done live I realise, actually is my kind of thing". So, I think it was definitely a really thorough and well put together event and I just hope that more booksellers take note.

And you can do it, I mean they had to get a lot of external sponsorship and funding... Which is nuts if you think of how big Waterstones is as a chain yet you need to go to, like, University of Birmingham and local councils and the Arts Council and, you know, whatever else to help sponsor and fund an event like this.

DWT: Was it your showcase having to give a shout out to the Chamber of Commerce of Birmingham?

AA: No, that wasn't us.

[LAUGHTER]

DWT: It must have been another showcase earlier on because they'd sponsored that and it was a really odd thing to have to.

AA: Shout out?

DWT: To have this civic commercial before your poetry show.

AA: Unfortunately, that's the nature of this stuff. We do require money and believe it or not poets also need money to sustain themselves, which I know certain people take issue with the fact that poets charge a fee to read or perform or turn up. It's like, how dare they? You know, like, we're supposed to work for free and be people's poets and whatever else but landlords don't really see it like that.

DWT: No.

[LAUGHTER]

AA: So, you're forced into the box of capitalism.

DWT: Yeah, I don't know anyone that's able to pay their rent with their collection or their pamphlet.

AA: Yeah, "I'll write you a stanza, can I have this month off?"

[LAUGHTER]

DWT: The latest extension of Out-Spoken is the press that you've got running, so how many books have you published as part of that press?

AA: So, we've got books by Hibaq Osman, Bridget Minnamore, Sabrina Mahfouz, Fran Lock and Media Diversified and also this year we're publishing Raymond Antrobus, Joelle Taylor and possibly one more towards the end of the year. So, I mean, it's a healthy little repertoire and I want to keep it small I don't want to be putting out, like, fifty poets a year and, kind of, water down the quality of the writing.

DWT: Was there any guiding vision when you were setting up the press as to who you'd put? Was there any, sort of, firm criteria?

AA: Yeah, I think a lot of the things I do are born out of frustration. They're born out of feeling frustrated, seeing an issue be it a political one even if it's a slight prejudice, something homogenous and thinking, "Hmm, I've got a couple of options. I can either go online and have a good old rant about it or I can try to do something and use the resources that I have to try and counter whatever it is that's frustrating me".

And the nature of publishing and I think over the last two or three years the discourse surrounding diversity has really developed and taken hold and a lot more people are aware of the discrepancies within publishing. It was really that, it was to take poetry that was necessary, that was plural, that was urgent, that was good, like good writing and to give it a home.

Because there's a lot of it that just goes over-looked because, you know, you're at the whims of a publisher, you're at the whims of an editor and they've got their own prejudices they've got their own style, their preference, things that they like, things that they want to associate with their brand and whatever else. The more deeper I got into the literature world having, you know, quite private personal talks with some gatekeepers and really influential people within literature I realised how much nepotism goes down in this thing as well which before...

I mean, I guess it's the same in any industry but when you actually realise, wow you're only publishing that person because you go out for drinks with them on a Friday. Yeah, they're

good but the fact that your mates also helps. So, I kind of realised that there's, not a spurious element to it but just that there's something that goes beyond the meritocracy.

DWT: The thing is... I think you've hit on something really important there, that I think we're probably in agreement that there isn't some underhanded scheme. But the fact that people don't realise there's a conflict of interest is what the problem is. I think more people do need to face up to that issue that if you're taking... Most publishers are taking public money in some form through funding for or whatever, you've got a very big responsibility as to how you use the money and if it's going to your mates and putting their books out.

AA: And it's cool if the writing is good but I've read a lot of poetry and, again, it's all subjective, you know, it's down to your own individual taste and preference... I've a lot of poetry that I think is really mediocre and then you look up and you realise or you find out this person is actually really good friends with this person who's then introduced them to this person. It's a network and this is why people always go on about why networking so important and being seen with the right people. I just feel there's something quite disingenuous about all that.

There's one thing hanging out and enjoying the company of another person, which is fine, but like I say when the writing is mediocre and they're being published over somebody else because of the fact. "Yeah. This is too much like this or too much like"... That's when I have a bit of an issue and some people might argue, "But you just publish your mates as well", maybe. Maybe that is the case.

DWT: But the thing is, this issue is not going to go away because poetry is such a small scene, you're going to know people. You're going to get to know people and probably if you're a publisher and you like someone's work and you meet them the likelihood is that, if you weren't friends before you're going to become friends. Then this issue comes up again in republishing someone but I think it's more about being aware of the situation and how that [relationship] is used.

AA: Absolutely and small presses don't have a big catalogue, you know, so if you've got twenty poets in the repertoire then that's going to be twenty poets who you know very well. Whereas, the big presses they've got hundreds or thousands and it's... I mean, I know a few poets who've been published by big publishing houses and they hardly meet anyone. [INAUDIBLE] So, it's quite... There's a disconnect, it's very cold and loose the further up you get and you can feel alone. Whereas, I think, [with] the small presses it's like a little family.

DWT: Yeah. How did the masterclasses come about with Out-Spoken?

AA: Again, a similar thing, it was just realising that people were... I was doing workshops and young adults and adults alike were, "Hey, can we come and do another workshop with you?" and I'm like, "No because unless you're part of this group or you come from this borough or you're from this particular place there's nothing open to you". So, it just dawned on me that why don't I just have a masterclass once a month for £20, that's not going to break anyone's bank for three or four hours and just invite a top poet to come down and pay them for time?

There are some people... I started that two years ago and there are some people that have come religiously every month and when I talk to them they're like, "It's a course, like this is a course for me and that's how I see it". And I'd never really realised that's how it was going to take off, I just thought we needed to do something about this. Because, like, if you think of the other writing courses that exist, they're seven, eight-hundred pounds and the only people who can afford them are middle class folk who've got the time to take, you know, five days off work to go and live in the countryside and piddle about with their novel.

Which is fine, like, no one's taking issue with that but it's not affordable. So, something like this, that is very quick, that is accessible that is modest in fee...

DWT: Do the courses range just in poets or are there definite themes to each class?

AA: Yeah, so every poet will bring a workshop with them and what I ask them to do is send me, like, a little outline of what the workshop is going to entail. So then on the event page on Facebook we list what is going to be covered, who the poet is. Sometimes, you know, it might not be a well-known poet but someone who's really really good within the education or the teaching of poetry. The numbers vary, the thing is with these events, every month differs depending on what's going on.

Some people have got... On the seasons too, you know, we find that the warmer it gets the less people come to indoor events, during the winter time it's great, we're packed out. As we started going towards spring and summer, Saturday afternoons, people want to be out. But yeah, it's definitely proven to be beneficial enough to keep running.

DWT: I'm not too sure when this chat's going to go out so we're not going to plug anything directly because I don't know about clashes of dates but if anyone wants to find out these things which are once a month they can go to your website.

AA: www.outspokenldn.com.

DWT: Yeah. I think, next we should talk a bit about our new born rivalry as podcasters.

AA: That's right, the old podcast game.

DWT: Now we're in direct competition for that burning poetry.

AA: So, the Interlocutor is a podcast series that I started because I realised that I had access to quite a few interesting people. Not just from the poetry world but from the academic world, from business, from philosophy, from all different walks of life. So, I figured I'd just have chats with them and to, kind of, get them into a place where a lot of people... What I find is that unless you are a public figure not everyone's going to have access to your thoughts and ideas.

There was a lot of people, like my friends, who I've made friends over the years who I think are really quite brilliant with incredible minds, really creative thinkers and it's a shame that

all those ideas and [INAUDIBLE] go to waste. So, I just wanted to create a podcast series that just shed light on that. I'm not looking to make any money from it or anything like that, it is literally just a little side line thing. I enjoy having a chat for an hour with someone who I think has very interesting perceptions on things.

DWT: Was it born into a vacuum? Because that was definitely how this podcast started. It was interesting you saying earlier about how a lot of what you do is born out of frustration and this podcast certainly was part of that. I was sick of not being able to have these kinds of conversations with people or if we did it was like stolen moments in pubs. It was a shame if anything genuinely interesting or insightful came out of it. It was a real shame that no one else was there to hear it.

AA: We've developed a culture of preservation and I think that when we think widely about the way in which we utilise information and the way in which we even utilise a moment it is all about trying to find ways to preserve it through technology. So I think, yeah, people would be amongst my circle of friends and we'd all be talking and you'd get the one person who might be new to the circle or they might have been with a friend of a friend who just says "Man, you guys are talking about politics and you're talking about philosophy and about racism and identity and whatever else. Why aren't these things recorded somewhere?"

But, obviously, there are hundreds of podcasts that touch on these on these issues, but like you say I think the magic is in the conversation and it's the dynamic created by the two people that make it what it is. Again, you're not trying to say I invented the wheel or starting something new here but it's just creating an energy between two people, a conversation or energy. And trying to have a place to preserve that and other people can listen, be inspired, be stimulated, be provoked into their own sets of thoughts, so I think that was really the intention.

DWT: So, is there any reason that it wasn't an Out-Spoken podcast?

AA: Yeah, I think Out-Spoken as a format... The three things, the publishing house, the masterclass, the competition that runs once a year and the live show is a set format. I don't want to tamper with it anymore, we get funding for that and it's a model that works. I don't want to start adding more to it and out-balancing parts of its components because I think we'll run into difficulties. Also, I'm free to speak as plainly as I want in these podcasts, whereas obviously when you're getting funding from exterior sponsors and whatever else you have to be careful with what you say and what you do. Whereas with this I can... You know, it's my own thing.

DWT: It's been weighing on my mind a bit... Since September 2016 the podcast has been part-funded by the Arts Council and I did start to think, do I now have to be watching what I'm saying? Not in terms of content and questioning things but simple things. Do I go on and swear as much as I would in normal life because this is now a publicly funded thing and I'm trying to reach as many people as possible. I can't turn around and give my normal opinion which would be, sorry if you don't like my swearing it's your problem. You know, this is a different thing now.

I'm, sort of, trying to find somewhere to exist between being an individual that runs something but also is trying to give something to the [poetry] community.

AA: I think it's important that we still have an element of real life and people swear in real life. You know, I don't think we should censor ourselves to the point where it starts to become like, "Wait for the watershed hour and then we can swear". I mean, if you think of the BBC, which again is public money that is being used, everyone has an issue or a gripe with what goes on there and the way that news is reported or the way that things are said. So, you're never going to please everyone and I think that's the nature of putting work in the public domain.

You're always going to get someone who takes issue with what you do and that's fine, that's part of why you do things. You're trying to reflect on clashes of opinions, I guess it's healthy for a democracy too to have all these different voices and whatever it might be. So, I think that in the long run it's a healthy thing to maybe even swear and piss a few people off. If we went back three years I would have definitely been one of those people that was banging on my drum, you know, about "This is poetry. This isn't poetry."

But the older I get and the more I think I understand the functionality of poetry, the less it bothers me. Like, you can just appreciate poetry in all its shapes and forms and if a poem is good then a poem is good and it doesn't really get more complicated than that. We can complicate things if you start getting into the archaeology of the poem and the author and its technique of meter and all the rest of it.

You can definitely be a pedant about things but I think if it's just simply about enjoying the experience of a poem, which is incredibly multi-dimensional, turn the page if you don't like it. It's cool, like it's absolutely fine. I just think people waste too much time berating poets because, "Oh, this isn't a poem because it doesn't do this and it doesn't do that and blah blah blah" then alright mate...

DWT: I was talking to someone about my opinion of Verve and like we were saying earlier, I think it was a really great line-up and really well programmed. I enjoyed it a lot more than I thought I would enjoy three days of poetry... I was there the whole time working and interviewing people. In all honesty if I really like 25 percent of the line-up I think that's doing pretty well.

AA: Absolutely.

DWT: Because it's not about loving everything. As long as people ensuring as many people as possible have got a platform.

AA: Absolutely, it's about being representative and I felt that's exactly what it was. It represented the poetry milieu in all its facets and that was its job and it did its job incredibly well. So, you know, you can't say anything else. You know, there's going to be poets that you enjoy and poets you might not enjoy as much and poets that you just think are

insufferable and that is absolutely fine. It's nothing against the person, it's just that particular style of writing isn't to your preference.

DWT: I knew this would happen, I'm feeling like we should talk some more but I don't want to start cutting stuff out. We're running out of time, so I'm going to wrap it up now. Hopefully, we'll get together another time and have another chat.

AA: Yeah, part two.

DWT: Yeah. If you just remind everyone where they can check out yourself and Out-Spoken and the podcast.

AA: I live at www.anthonyanaxagorou.com there are books on Amazon that I've written. Heterogeneous is my latest collection of new and selected poems, you can get it in bookshops too. Twitter is @Anthony1983 and the Facebook is just my name. Out-Spoken is www.outspokenldn.com and the Twitter handle is @OutSpokenLDN and Out-Spoken Press [INAUDIBLE].

DWT: I'll put the links in the episode description so you can just click and really professionally on an audio recording I'm pointing down to where the description box will be. If you can see that, well done. Thanks very much Anthony, I really enjoyed chatting. See you later you lot.

End of Transcript.