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[Episode 66 - Paul Cree](#) (April 2016)

Transcript by Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Paul Cree – **PC**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Today, I am in Morden, in South London, with Paul Cree. Hello, Paul.

PC: Hello. Good afternoon.

DT: We'll start with a reading and then we'll get onto the questions.

PC: Yup. So, this is called Crows.

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

DT: Cheers for that. I was thinking the other day, I'd love a pet crow, but I don't want to make a crow a pet. I'd like a crow to choose me, that's what I want. I think they're mental.

PC: Do you know what, I think they do. Crows are mad. They are unlike any other avian species. They're highly intelligent.

DT: I don't go over that way very often, but I was walking across Clapham Common and you do get the impression that they're letting you be there. If they didn't want you there, they'd tell you to fuck off.

PC: There's a guy on YouTube somewhere in America and he's trained them to fly with him in his car – there's a whole bank of them – and he feeds them out of the window and stuff, man. They're fascinating. When you start watching them as I like doing, there's a little Common over – it's kind of where this was set – you can watch how they operate and they have little scouts or lookouts, and, if you get familiar with them, they start squawking when you come up the street. It's mad.

DT: They do that funny chattering thing, that's odd.

PC: They have hierarchies. It's no surprise that almost every culture has written about them, from the Mayans to here, to wherever you know. I love the crows, man.

DT: I could talk about crows all day, but what brought you to poetry?

PC: It's probably two things really. Number one, I have been writing lyrics for MCing/rapping which I started doing when I was 16 or 17. So writing rhymes. I'd written stories when I was younger, like a lot younger, so maybe up until [the end of] primary school until the ages of 10 or 11. I used to write little comics and stuff at home. I've always been around music.

I'm from a big family. My mum and dad are musicians and my dad had a little record deal in the 80s. I'm one of seven kids, and I'm one of the youngest, and every single one of my brothers and sisters all have their own taste in music, so I grew up with all of that.

Oddly enough, I played the drums when I was younger. My grandpa was a jazz drummer and I inherited some of his practice pads, so I was given those as a kid. I love the drums. I suppose my way of rebelling as a kid was to not do music. When I was at school, I went to the same school as all of my brothers and sisters, and we were known as a family for not being very good academically but being quite good at music and performing arts. Music really and maybe a little bit of drama, I suppose.

But I wanted to be good at football. Music was always a thing that could slightly alienate you in a way. I think you can tell a lot, music says a lot about your interests, about what kind of

background you come from. Whereas everyone was into music, it wasn't quite as cool as football, being good at football. I love football, all my family like football, but I wasn't all that good at it. I wanted to play football so I was like, right. I stopped playing the drums, I made the decision I don't want to do music no more, but I always listened to it.

My big sister was into house and techno and stuff and I got quite into dance music. I liked electronic music, and I sort of followed that line, so by the time I got to 14, I got really into jungle drum and bass. My brother who is one up from me, we were quite close I guess, he was the same. So, it was around the time when Roni Size had won the Mercury prize, I remember one of my older brothers had a record and there was a label Ninja Tune. They had been going for years, but it was quite experimental.

I remember hearing this record in my brother's room, and I can't remember the name of it, it was never a big release, but it was like a drum and bass track and it had this most mental ... well to me, it was like absurd drums. So, I guess what jungle and all that was based on, was taking that old funk break, the amen break, and chopping it up and doing loads of mad things with it. To me, at the time, hearing that, I remember jungle. but not really being into it. Kids at school were into it, but when I latched onto it, it was like, wow, this is nuts.

It was like really angry, loud music and it was drums. I love the drums. By getting into drum and bass, it was kind of an acceptable way to get back into music for me, and at the same time as keeping that distance from my family. Even though me and my brother who were close in age were into it, no one else was. So, it was like, I'm back into music now, but this is my way of looking at it. Inevitably, they all wanted to get involved. I shared a room with my two brothers, and one of them got decks, because he had a job and he started buying records and I wanted to DJ.

I was never going to be able to save up and buy records and get a set of decks, and he wouldn't let me go on his ones, so he said, why don't you MC? To me, at the time, it was like, really? A little white kid from Horley in Surrey, we don't do that, but when you sit down and think about it, no, hold on, it's just writing little words and stuff. I love the MCs, all the jungle guys, the ragga jungle MCs, so I started writing lyrics and progressed into doing parties, met a few other mates as DJs and started putting on our own events.

DT: Obviously you had that link with your brother, as you were into that same sort of music, but where you were going to school at the time and growing up, was there much of a scene?

PC: Yeah, it wasn't massive. My oldest brother, he DJed, I mean they weren't playing drum and bass and that, but they used to put on parties. They were playing hip hop and all sorts of things, so there was that going on, and there were always people around that we knew were doing things. So, the funny thing about that music and garage and all of the stuff that came after it. Tape cassettes were a big thing because you'd get people who would record the pirate stations.

There were some pirates that we could pick up where we were because of Crawley, where I went to school. There's so many ties to London, there's so many people from London or so

many people have got family in London or always things coming down with tapes of pirate radio stations.

And of course, you'd get the big raves back then, like the legal ones that they'd do up in Milton Keynes and London like One Nation and Helter Skelter, and they'd produce these tape packs you can buy. They were [around] 25 quid and you'd get this massive box and it would have 15 tapes in it of every DJ from the rave, live recordings, sometimes really shit live recordings but that was it, to us.

We were 14, that's what we had. You always had older brothers or older sisters who had these tapes and you'd get copies of the tapes and you'd be sitting on the bus, but these tapes were really, really important.

DT: We talked of it the other day about living in a satellite town, but I suppose more so when you were growing up, did Crawley feel more like an extended London borough in a way? It would have been really heavily populated by people that had moved out of south London.

PC: Yes and no. It was far enough away to be its own place and we used to joke when we were younger, I think there are a lot of people there that like to think that they were from London, you know, and some people legitimately were. Certainly a lot of people had family from there, but I think there were some people who liked to think they were [from London].

DT: What was the pressure like? Once you started MCing or DJing or writing poetry, was it inevitable that the next step was to travel up to London? Is that where you took most of your influences from?

PC: Yeah, my dad always said – my dad was doing music and that locally – the problem is with that area in particular, because you're sandwiched right in-between London and Brighton, so two cultural epicentres if you'd like, and you're in the middle. So, anyone that's vaguely into anything, whether it's goth music or jungle, why go to something local when you can go and see the best people by going up to London or down to Brighton? You can be in either city in 40 minutes and get home. And because of the airport, you could get back, well not from Brighton but from London, you could get back 24 hours a day. So, it was easy.

There were always a few little local people that were trying to set something up, there was a big pirate station when I was kid, when I was 16, Blaze FM. That was going round Crawley, and then there was Kick FM. There was always someone trying to do something, but the problem was... there was a little venue in Horley called The Liquid Lounge. It was like a little wine bar, which had gone through a succession of different names, always the same people owning it. It would routinely get its license taken away and then it would reopen under a new name and it's the same family still. It was a horrible little place.

But maybe every two years you'd get a new group of people who would try and run a garage night and you'd just get loads of trouble. We used to run an event there. It was never like a battered... It was punch-ups, do you know what I mean? It was a small town. You'd get kids from Crawley, kids from Redhill, kids from Croydon, kids from East Grinstead. You're not getting the kind of kids that would go to London because they're a little bit clued up, or they

might go to London to go and see a band. Nah, you're getting local rude boys, it's all just bravado.

When garage fizzled out of mainstream, and was becoming grime, becoming darker and more aggressive, we were running nights where there were hardly any girls and just loads of rude boys. Everyone just wants to get on the mic, and there were little skirmishes all the time. After a while you think, we're trying to set something up here, locally, and also, we didn't have a fucking clue what we were doing, so you just think, why bother, do you know what I mean? Anyone with any sense would go down to Brighton or London or wherever.

DT: Before we go on, perhaps we could have a second reading?

PC: Yeah, this is called Turbo Breeze.

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

DT: Cheers, man. In terms of poetry, how do you develop your work now? Because I know just last week you were at Michelle Madsen's night, The 7-Minute Itch.

PC: I don't know, everything starts at home, I suppose... home being my head. I don't think a lot has changed much since I started doing it, other than that I write a lot more on computers now. But I think over the last five years, I got really into longer and longer forms of writing. Like big stories... I like stories. However, I've still got tons and tons of notebooks that I keep with just little scribbles, little ideas.

I have a note file on my phone, with just random rhymes on it, little thoughts. I still write things down, but it depends what I'm doing. I have days where there's a little bit more structure. Back then, when I first started doing it, even with rapping, I would routinely sit down most days. I'd come home from work, put a beat on and, I guess a term I wouldn't have known back then, I'd free write. That's how I did it.

You'd hit on an idea and run with it. I still do that from time to time with or without music. Depends what I'm doing, but generally, with the story writing stuff, I quite often already have a fixed idea in my head of what it is.

DT: Do you think you needed poetry to take you from writing lyrics to being able to write stories? Was it like a natural crossover to get towards writing something longer?

PC: I don't know, probably, because it opened up the idea that I could try out other things beyond music. I have always struggled with doubts and little inferiority complexes and stuff. Even making a jump into writing poems, it's only relatively in the last year or so that I feel comfortable saying it, I write little poems, and I quite like doing it as well. Do you know what I mean?

For years I would have balked at the idea of it, don't know why. Perhaps it's this whole thing about going back to when I didn't know anyone who did that stuff. As soon as you asked the question, it made me think of the Poetry Café. Sitting in that basement for me was like two years, I didn't really go anywhere else for two years.

DT: Unplugged?

PC: Unplugged, yeah, yeah. Sitting in that basement every Tuesday and once I got into it, it took a long time, it was alright. Little ideas start popping up and you think, yeah, I could have a little go at this. I remember being at home, I didn't even have Microsoft Word, I saved up and bought a laptop, it was the first computer I had ever owned, so I could record, as I was still doing a lot of music then.

I recorded a little mix tape and did it so I could record it. What's that word processor you get, Notepad or whatever? I had that and I don't know why, but all the stuff I wrote, and this is probably from [around] 2006 for a couple of years, it was all on Notepad and all in block capitals. I don't know why.

DT: Like an angry teen on YouTube.

PC: Yeah, but I don't think I was trying to convey anger. For some reason, I just wrote in capitals. There was definitely a point, and I've still got them, where somewhere in-between, I started actually writing fairly regularly, little poems, where I've gone, aw I'm gonna have a little go at a story. Do you know what I mean?

There were a couple of early ones and I think my dad said, you should go and do a little evening course in creative writing. 'Creative writing, what's that?' But I did and I went to Birkbeck in 2008. But yeah, going to the Open Works and writing these little poems and sitting in, I dunno, it suddenly opened up my mind to the possibility, the other things that you can do, and that's kind of pretty exciting and overwhelming at the same time.

DT: One of the most interesting things I've found since hanging around the open-mic scene is seeing people coming along fresh, going absolutely fucking mental and doing every open mic for two months or longer, then realising it doesn't have to be five-minute slots or poems, it could be anything else. Then seeing them disappear into their little clique and find where they want to be.

It's interesting to see what direction they go in. You get a lot of people that think writing isn't for them and they're embarrassed. You talked about having a slight inferiority complex. Maybe it was necessary for you to take small steps, without it being too much of a 'coming out' process?

PC: It took years even going to Unplugged. Physically, going there after work one day just to find where the place was, I didn't even go in. I'm not even joking, it was like... that was huge for me. I was, what the hell am I doing? And then I remember my dad told me about it because he worked with someone. I must have told my dad at some point, Dad, look, I've been writing these little poems, y'know, as if I'm coming out, do you know what I mean?

Anyway, my dad is very resourceful, he just knows about stuff. He said, there's a lady who I work with who is right into all of that and she said you should go to this place. So, I was like, alright. It was probably weeks before I even plucked up the courage to actually go to the night.

I remember, the first time I went, I went to the place, looked on the little sign outside and saw it was, Tuesdays, sign up at this time, whenever it was, I can't remember now, and I think, that's enough for me today. I thought, I've made that step. I can even remember the music I had on my iPod, it was techno, I don't even know why, it was a Dave Seaman techno mix. I remember having it and finding that side street. It's quite an interesting little street, and the Poetry Café, you don't immediately see it, very flat, sunk into the wall, but yeah.

The first time I went, I think I might have even taken my mate with me. He's my best mate really and knew that I was doing this stuff and was quite understanding, I think, bruv, I'm well nervous. I just watched, and I couldn't even sign up. I did that for a month, I think, so I went every week and just sat and watched. When I did finally sign up, I remember the night, I can't remember exactly what he said, but he was quite encouraging, and he was, are you gonna do it? and I was like, yeah.

Every week to me, it was huge. I was building up to it for weeks and all day at work you're sitting there thinking, what am I doing? I practised and practised the three that I was going to do because I knew the time limit. I had a whole bunch of poems at this point and I was practising and trying to learn them, but I didn't and lost my bottle and just went up and did it. But just doing it was torture.

DT: Performing a poem in front of an audience is just daunting, especially the first time.

PC: I get a really rumbley tummy and there's something about that basement and the silence that's under it. Probably being nerves, it sets my stomach off. Putting your arms around your tummy is going to stop it, but you're, everyone's thinking, who is this weird kid? I used to sit at the end of the row, right near the wall. You know what it's like in there. If you're on the end of a row that isn't in the aisle, you can't get out. But I specifically wanted to sit in a dark corner so I could just... Maybe occasionally, I would just speak to the person next to me.

There were a couple of people I'd speak to after a while. You'd sort of say hello to them and I'd sort of sit next to them. But other than that and Niall, I wouldn't really talk to anyone. I dunno, to me it was hard enough just being there, but it's funny, I never really got used to the MCing. I hated all the aggro that went with it, I couldn't stand it. We were running nights, so running nights is well stressful and then performing, to me, was hard enough, then just getting every week dickheads coming right up to you and, give me the mic, bro.

I don't think there's any other fucking artform, or maybe there is, I don't know... If you're in a band, you don't just go on a stage and say to the guitarist, give me that guitar, bruv, you're shit. Dealing with that, I hated all of that, it was a whole different world.

DT: I think there should be more of that.

PC: Yeah, heckling. I think also I've always been quite conscious about how I speak. When I was a kid, my mum and dad would say, you can't speak properly, we're going to have to send you on speech therapy. They never did. School would say the same thing. I actually find talking quite difficult, which is odd considering this path I've chosen. Sometimes it's like words get... it's like a traffic jam in my mouth, they just don't come out very well.

And I've always been overly conscious of that. I don't really give a shit anymore, it's worked in my favour, weirdly enough. So, I was thinking, who is going to want to hear what I've got to say and how am I going to say it? I'm going to get laughed at, do you know what I mean? I remember being there, maybe it was just one of the first times, I don't know, but it was certainly in that early period where a young lad gets up, quite well spoken, and this is a typical example of why I wouldn't have gone up before and nothing wrong with the kid, but his little introductory patter was, I've been reading lots of Keats and he gets a few murmurs of approval.

I didn't even know who Keats was and I felt not only embarrassed, but ashamed and sort of humiliated. I was, I'm a fucking moron, what am I doing here? Do you know what I mean? Getting over that, I don't even know whether I got over it, but the one thing I've always had ever since I was young is drive. Not really knowing what to do with it, that's been the problem. That's why I thought as soon as I started writing lyrics, I thought, right, gotta perform, gotta put events on, gotta do something.

I was always short of confidence and self-belief and all of that, but I just had this incessant drive and I think that just kept me going back there every week. I actually hated it, do you know what I mean? It's like putting yourself through torture, every fucking week and it would start right at the start of the day. And you'd think, I'd be at work, it's Tuesday, I've gotta go, I've told myself I'm gonna go, I'll fucking go. Do you know what I mean? It just builds up throughout the day.

I'd always work out what I was gonna do when I went there, I never wanted to do the same thing that I'd done the week before. I was always trying to bring something that I hadn't done before, and I did that for a long time. So, I always had to have something fresh, something that I'd not performed. So, I'd get it ready the night before and then you walk in there and it's like, fuck. And I'm trying to convince myself to go somewhere else or not bother and sometimes I didn't even make it. Sometimes I'd go and I'd start walking and say, fuck it and go home.

Do you know what I mean? Why put yourself through that, but somewhere underneath there's that drive. Do you know what I mean?

DT: Yeah and now I'm stuck with poetry. We'll have another reading.

PC: Right. This is called Trap It.

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

DT: Cheers. I was walking through Regent's Park and a ball came flying over and bounced towards this fella. The kids were like, 'kick it back', and he went, 'nope, no, not doing it' and walks off. He wouldn't go anywhere near the ball. A terrifying moment.

PC: It's something about that, isn't it? You're an adult, man. All these adult normalities that come to be part of your day-to-day life and something like that, suddenly, it's like nothing else matters. Don't fuck it up, do you know what I mean?

DT: Yup. We're running out of time. Where can people check out your work?

PC: SoundCloud, I've got lots of tracks uploaded on there. SoundCloud/Paul Cree. There are a few videos on YouTube, there's a couple of new ones recently. Got my website which is paulcree.blogspot.co.uk. I have a handle that I've recently lost. Twitter, I suppose. I've got an EP on Bandcamp, I worked with a musician, it's paulcree.bandcamp.com, you can listen to short stories and stuff.

DT: I think we should meet up again and have a chat about the longer writing, now that we've done the poetry stuff, it would be good. Cheers Paul.

PC: Thank you very much mate, it was fun man.

End of transcript.