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[Episode 05: Mel Jones](#) (February 2015)

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Mel Jones – **MJ**

Transcript: Christabel Smith

Conversation:

DT: Hello. My name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Today, I am joined by Mel Jones, who is the co-founder of Friggers of Speech and we're

actually sitting in The Spread Eagle in Camden at the moment and Friggers Of Speech is due to start in about 45 minutes, so we're just going to try and record one of these things. By way of introduction, we'll start with a poem from Mel.

MJ: Thank you very much, darlin'. This poem I'm going to do because a friend of mine, Tara Fleur, was very recently banned, mid-poem, at a famous London venue because she said 'fuck' too much. Apparently, there were other people on the stage who said fuck, but they had penises so that was OK. This is dedicated to her and it's called 'Fuck Me If You Think You're Hard Enough'.

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

DT: Thank you. Really not very professional, but I am fucking corpsing now.

MJ: Oh no, not the snort!

DT: My first question is why poetry?

MJ: Why poetry? Poetry is one thing and I love it and I think of it as 'performance poetry', not 'page poetry', although I try and do that as well. I started out doing singing, I'm a jazz singer. There's a lot of singing in my family, a Welsh family, and then writing songs with my sister and writing songs on my own, then down the line, I was listening one late night to Radio 4 and they'd got Poetry Slam on. I'd never heard of poetry slams, but I thought 'I've written stuff as good as that', so I went off to a place called Bang Said The Gun, just down the road from Borough, and I won their open mike, it was called Raw Meat Stew, and I've never looked back. I've done it ever since and I thoroughly enjoy it. I enjoy the people I've met through it, more importantly.

DT: I try not to be too bitter and mention that I haven't won at Bang yet. It's not important.

MJ: I'm very anti-competition. I can tell by your voice it's not important at all to you at 4am as you're gnawing off your own foot.

DT: How often do you read your poetry in public? You mentioned you're more of a stage poet, but have you had anything published?

MJ: Yes, I've got my own book. MMM, it's called. I might do that, it's a good one to do, and lots of anthologies. I was in the Morning Star once and various other bits and pieces. There's a CD out, so there's lots of different places it's come out over the years.

DT: Let's have a second poem.

MJ: OK. I didn't know what to do, but as I mentioned the book, which is called MMM, this is as the result of a drunken bet, somebody asked me to write a filthy poem and I said 'that's not much of a bet'. So they decided that I'd got to write a poem about bestiality, only

using words beginning with M, and I did think that was a bit of a challenge, so this is the result of that. It's called 'MMM'.

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

It's filth. I don't know why it's filth, but it is filth.

DT: Questions. How do you critique your work? Do you have people you share your writing with or do you get feedback mainly from audiences?

MJ: It's a bit of both. Mainly from audiences. Occasionally, I wilfully leave in something I find funny and nobody else finds funny, but I have gone back repeatedly and edited and re-edited as a result of audience. Not just one audience, but if, three or four times, that's not working. Very often, the hardest thing to do is cut down a poem because it's a good line, a good joke, but alters the whole pace of it. When friends say 'that's not working, you need something else there,' I do listen.

DT: How would you like to see your writing progress? More stuff published or would you like to develop a different style with your performing?

MJ: I have started trying to write more serious stuff. I love the filth. I love doing all that. I love making people laugh, but I don't like being introduced as the filth, which started to happen. Not to say don't like, but there's more to me than that.

DT: It's never nice to be pigeon-holed, it's limiting.

MJ: That's it. So I'm doing some songs and things to ring the changes, but I'm also trying to write more serious poetry, simply as a challenge because it's difficult. I'm delving into those waters now.

DT: Dangerous. Maybe we could have another poem, since you mentioned the word poem.

MJ: I don't know why I did it, but OK, let's have a serious poem. This is after reading a wonderful poet called Fran Lock. She writes brutally honest stuff and after reading her poem, I wrote this. It's called For The Poet Who Harmed Herself.

[We are unable to reproduce this poem at this time.]

DT: What have been the main influences over your development as a writer or performer?

MJ: Other performers and also, reading lots and lots of comedy. Comedy helps you whatever you're writing because it gives you a sense of pace and timing. If you haven't got those things, you can't write anything well. I read PG Wodehouse, I read Georgette Heyer, I

read nonsense poems, Kipling, and watch lots of comedy, situation comedy, all that kind of stuff, and listen to other funny performers.

There are so many great comics at the moment and a lot of that is very, very similar to performance poetry. I don't know why there is this demarcation line. There does seem to be a difference. I think comedy audiences are a bit more feral than poetry audiences.

DT: I think poetry puts people off. People who would go and watch very, very experimental alternative comedy, won't then turn up and watch a poetry night. You're right, there's very little difference. If you watch someone putting on a very dark or alternative comedy set, it can be very similar to a poetry evening.

MJ: It either makes you laugh or it doesn't. You're right, drama and comedy are not exclusive to one genre.

DT: What would you recommend to our listeners to go out and see, read or watch?

MJ: I realised this question was there. There's a list as long as your arm. I recently saw Ross Sutherland, absolutely marvellous performer. Fanny Walker is another great one. Rob Auton is quite well-known now, but he's been good all the way through, even when he wasn't. I would go onto a website called Poetry In London and have a look on there and see some of the great possibilities there are out there.

Kat Francois is one kind of poet, Mab Jones is another kind of poet, you've recently interviewed Michelle Madson, Poet Curious. They're great, great poets, Polar Bear and Kate Tempest, but it's not just about them, it's not just about social commentary and the beauty and lyricism of their writing. There's such a vast array and you should be able to tell from the blurb what kind of evening it's going to be.

DT: The important debate people should be having is whether there should be an overt message through poetry because in my view, that's not really the point.

MJ: That's why we called it Friggers of Speech, let's take it, let's frig it. I must mention the Anti Poet, everybody should see the Anti Poet, it's silly not to. They combine music and poetry to great comedic effect.

DT: Is there anything you'd recommend that isn't spoken-word based?

MJ: Just go out to your local theatre, the one above a pub, and see what people are doing because you don't have to spend loads of money. This is a free gig, there are loads of free gigs around in London. Or you pay a fiver, less than you would to go to the cinema and you see people putting their heart and soul into something. I think that's always exciting.

DT: You go to scratch nights?

MJ: Yeah, absolutely.

DT: If you don't know what a scratch night is, Google it. Thank you, Mel. I nearly wet my pants, it's hilarious.

MJ: I do try to leave people wetter than when they started.

DT: The pub's getting busy now, I hope we beat their noise. Thank you.

MJ: Come to Friggers of Speech, every second Wednesday at The Spread Eagle in Camden. It's at the top of the building and it's absolutely free.

DT: As always, you lot can now just go away.

End of transcript.