



## Decolonising the Voice 7: Re-positioned Voices and Affirmations

### [00:00:20] INTRODUCTION

**Jane Boston:** Welcome to the last podcast in the series 'Decolonising the Voice' – 'Re-positioned Voices and Affirmations'.

Find a comfortable space in which to listen to the following examples of highly rhythmic spoken vocality. What do I mean by this? The recurrence of pattern is a part of all speech – but some artists heighten the dynamic forms in their compositions so that they reach the ear with greater intensity, create more impact for the listener, and thereby remain more memorable.

Think about the specific ways in which the following examples draw you into their atmospherics because of the patterns in their rhymes, phrase timings, volume dynamics and emphasis. Do you hear the repetitions as jagged or soft – punctuated or smooth, for example? What do they feel like in your ear? How do you specifically respond to repetition and pace, the energy of the sound waves, the consistent pace of the message content, the fusion of sound and thought that reaches beyond the ordinary messaging of speech?

Have a brief written or drawn improvisational response to anything that you hear in the sonic examples that follow and sound them out through the mouthpiece of your own voice in the space that you're in.

### [00:01:55] FINDING ONE'S VOICE

**Deelee Dubé:** In my own lived experience as a vocal jazz artist and songwriter, I have been on a journey to discover my roots and lineage. My voice, passion and purpose in music has served as a grounding force towards engaging with core themes in discovering my patrilineal and cultural heritage. I feel that the jazz artform has a cellular embedding within my DNA and is therefore expressed in my performative delivery and artistic expression. In finding my voice I have unearthed a stronger connection to my artistic and cultural belonging and the jazz artform became an integral element in my voice.

This sonic association is an experience of deep revelations through the jazz idiom which allows me to recover and understand my ancestral past whilst embracing my own emerging vocality. It has opened a pathway to make a deeper connection with my father and to gain a stronger sense of his presence.

As a highly gifted rapper and hip-hop artist, my twin brother Sipo Dubé, otherwise known as EMCEE Flava, would often freestyle to convey and tell stories about his own lived experience. Freestyle or spitting, as it is colloquially termed is a way to describe an impromptu and spontaneous rap or word-based vocal performance which is primarily focused on an individual's experience within the moment. It is therefore often improvised and unrehearsed, and serves as a stream of consciousness through spoken word, vocabulary, timbre, rhythmic expression, and rhyme. It is a language. Most of the time, his flow, which is another colloquial term for style of performance or delivery, was based on his personal account of lived experiences, and it is an artform that requires a great deal of skill, technical proficiency, and quick-witted musicality. The professional name for these types of rappers or hip-hop artists is known as MC short for 'master of ceremonies'. During performance, an MC can freestyle on any given topic that rests on their conscience within a given moment and the experience through



listening can be extremely profound, heartfelt, humorous, or even melancholy, and this is an artform which bears significant resemblance to poetry itself.

In the following recording, George the Poet invites us in to view life through his lens and his own lived experience as a rapper-turned-poet and Cambridge alum. Here we can hear his sample based on being an artist within the music industry as a celebrated rapper, and how this clashed with his positionality as an MC and the argument based on rap being a commodity of life and survival within the community.

In listening to this recording, I am instantly drawn to George's voice as a representative of the community who continues to excel within his path. In hearing his voice, I am reminded of my late twin brother's voice, who was on a very similar trajectory as an MC and rapper. Although emotional, I somehow feel uplifted in knowing that his dreams and goals were very real, valid, and achievable, as we hear and see beautifully demonstrated by George the Poet in his ongoing accomplishments.

#### **[00:06:36 to 00:09:17] Extract from 'George the Poet Empowerment Session' (2018)**

**Deelee Dubé:** And now, please listen to the work of Akala to hear more about the profound connections between hip hop and rap cultures and other privileged cultures represented by Shakespeare in some circles, but in new ways through new voices becoming more connected to the lived experience of Black British positionality. Not only does this appeal to a more diverse audience but it brings in diverse-aged audiences.

#### **[00:09:54 to 00:13:02] Extract from 'Hip-Hop & Shakespeare? Akala at TEDx Aldeburgh' (2011)**

**Deelee Dubé:** So, as you now may well understand, jazz, hip hop, rap, spoken word and poetry are all significant cultural idioms which aim to convey and communicate a certain kind of discourse that pertains to one coherent and common theme – life. In this next short recording, the legendary American jazz pianist, Bill Evans eloquently describes the improvisatory process through his own creative lens.

#### **[00:13:46 to 00:15:45] Extract from '1970- Bill Evans, Eddie Gomez, Martin Morrel – Interview & Concert'**

**Deelee Dubé:** Now you have listened to a few examples, see if you can draw a link between any of the sounds you have just identified and the patterns and characteristics of at least two other key influential voices in your life.

If there are none that is fine. Just allow your breath to let you be present, and let your mind wander freely about the possibilities of this thought.

Take your time to think if you feel any closer overall to being able to name what it is about the quality of the spoken sounds you have identified that allows you to better understand how you listen. Do the voices you respond to best allow you to feel differently about your own voice? Do you feel that your capacity for participation in public sonic life benefits from being matched up with any of the specific kinds of resonance, volume, pace, tone, and emphasis you have identified throughout the broadcasts?

#### **[00:17:09] LISTENING EXERCISE – Re-positioned Voices**

**Jane Boston:** Please listen to the following examples of current spoken word artists in the UK. Reflect on how your listening responses are impacted when the expression of the voice is drawn from a contemporary spoken word field as opposed to one that is from another historical era. Think too about all the formalities that certain kinds of public speaking has placed on the voice in the past as well as some of the demands that the published literary field has placed on the live voice.



**Deelee Dubé:** Malika Booker is a Black British writer, poet, theatre-maker and educator. In this next recording she personifies Mars in a poem about planetary siblings.

**[00:18:03 to 00:20:00] ‘Destined to Grow Apart’ (2019) by Malika Booker, BBC Earth**

**Deelee Dubé:** Next up we have Vanessa Kisuule, who is a Bristol city poet, writer, and performer. In this upcoming recording, Vanessa speaks of her sense and lived experience of belonging and unbelonging as a Black Bristolian in the English countryside.

**[00:20:23 to 00:21:47] Extract from ‘Belonging & Un-belonging in the English Countryside (4): Vanessa Kisuule’ (2019)**

**Deelee Dubé:** Lastly, here is a poem of my own titled ‘My Violet Sky’, which was selected as part of a poetry prize and published in the *Book of Dreams* by the United Press in 2010.

**[00:22:07 to 00:23:30] ‘My Violet Sky’ by Deelee Dubé, read by the author**

**[00:23:33] INTERSECTIONAL AFFIRMATIONS**

**Deelee Dubé:** As we near the end of the decolonising broadcast, please take the time to reflect about your connective bridges or where pathways from the previous broadcasts can lead you.

Do you have any thoughts or feelings about the alliances, collaborations, and sonic worlds beyond you that will enable you to put your own voice more effectively into action?

Write seven lines of affirmation to your own voice that will serve as your mantra in going forward. But before I go into sharing my seven affirmations, I would like to quote the late, great Dr Maya Angelou, who said: ‘There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you’.

Affirmations:

1) Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

2) Ubuntu

Ubuntu (Zulu pronunciation: [ùbúnt’ù]) is a Nguni Bantu term meaning ‘humanity’. It is sometimes translated as ‘I am because we are’, or ‘humanity towards others’ (in Zulu it’s pronounced umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu).

3) ‘It always seems impossible until it is done.’ – Nelson Mandela

4) ‘Learn the rules like a pro, and break them like an artist.’ – Pablo Picasso

5) ‘You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.’ — Maya Angelou

6) ‘What you’re supposed to do when you don’t like a thing is change it.’ – Maya Angelou

7) ‘I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.’ – Maya Angelou

**[00:26:48 to 00:31:00] ‘Still We Try’ (2020), spoken word tone poem by Deelee Dubé**

**Deelee Dubé:** Thank you for taking the time to travel with us on this decolonising vocal journey.

We hope that it has provided you with some helpful space in which to consider and reflect on your voice and the voice of others, and the ways in which the voice makes a difference to your identity in a white-dominated sonic landscape.



We very much hope that the journey taken has provided you with inspiration, dreams, and passions that you can take forward in the ongoing challenge to de-centre the whiteness of sonic UK public life.

We hope that the listening and reflection on the broadcast will provide you with the tools of creative resistance in which to move forwards to ensure that the Global Majority voice is placed – rightly – at the centre of public life in the UK and beyond.

### Clips Summary

[00:06:36 to 00:09:17] Extract from 'George the Poet Empowerment Session' (2018)

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[00:22:07 to 00:23:30] 'My Violet Sky' by Deelee Dubé, read by the author

[00:26:48 to 00:31:00] 'Still We Try' (2020), spoken word tone poem by Deelee Dubé

### Works Cited

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To cite this material:

Boston, Jane; Dube, Sitandile (2022) LMYE Studio: Decolonising the Voice 7 – Re-positioned Voices and Affirmations, *Auralia.Space*, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,  
<https://doi.org/10.25389/rcssd.17259581>

