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[Episode 12: Kyla Manenti](#) (March 2015)

Transcript: Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Kyla Manenti – **KM**

**Conversation:**

**DT:** Hello. My name is David Turner and this is another Lunar Poetry Short. Today, I'm joined by the wonderful host of the monthly music and poetry night Union, Kyla Manenti. Hello, Kyla.

**KM:** Hello.

**DT:** We're in Putney, in Kyla's living room, so it's going to sound really relaxed and casual.

**KM:** So relaxed, a few glasses of wine down.

**DT:** This is the first podcast I've done with a drink. I'm not drunk, but I have a drink. First of all, we're going to talk about your night, Union. How did you get involved with Union?

**KM:** I'd been going to poetry nights for a couple of years, I guess, and at the time, I kind of didn't have a job. I'd been made redundant and I was working a bit from home and I had a lot of time to think. I just kind of had this idea as I was going to sleep. You know how you have ideas as you're going to sleep and they seem like the best idea in the world?

**DT:** I never have any ideas, I make a point of it.

**KM:** Ok. For those of us that sometimes have ideas, you sometimes get them when you go to sleep and you think 'this is excellent, it's the best idea ever' and you wake up and think 'oh, it's rubbish', but actually, I woke up and I was like 'no, it's still a really great idea and I should run a poetry night.

'I should do something at The Half Moon, which is a venue I know really, really well and it's really close to my heart and they don't do anything like that around this area and it would be really great to bring poetry to this part of London and to people that maybe don't really think they would necessarily enjoy poetry', which is why we mix it with music as well.

**DT:** So you realised poetry events can't sustain themselves on their own. So you had to add music to attract the punters?

**KM:** It's not that I thought poetry nights can't sustain themselves, or maybe it is, kind of. Maybe having the music there is a kind of an insurance, maybe I was worried about just launching a poetry night, especially in a well-known music venue. I don't know, I think it kind of makes sense. Most of my friends really love music, really love going to gigs, but wouldn't necessarily think they would enjoy a poetry night, so I was just going off what I knew, the people that were closest to me. Yeah, I made it for people like that.

**DT:** It does make sense in the context of the venue. The Half Moon is so famous.

**KM:** It's iconic, really iconic. People that play there, people go back a lot, because the sound is amazing and there are a lot of music venues popping up that are just corporate, horrible places, so somewhere like The Half Moon, that has a lot of heart and history, is really special.

**DT:** When I came to Union for the first time, I hadn't been to The Half Moon for 10 years. It had all been painted in the bar, it was all quite fancy, but they haven't changed the back room.

**KM:** They have changed it a bit. I don't want to go into the details, but they put a new floor down and stuff like that.

**DT:** What I mean is it still feels like a proper music venue.

**KM:** Yeah, the stage is still the stage, they haven't moved anything around, it's still very much The Half Moon.

**DT:** It must be quite difficult to keep the spoken word side of the night going. What drives you to persevere with it?

**KM:** It is hard. There were a couple of occasions during the first year where we cancelled because there were issues with booking people, or people pulled out, and we felt like we weren't on top of it. Now, I'm kind of used to it. I'm in the rhythm of doing the bookings and everything and I guess what pushes me to keep it going is the fact that it's my responsibility and I don't want to let myself down. I don't think anyone would necessarily care if I did cancel it, but I want to believe they could, because that makes it something worthwhile.

**DT:** It's more your commitment to the night. You don't feel any commitment to the spoken-word scene as such. It's more that now you've started it, you want to keep it going?

**KM:** Yeah, it's my thing.

**DT:** I think people will relate to that. Just a bit of background for the listeners, you don't read poetry at open mic, as a lot of my guests do on this podcast. I thought it would be interesting to have a chat with someone that runs a regular and quite well-known night. Kyla isn't going to read any poetry on the podcast.

**KM:** I'm sorry.

**DT:** As everyone knows, I fucking hate poetry anyway. This will be all the better for it. This might be quite a short podcast, but I hope it will be interesting anyway. You're the only non-poet I know, sorry, non-open-mic-attending poet I know, that runs a night. Why?

**KM:** Because when I started going to poetry nights in London, I didn't know what to expect. I can't even remember what I thought it was going to be like, but you just realise it's this whole world and there are communities within it. You get a really weird mix of people and it's an opportunity to be really open as well.

I started by going to Poetry Unplugged at the Poetry Café, which I think is an obvious place. When you don't know where you're going to go, go to the Poetry Café. You sit there and realise 'loads of these people know each other, OK' and you feel like a bit of a tourist. Then there will be the bloke that tries to come when he can make it from work and loads of his poems are about sitting in the office really late at night.

It's like 'my God, you're this desk-bound guy, but you've got this amazing creative side and you come to this night with these people who are completely different to you.' Some are

students, some are unemployed, some are a bazillion years older. It's just so great, it's awesome and you want to be a part of that and further that and share it with other people. So yeah, that's why.

**DT:** My next question is to highlight the reality of running a night. Not to catch you out in any way. I was wondering what your hit ratio is when it comes to booking the poets you want each month, compared to just having to fill the slots.

**KM:** It depends how organised I'm feeling at the time. If I'm booking really far ahead, maybe I'll think a bit more about who I'm booking. If I'm honest, you never really know how it's going to go. Sometimes, you're panicking and you book people at the last minute and you're not sure if they're going to be right.

Sometimes, you book people at the last minute and they're really, really awesome. Sometimes, there are just people you really, really want to get there and you work really hard to get them there because you know they're going to be great. It's a mixture, a mixture of all sorts.

**DT:** You asked me two days before, so that worked out well.

**KM:** That's one of those times I looked back and really regretted it. I'm not one of these people that has a lot of regrets, but I thought 'well, Kyla, now you know, be more organised, be prepared, otherwise you're going to get David Turner on the stage, doing a fricking monologue down the telephone.

**DT:** You won't be burnt again. It's interesting, I think a lot of people would assume a lot is planned well in advance, but it's pretty organic with a lot of nights. Our night, Silence Found a Tongue, we're still booking people a week before.

**KM:** That's what's so great, that's when you might get something really rubbish, or you might get something awesome. It keeps you on your toes and that's how it should be. No one really knows what they're doing in life. Everyone wings it.

**DT:** I don't know what you're talking about. Your day job is as a journalist. Along with that and your obvious commitment to spoken word, I think you should be recognised some way.

**KM:** I should get some kind of medal from the Queen.

**DT:** No, I think from Niall O'Sullivan actually.

**KM:** Wow, God, I don't think Niall's even aware of me, so that would be quite special.

**DT:** He doesn't have to be, his aides will tell him about you. The combination of these two things has led me to ask you to guest host a podcast, which I'm excited about, so this podcast is to introduce you to the three or four regular listeners I have. Two of them, I'm related to.

**KM:** Hiya. They can't see you waving, just so you know.

**DT:** I have this awkward habit of telling the listeners I'm now pointing down. What I mean is, that's the description under the YouTube video. I was waving though, you're right there. Why would you want to get involved with such a thankless task?

**KM:** With doing the podcasts? Because in my previous job, I did a lot of interviewing celebrities and whatnot. I love interviewing people, I think everyone is really interesting. Everyone. I kind of missed that. So as an opportunity, this is me talking to people, learning about them, pushing the edges and seeing what happens. I think it's fascinating and if anyone else finds it interesting, that's a bonus.

**DT:** I asked you initially to stick to the regular format, but I wonder if you have any thoughts on how you'd like these podcasts to develop.

**KM:** I think that since you're here tonight and this is the first time you've been drinking when you've been doing an interview, and it's quite a chilled night, you've come over...

**DT:** I have a drink, I haven't 'been drinking.'

**KM:** You're knocking a few back, you've brought a hip flask with you. You came over, we made some food, we had a meal. I know that when you go and interview people for the podcast, you go to their place, because often they live out of London and I'm sure they give you a cup of tea or whatever, from the sounds of it, but I've given you food and what I'm thinking is food is really important.

I'm kind of hoping that whoever I interview, I'll go round theirs and they'll give me some food. Part of my assessment of them during the interview will be how good they are as a host, through the food they offer me.

**DT:** Great British Poet Off or something.

**KM:** That's really gimmicky. What you need to think is, my dad's Italian, food is a really important part of life and in Italy, they mix food with art regularly, it's all just part of life. They flow into each other. So eating with someone and eating what someone chooses to give you is a way of getting to know them in the same way that interviewing them for a podcast is.

It would just be another way of getting to know them and we'd bond through the food. As long as they don't give me shaped potato or party rings, I'm fine. So that's my kind of direction for the podcast.

**DT:** If you had more time than I'm allowing, are there any particular topics you'd like to see discussed?

**KM:** I think the great thing about longer interviews is there is more space to chat, so you're not just constrained by the questions you've got and need to bash them out. With a longer one, there isn't anything specific I'd be going for, but I would hope it would end up being a more organic conversation and through that, you'll kind of learn little things that you wouldn't

even have thought to ask or someone wouldn't even have thought to say, interesting bits of context that round out the interview.

I'd just like it to be more natural, if it was longer. Like a chat, but about poetry. And food. I'll get my coat now... oh no, I live here.

**DT:** Just to finish off, are there any recommendations for people to check out or watch?

**KM:** Like poets?

**DT:** Doesn't have to be.

**KM:** It's hard. I don't want the people who listen to this know and I don't want to be patronising.

**DT:** Patronising's fine. If they listen to this, they deserve it.

**KM:** There are very obvious people I would say go and see, so there's no point going through all of that. Someone I'm watching at the moment and who I think will be interesting to see where she is in a year's time is Becky Moses. She hasn't been performing very long. I think she's only been doing poetry for a year, but I think she's really promising and in a year's time, she could be doing really, really cool stuff. That's one probably everyone knows about. That's my tip.

**DT:** Thanks for that. Under the video, I'm pointing down again, there will be links to the night that Kyla runs, Union, at The Half Moon pub in Putney. Any blogs you want to talk about?

**KM:** No. Union would be great. Point people to Union, get people down in South West London for some poetry, make it a cool place again.

**DT:** Christ.

**KM:** Everyone thinks it's the end of the world and they can't get there, but it's not that far.

**DT:** How do you get home?

**KM:** Same way you get there, the same way anyone gets anywhere in London.

**DT:** Transport links are irreversible in South West London.

**KM:** That's absolutely ridiculous. They can stay at mine, we've got a spare room. My housemate will be like 'er, no.'

**DT:** Thank you, Kyla, it was lovely chatting. Thanks for the gnocchi.

**KM:** That's alright. They were delicious.

**DT:** That was Kyla Manenti. I'm David Turner. This was a Lunar Poetry Short.

**End of transcript**