

Decolonising the Voice 3: Gendered Voices

[00:00:20] LISTENING EXERCISE ONE

Deelee Dubé: Welcome back to episode Three, 'Gendered Voices'. A certain childhood memory comes to mind as I listen to Grace Nichols here reciting her short poem titled 'The Sun'; and it is one that I am quite fond of. I recall one early morning feeling excited to perform with my fellow classmates for an assembly play. I was playing the role of the Sun for a story based on Jack Frost, and as I stepped on to the stage fully clothed in my shiny and sparkly costume attire representing the Sun, I cleared my throat and paused for breath, just for a second, before uttering the following lines: 'Yes, Jack Frost, the children know, you've lost your sting so away you go!' I received the most rapturous applause from the audience and beamed with joy for the rest of that day.

[00:01:48 to 00:02:48] 'Sun, You're a Star' by Grace Nichols, read by the author

Deelee Dubé: In the following live recording excerpt, you will hear Grace Nichols raise important themes about power and gender. In her second poem, these themes are relevant for our reflections on sonic identities and race.

In the poem, 'Picasso, I Want My Face Back', she invites links to be drawn between the fractured identity of Picasso's muse, Dora Maar, who is the subject of his painting *Weeping Woman*, and the entitlement of the male artist who shapes and molds what he sees entirely on his own terms – in both painting and in life.

Nichols makes it her aim in the poem to render Dora Maar her own voice. This has a parallel in the idea of giving a voice to the experience of alienation in emigration and the challenges faced by individuals in the pursuit of a self-defined, self-empowered identity.

[00:04:30 to 00:06:12] 'Weeping Woman' by Grace Nichols, read by the author

Jane Boston: We now come to a short reflective exercise:

In free flow, without taking your pen from the page, firstly write down anything that comes into your mind about the ways in which the readings you have heard, as well as the recordings of speech and music, reflect similar or different challenges with regard to your own vocal identity. Enjoy the process of writing random words, putting down colours, or making drawings by way of a response.

When you've done that, literally address your thoughts, your colours, your feelings to a specific individual in your past or in the present to whom you would like to engage in a 'virtual' dialogue about the discoveries that have surfaced in free flow process. They could be a mentor, family member, close friend or other. How does your voice sound now if you read out loud your own responses to this individual?

[00:07:45] LISTENING EXERCISE TWO

[00:07:45 to 00:12:33] 'Harvest Moon' from *New Moon Daughter* (1995) by Cassandra Wilson

Deelee Dubé: The track you have just listened to is by vocalist Cassandra Wilson, entitled 'Harvest Moon', taken from her album *New Moon Daughter*, released in 1995. Cassandra has a voice that comes from a place of heart-felt understanding. This piece was originally recorded by Neil Young and puts one in a mood of reflection from deep within.

Take a moment to be still and notice your breath – stretch, shake out and give yourself a few minutes to reflect on what you have heard and felt before you go back into your day.

Think of posting any aspect of your responses to an actual chosen colleague, friend or mentor on a social media platform of your choice in order to create a wider dialogue about how this sonic experience has made you feel.

Finally, thank you for joining us for the first three of a seven-part sonic podcast series of interactive workshops. We hope you have enjoyed engaging and participating in the experience, and that the process of listening, combined with writing and reflection, has served to enhance your overall understanding of some of the profound sensations of voice as experienced through a decolonising lens.

Clips Summary

[00:01:48 to 00:02:48] 'Sun, You're a Star' by Grace Nichols, read by the author

[00:04:30 to 00:06:12] 'Weeping Woman' by Grace Nichols, read by the author

[00:07:45 to 00:12:33] 'Harvest Moon' from *New Moon Daughter* (1995) by Cassandra Wilson

Works Cited

Nichols, Grace (2009) 'Weeping Woman' from *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, Hexham: Bloodaxe Books Ltd.

Nichols, Grace (no date) 'Sun, You're a Star', <https://vimeo.com/336221448>.

Wilson, Cassandra (1995) 'Harvest Moon' from *New Moon Daughter*, Blue Note Records.

Notes

1. Originally written by Canadian musician Neil Young, 'Harvest Moon' is the 19th studio album released on November 2, 1992.

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