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[Episode 06: Sean Wai Keung](#) (February 2015)

Transcript: Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Sean Wai Keung – **SWK**

Conversation:

DT: Hello. My name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Tonight, I am in the Chelsea Theatre in West London and I'm joined by Sean Wai Keung. I've just been and performed at an open-mic night called World's End, which is a fantastic night.

You'll find it on Facebook and you should all come along and there were some great features tonight, like Lizzy Palmer and Michael Clift, Fikayo Balogun and Ernesto Sarezale. It was a great night of poetry. By way of introduction, we're going to have a poem from Sean.

SWK: Thanks, David. This is a poem called Running At A Loss.

[we are unable to reproduce this poem at this time]

DT: Cheers. Hello, Sean.

SWK: Hello, David.

DT: Just a quick clarification. This little chat may seem really overly familiar, more so than others. Sean is a good mate of mine, so it's really good to talk. He's gone away to Norwich and I haven't seen him for months, so this is the first time we've chatted in four months or something.

SWK: Pretty much.

DT: I'm not going to indulge myself too much with chatting. Question: why poetry?

SWK: Why poetry? Why not poetry? It's something that the more you think about, the worse your poems get, I believe. If you want to write a poem, write a poem. I've always wanted to write poems, it's just been a form that suited the messages or images.

DT: Why does it suit what you want to say?

SWK: Because it's open and open to play, not just with message or content or image, but also with form. You can play with images, you can play with expectations, you can play with the sounds of words, the rhythm of words. I've always enjoyed rhythmical things, so that's why it suits me better.

DT: How often do you read your poetry? We know each other from performing poetry in London. Maybe it's different in Norwich.

SWK: It's very different in Norwich. In London, there's something on every night and it's an unfortunate problem in many ways, that English poetry is still fairly London-centric, especially performance poetry. Obviously, there are big scenes up in the North. It is trickling through the country, but there is still a very much London-centric focus.

Norwich, the scene there is more literary, from my experience. That may just be because I am there to study my Masters in poetry, so being part of the university, a lot of things I go to are university-endorsed or sponsored. There are of course still open-mic slams, very good performance poets, there are a lot of good things going on there, just with it being a smaller town than London, it can be more difficult to seek them out.

DT: I was going to mention again Leanne Moden and Elaine Ewart, who are running Fen Speak, which is an open-mic night up in the Fens. It goes as far east as Kings Lynn. There is stuff happening, but obviously more travelling.

SWK: The great thing about London is it's big and transport is easy and there are so many poets as well.

DT: You say transport's easy. I've got to get home to South London from Chelsea tonight and it's not that easy. That's my problem. How about another poem?

SWK: Sure. This one is called What's Happened Was. Am I allowed to say it's Valentine's Day today? These two poems, I've just read them out at World's End Poetry, both revolving around love.

[we are unable to reproduce this poem at this time]

DT: How do you critique your own work? I normally ask poets if they have people they share with, but you're obviously studying at the moment, so it must be a big part of how you're critiquing your work.

SWK: Obviously, I have to do workshops, which is a strange experience in an academic environment. You're workshoping mainly for yourself as a writer, but also, in the back of your mind, you're thinking 'teachers are going to mark this, you've got to get a good mark to get my money's worth out of this course'.

Luckily, the teachers I've had at academic-based workshops have all been very open about this and very comforting as well, saying stuff like 'I prefer it this way, so maybe when you submit it, do it this way, but you can always change it back.' The academia side of things is not the end. So it is a part of my process, definitely, but not all of it.

I count one of my poems successful if I like it and of course, that can change on a daily basis. Often, I write things and for the rest of the day after I've written them, I think 'this is the best thing I've ever written.' The next day, I'll look at it and think 'that was pretty bad, actually.' But then it's all about longevity. If I feel like it's still worth editing, I will edit it, I will keep on editing it. If it stays with me, it's a good poem, obviously.

DT: How would you like to see your writing progress? Are you ultimately looking to be published?

SWK: Yeah, I mean it might be old-fashioned of me, but I do still want to have a book with my name on it in Foyles and Waterstones, just because it's been my dream since I was a kid.

DT: Strange how that's old-fashioned now.

SWK: Yeah. So many poets are selling CDs or have things on YouTube or whatever. I still really want to focus my work right now on the page. I feel like I've done a lot of performance. I'm happy with where my performance is, compared to where my work is at on the page.

DT: How about a third and final poem?

SWK: Cool. I Won't Stop Looking.

[we are unable to reproduce this poem at this time]

DT: Cheers, man. By the way, the banging in the middle of the poem was a door banging. Unfortunately, Sean hasn't yet made me collapse off my chair, that wasn't what that noise was. That should be your goal, rather than a book.

SWK: David's lying, by the way. He is literally on the floor, right now.

DT: What have been your main influences over your work as a writer and/or performer?

SWK: Seeing other people perform, definitely. For a long, long time I was writing poetry, I had never performed anywhere, I didn't even consider the idea of performing to be relevant to what I was doing. I went to my first open mic, it must have been three or four years ago now, I was a bit drunk and friends asked me to.

I was terrible, I was shaking, I couldn't get my words out properly. It was seeing other people which made me do it more and eventually, you get heavily involved, to the point where I've seen hundreds of people performing over the years and it's seeing the different things that can be done with poetry, the different things that can be done with performance, that really inspires me.

For instance, the first time I saw you, David, I wasn't even looking at the stage, I was looking at this guy standing on a big chair or table, shouting at people. That kind of thing inspires me.

DT: I'm glad it inspires people and doesn't terrify them.

SWK: Oh yeah, it terrifies people, but that's what's inspiring about it. People need to be terrified more.

DT: That's it. Cheers, Sean, really good. Thank you for the poems. Just briefly, what's your blog?

SWK: You can look me up at WaiKeungPoetry@wordpress.com.

DT: We'll put that under the video in the description.

SWK: Also, if anyone out there is in London, please find out about World's End Poetry Night.

DT: I'll put a link to World's End as well. A big thank you to Chelsea Theatre for letting us use their office space to let us record this. We're going to wrap this up because they're clearing away chairs and we're going to get herded out of the building.

SWK: Let's go and get a drink.

DT: And you lot, clear off!

End of transcript.