

With Opened Mouths: The Podcast

Transcript of Episode #5: Soak Black Worry in a Bath of Black Laughter

SPEAKERS

Qanita Lilla (host), Britta B. (guest)

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Hello, and welcome to *With Opened Mouths: The Podcast*. I'm your host, Qanita Lilla. This podcast runs alongside Agnes' exhibition of the same name. The show, *With Opened Mouths*, interrogates conventional museum practices. It asks if objects that originate from outside Western knowledge making systems can find their voices in new ways. In this podcast, I sit down with artists, spoken word poets, musicians and curators to discuss the expression of their practice and to find out what inspired them to open their mouths and to be heard.

[Music]

And today, I am delighted to have Britta B with us. Britta B is an award-winning artist, poet, MC, voice actor and educator. In 2021, Britta won the Toronto Arts Foundation Emerging Artist Award and was named COCA Lecturer of the Year. Her work has featured in print, in sound and onstage across North America in notable spheres such as the Art Gallery of Ontario, CBC Arts, Poetic License, the Walrus Talks, TEDx and the Stephen Lewis Foundation. As an artist educator, she facilitates artist training seminars, poetry workshops and social justice programs in partnership with organizations like JAYU, Poetry In Voice and Prologue Performing Arts. Britta also serves on the League of Canadian Poets Membership Committee for spoken word and is the interim director of Hamilton Youth Poets. Currently, Britta is preparing to defend her MFA poetry thesis at the University of Guelph in early August and is looking forward to joining the School of English and Liberal Studies at Seneca College in Toronto as a spoken word professor in the fall.

Britta, I'm totally blown away by your accomplishments. Seriously, it's amazing. And, like, by your body of work. Thank you so much for coming, all the way to your hometown and joining us today.

Britta B: Thank you for having me, Qanita.

Qanita Lilla: That's a pleasure. Let's dive straight in. I think it would be really great if you can share a piece of your work with us just so that people can get a sense.

Britta B: Yeah. Okay. So this poem is called *Black Boots*. Here we go. Snap, snap, snap.

[Finger snaps]

Said no black and broke into black boots. Loosen the strings of my black, black hoodie, pulled my head see-through. Soak black worry in a bath of black laughter tucked into, tinkered out of black turtleneck fractures. Saw the spy on the other side of the tunnel. Spat purple black paranoia over boom bap stitches. Hunch pitch black helmet hips. Black shellacked fists rolled around black cotton sheets, the T-shirts till I snatched cavities on a black satin dress. Geez. Took it off, put on black track pants and black leather gloves. Pushed my way through the dark of a long black coat's arms. Parked in front of the mirror with black wings of what little I got. I and a lot of blackish and black begin every day reentering this blacklisted grid. Black comes back. Black attracts black. Black goes with everything. Sure. But what would you give to be the blackest thing on earth?

[Finger snaps][Laughs]

Britta B: I always want fireworks to go off at the end --

Qanita Lilla: No, no, no, no, no.

Britta B: -- of the last line.

Qanita Lilla: Wow, man. Wow. The blackest thing on earth. What are you thinking about? What are your thoughts? What is in your mind?

Britta B: Yeah. So, well, actually growing up in Kingston, yeah, I was one of very few families that had black and brown skin. Growing up in Kingston, there wasn't a lot of other black or brown families to relate to and look at and be recognized by. I was used to be the only black kid in my school or in my class or in a room. And so often, I think about what it means to, like, stand out and be invisible at the same time, to not really be seen, to not really be recognized in terms of your full presence, because there are stereotypes. There's biases or biases. And yeah, with this poem, I really wanted to complicate -- not complicate, but look at the trouble of showing up in, like, your fullest self but having that pride, that inner pride that keeps the momentum, that keeps you moving, even when, you could say, adversities are against you or people's opinions, people's thoughts, people's judgments, people's discrimination or any of the -isms are thrown on to you. And so yeah, with this, I just -- I think this piece just wants to see itself in its blackness and to understand also, like, blackness isn't just one thing and to be available to that full presence.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, I really like how you use, you know, black clothes and the fact that, you know, everybody regardless of, you know, skin colour adopt some kind of --

Britta B: Yes, but, yeah, the clothes.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that is like it's a -- something readily adopted, you know, and how you transition that into, like, sharply into actually, like, being that, you know, and how that is so difficult to be accepted. And, you know, just how, like, the codes work. The fact that you

can, you know, you can wear all these black things. And, you know, they might be cool, might be elegant. You know, they're read in all these different ways if people wear them. But, like, being in the body is totally, totally different. And I think that spoken word poetry has something to do with, like, poetry being embodied. When you're speaking now, it came from deep within. Can you please explain -- it's the first, really, the first time. You're the person who's introduced me to spoken word, really. There's been a lot of -- there's a lot of traditions in Africa about pray singing, for example. And this is the closest thing that it comes to, like, pray singing. You know, and I find a lot of similarities between your work, your practice and pray singing. Could you talk to -- tell us a little bit about that.

Britta B: Yeah. I think, too, with embodiment, what it -- what is it that you as the artist can't take off? So when we think about, like, apparel or swag, armour, masks, when we think about these things we put on to show up, but what is it that you can't take off? What is the thing that you are left with when you are vulnerable but when you are generous in being able to gift yourself to people? And for me, spoken word is my way of letting others receive me because I'm able to hear my voice and control my voice. And if I'm not able to control maybe my surroundings, my environment, my company, my era, all these other things, so much of the world I can't control, my voice is something that is mine. It's my thing that I'm at least left with. It's the thing I hear when I'm alone or when I'm isolated or when I feel lonely or when I feel confused, caught up, when I feel these intense, complicated emotions. And that I'm not -- at times, when I'm most not able to use my voice, then I'm able to curate and write. Of course, writing is a part of it too because I'm curating what it is that I want to be able to express. So I think spoken word -- a lot of people show up to spoken word wanting to be able to get something off their chest or to kind of clear a cloud that's fogging their mind. And a blank page, for instance, is a place where you can begin to pour those thoughts, pour those feelings. And what's maybe really attractive about spoken word is that everyone -- a lot of people are really afraid of being in a room and having the attention, like, being able to speak in front of a roomful of people. But with spoken word, you're not just like giving a speech. You're putting some music into it. You're putting some rhythm. You're putting some motion, some body movements, facial expressions. It's theatrical. It's dramatic and dynamic. And you get to kind of stage how that expression gets to be visible, gets to be heard. It gets to be sensed by the audience. Whether they interpret it the way that you want them to or not, it's still a play and an experiment and a way of either telling a story or contributing like a piece of art to a scene or to a moment. I think of poetry in terms of moments and how you are reflecting value onto a particular moment with what you choose to say. It automatically becomes valuable. And so yeah, I think poetry and spoken word specifically is very attractive because it's a chance to use your voice as you would want to be heard and as you would choose to have it experienced.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And it's very -- it's like a very overt form. You know, it's like --

Britta B: Overt. Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. It's, like, this is what I -- which is fantastic, which makes it really evocative. You know, it's like this is me. And either accept this or not.

Britta B: Yeah. It can be the opposite too. Like, I imagine, like, overt as in you're going to take what I'm giving you. But it could be the opposite of it, too, where it's like I want to bring you in. I want to have you go introspective. Like, go inside your mind. Go inside your faculties, your ability to intelligibly decipher the language, the sound of the language, the cadence of the language. And I want you to be able to -- with where I'm going to land you or certain landscapes, parts of words or even images, I want you to be able to meet somewhere in the middle of all that tension and remedy a thought of your own and get to a thought of your own that maybe I can't tell you exactly what you need to be thinking right now or reflecting on. But you'll get there. And that's a really beautiful thing about poetry too is how you're able to gesture towards something without imposing it, without, like, really pushing somebody to see it.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. But also, it takes, like, movement on the part of your audience.

Britta B: Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: It's not -- it's not, like, you know, opening up a book of poetry and reading it and then deciding, you know -- or I'll pick it up, whatever. This is like, here I am, you know, regardless of the type of experience. But here I am, and this requires movement, you know. And I want to ask you, how did you start on this journey? Because this is a dynamic journey. And it's -- you know, it's kind of -- absolutely, it's completely activist. You know, it's activist like for the spoken word artist and for the listener. How did you arrive, like, on this journey from Kingston?

Britta B: Yeah. Growing up, I spent a good quality amount of time with my mom reading, reading and writing. And I remember the day she taught me how to spell my name. Like, that's something that will live with me, like, feeling the pen in my hand and her hand around my hand and teaching me how to draw the shapes that would create the letters to spell my name. And that, for me, was this internal, like, little switch that went off in my mind that just without knowing it full on in that moment, but looking back, I could tell myself, oh, I knew that writing would be a way for me to achieve some kind of power, some kind of magic, let's say. And growing up, my mom would spend time reading out loud with me, teaching me to pause and use my breath and be able to look at an audience and address them. So we would stand, my little brother and I, sometimes in the middle of our living room and just pretend we were kind of giving a speech, but really working on the comfort of being up at the front of a room so that if we were ever given a chance, we would never be afraid to do that. We would always have this ingrained confidence of being at the front of a room and speaking our mind. And I got really into it because of my mom, like, sharing those skills with us and spending that time with us. Then when competitions would come up, like little speech competitions at school and stuff, it would be a really easy thing for us to do because we had this quality of confidence that other kids didn't have. And regardless of what we were talking about, we had conviction. And so it made it interesting, you know, entertaining for an audience. Also, being, like, the only black kids at school, it made it doubly interesting. Like, look how confident these exotic children are. And as I grew older, I had always been writing. Writing poetry was something that started as, like, a letter to a pen pal from a very young age, because I had a best friend that I had growing up ever since I was little. But then she moved away. So I would write her letters. And then it was later in

elementary school that I found out about poetry. And when my teacher explained what poetry was, I realized that I wasn't just writing letters to my best friend, I was writing poetry. That's the way that my mind worked. And so I saw the connections from a very young age, like, 10 years old. But I didn't know about any poets, especially any poets that looked like me, that were, like, making a life out of writing poetry. And I didn't know of any poets that were performing their work. That didn't come till much later in my life when I was leaving high school and going off to university. I started to be more on YouTube because YouTube was coming out by that time. And seeing that there was places, especially in the States, where artists would mingle, get together, share poetry out loud. And there was specifically one poet that really lit my mind up. Her name is V Young. And I saw her on Def Poetry Jam on YouTube. And the way that she was, as you say, embodying moving across the stage, her stage presence, the character of her voice, the sort of music, musicality of how she was telling a story, but it was very poetic because of how expressive and lyrical it was. When I saw her do it, I was like, yo, I want to do poetry like that. And so that's sort of what I would try to mimic in the way that I would now share poems with my friends, just gathering them together and be like, "I have a poem I want to share. Let me know how you feel about it." And for a while, it was just like a friendly thing. Like, I would just share a poem in front of my friends. And then throughout university, later at university, I saw that there was, like, open mics and poetry club meets. And that's really where I would start to have a community of writers because at school, I was studying biology. I wasn't in English or theatre or anything like that. I was just a very private act for a very long time. And so once I started to see other examples, that's when it gave me permission to attempt this more staged act of -- it's not an act, but just the stage ability to perform a poem in front of an audience, in a roomful of people. Something that I wrote that came from my heart, came from my experience. And as you say, spoken word in terms of activism. For me, spoken word was the place that I could talk about the truth about, you know, dysfunction in my family. I could talk about issues I was dealing with in terms of mental health. And that's where I would be able to really understand more deeply for myself what accountability I could take for that sort of experience, but also ask the world, let's look at this together. Why is this happening to me? Why is this? Why is this violence going on? And who else is dealing with it? Why are we so ashamed to talk about it? And it really would help me to communicate to people just in a better way than any conversation ever could.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. You know, it's -- what strikes me is that you often tackle, like, difficult issues, you know. Where did you find your strength to take that on, head on? Because, like you said, it's not -- people don't, you know, gravitate towards, like, difficult issues. How did it -- like, what held you up? Were there people?

Britta B: So I think in my younger years -- no. I think even when I was young, I wouldn't look at it as strength. For me, it was how am I going to survive? And if I was going to hold it all into myself, I wouldn't survive. I wouldn't make it through. And I would harm -- I would do more harm to myself. And even though it might hurt a little bit for others, such as people in my family, for me to talk about what was happening, it would at least give me a creative way because I'm not trying to hurt people. I'm talking about something that has actually happened, to me, in my experience. I'm not trying to hurt anyone. But if it happened to hurt people along the way, it would hurt way less than what I was doing to myself if I kept it in. So I think -- I don't -- I mean,

we look at resilience. We look at strength. I don't really think I would use those words. I think it was self-preservation. I think it was a way of keeping myself together.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Yeah. I understand that totally. For myself too, it was just never -- I couldn't -- I needed something. Like, I needed something in my life, because, you know, yeah, there were just, like, obstacles and stuff that I just needed to deal with. And there was only -- I had to be creative to kind of deal with it.

Britta B: Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: But I mean, like, your -- you said your mother gave you a lot of encouragement and support. And, you know, you had a circle of friends. And then, you know, it kind of grew.

Britta B: Yeah. Both my parents actually -- like, my mom and my dad, despite -- you know, we all have flaws. We've all made maybe some serious mistakes in our life. Through all of that, both my mom and my dad have forever been encouraging of their children, myself and my brother, living life happily. And so I think by way of little things that they would do. So making sure that we had -- we would have time outside. That might seem, like, really simple, but --

Qanita Lilla: No, that's a big deal.

Britta B: It's a big deal.

Qanita Lilla: That's a big deal.

Britta B: Having time outside, making sure we had something to eat, travelling when we could, doing little road trips, going to amusement parks. We didn't have a lot. And I think now that I'm older, I can see how much living as working class, people living sometimes in poverty, like, not knowing when -- if you're going to be able to make it to the next check. I can see how much damage that does to the mind, how much pressure and stress that puts on people, many people, every day and how that can affect the quality of your life and just your own mind. And so I think when we get to a place where now we have dependents and things aren't going as well as we would hope they would be for the people we are raising and supporting and surviving, a lot of that can be expressed in ways that are more reactionary and ways that -- definitely not ways we mean to, but just in ways that want to show us that we exist.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, definitely. I mean, you know, I think most people around me growing up decided to, you know, kind of adopt quite negative strategies, you know, because they just weren't seen. They weren't seen in the world, in, you know -- as, like, poorer, as, you know, just, like, coming from tough backgrounds. But I also think that what I really love about your work is that you take those challenges. And you, you know, you kind of rocket ship them up so that you make them visible. But also, there's the sense of movement. It's not just, you know, this is where we are. And it's tough. And it's shit. And we hate it. You know, it's -- that's what I kind of want to, like, get at. What, like, propelled you? Like, what propels you?

Britta B: Yeah, I think I'm influenced by a lot in terms of teachers I've had in my life and I think maybe an innate sense of wanting to provide something for someone, somewhere. Like, not always knowing who that is or where they are. But having a sense of, like, you could get through

this better than I did. You can trust that even though you might be in a situation right now, your mindset is what's going to help you to come out on the other side of it and be maybe not always grateful that you had to go through it but at least grateful that you got through it. And you can use it as fuel to create something forward, create something moving forward. Yeah, I just imagine. You know, I don't -- I look at legacy a lot. I don't imagine legacy so much in terms of, like, blood relations, heritage and, like, family stuff. I look at it in terms of community. And so I know that if I've experienced whatever I've experienced, I know that there's at least one other person that feels the same way I do, regardless of if we have the same exact experience or not. They feel -- they feel how I felt at a particular time. Now how do I speak to them? How do I send those whispers, that voice of encouragement to keep moving? Because luckily, I had whispers. Whether I recognized them in the moment or not, I had whispers and mentors and guides in my life that were saying, "Keep going. Keep going."

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And I think, also, just, like, the power of seeing your face, you know, for a girl, little girl. It's enormous and --

Britta B: I wish I saw my face when I was young.

Qanita Lilla: Me too. I wish I saw your face when I was young, really, because it's really lonely. Like, just, like, physically lonely. And you think, you know, there's just me. This is crazy. And all --

Britta B: Hundred percent.

Qanita Lilla: And society is telling you this all the time.

Britta B: Absolutely.

Qanita Lilla: You know, like, why go that way? Why not just go this way, where everybody else is going? And it's not -- you know, for me, it wasn't just society. But it was my own family and culture and all that stuff. But to just have one, just to have, like, even one YouTube video. And you think, you know, you kind of make that connection. That is really, really powerful.

Britta B: Yeah.

>> And I think we kind of overlook, like, the very, very simple things, you know, that kind of hold us up --

Britta B: Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: -- and hold us together.

Britta B: We want to see ourselves reflected.

Qanita Lilla: Yes.

Britta B: I think we need to. Especially if you're a minority group, you don't see yourself at all. You need to see something that represents you, represents a part of you at least because that will be more motivation for understanding that there's more than one possibility of what this

outcome will be because patterns will tell you, well, if you come from a broken home, you'll end up an addict or, you know, an abuser --

Qanita Lilla: Or pregnant.

Britta B: Yeah, teen pregnancy. There's all these, like, patterns and stereotypes and that societal, I guess, tension of you had a bad environment, so you'll be a product of that bad environment. And there's less, like, humour. There's less, like, satire. And there's less, like, meaningful examples, I guess, meaningful examples of, like, what all the other infinite possibilities and options are.

Qanita Lilla: Like, infinite, infinite possibilities. And when you are -- when you're kid, you just cannot see that. You cannot see that. I just felt like, oh, my God, I just have to get away from that little environment. I just have to. I have to, because it's not possible for me to do what I need to do there, you know. And I need to kind of make, like, alternative options for myself --

Britta B: Absolutely.

Qanita Lilla: -- because it's not going to -- yeah. And at that time, I didn't see a face like yours. But I'm really interested in thinking about how you translate your lived experience into your creative process. So what does that look like physically? Where does it start? Like, how do you -- where do you get, like, the impulse?

Britta B: I mean, impulse is happening all the time. Like, that's why I always have a notebook in my purse, pen in my purse or like in my pocket, in my back pocket, because anything -- like, I get -- I guess I get triggered by, like, positively and negatively by things that I'm just sensing. And so my lived experience is very important because I have a hard time imagining things. I'm not the kind of creative that will imagine or, like, fantasize or just, like, invent a world. I'm living in whatever make-believe of this world that I have in my mind. And I am trying to process it. So-- so much of my truth is in my poetry because I'm processing it. And little by little, I'm learning how to reference and use references to things that might not be so personal to me but use references in a quality way, in a good way that will help and serve my readers or serve my audience so that they have more entry into my work. Not to make it more accessible, but just so that -- just so that the things that I'm writing are just better. Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: So who is your imagined audience?

Britta B: My imagined audience? That's tough because I think in terms of, like, vibe, my audience is, like, on a level of energy that wants to feel good, wants to feel good in a way that's not superficial and wants to rally and also be good being alone. So it's kind of like -- my audience loves to be separately together.

[Laughter]

Qanita Lilla: That's great. That's a good answer. Yeah, like, I want to talk about your role as an educator because, you know, like, just thinking about the audience and about the social role of your work. How does this, you know, especially with, like, social justice programs --

Britta B: Yeah. Teaching is a way for me to learn even deeper what it is I'm attempting to do in my work. And so when I get excited about teaching something to a group or even to a mentee, it's because I'm learning it at the same time as them. So if I were to look at, you know, my notebooks from what I was teaching last week to last year, it's very different where -- it depends on where I'm at in that time in terms of my own craft and my own process. And social justice is important throughout all of that. It's a major thread through my work because for my own personal values, I constantly think about what respect looks like and how people can exist sharing mutual respect for one another. And if I am going to be in a space, I will want to ensure that I'm respected and that people who are, you know, sharing my company also feel respected and have a sense of respect from me as well. So social justice looks different for everyone, depending on how much knowledge they have about the world and their community. But I think that with the help of social media, like, even TikTok is fascinating. But Twitter is huge. I get all my news on Twitter. And Instagram -- things like this. I think the younger generations are way more in tuned --

Qanita Lilla: And demanding.

Britta B: And demanding. Like, what is this called? They have more agency.

Qanita Lilla: Yes. Yes. And they are advocating for change, seriously. For the first time really, they mobilized, you know, in a new way.

Britta B: Yeah. They're way more aware than my group of friends were. And maybe that's also because I grew up in Kingston. Like, we didn't -- it wasn't very diverse growing up in Kingston, right? So our issues were little more just small town stuffs that would happen and not so much, like, thinking about the world and, like, what was going on. News is something you did when you got to be an adult. You don't look at the news. But social media is the news. You know exactly what's happening all the time. I think I look at social justice -- it's really important to me in everything I teach, though, because it's a way of being responsible for yourself and also for how people are impacted by you having this time on Earth.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Like, how do you see your students, like, responding to this? I mean, are they very responsive?

Britta B: Oh, yeah. The younger ones, especially, like Grade 5s and Grade 6s. They know so much. And they are so clear about their values and their morals. And they are so wonderful to listen to because it's so simple how to be here for each other. And they -- the younger ones are just so open about talking about it. They're not afraid to talk about these deep violences that are happening and how things are unfair and how we're missing the point of living in this time together. And then as we get older, I just find there's a mix of, let's say, young adults and, like, early 20s being so -- like, having a lot of energy about pushing, like, justice for a particular issue. But at the same time, because it's probably tied to so much of their personal experience, they're also being really burnt out by talking about it.

Qanita Lilla: And also just day to day, kind of --

Britta B: And the day to day.

Qanita Lilla: -- being exposed all the time.

Britta B: Hundred percent. There's, like, almost too much responsibility that they're taking. So it's like, as a mentor and as a teacher, how do we also continue the conversation on how to take care of yourself, how to make space for yourself and, you know, to also step outside of the activism a bit just so you can refuel, recharge and be able to show up fully and fight. Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: That's really important, like, that idea of, like, selfcare and teaching it to kids. It's really inspiring to hear, you know, that, yeah, the younger generation are there, like, for sure. But it's tough on them.

Britta B: It's tough on them because then, again, social media works against that. It's like, what are you doing right now? Where's the instant gratification?

Qanita Lilla: And it's always -- yeah, yeah. It's kind of like, you know, pumping them all the time.

Britta B: All the time. But that's why you have to take the tech breaks, I love my tech breaks. You also have to find ways of finding -- like, self-care can be really expensive, especially the way that our culture wants to show you self-care, you know. So now, again, like, how do the whispers work in terms of how you are good by yourself when you are alone? How you be yourself when you're by yourself and find yourself and love yourself and celebrate yourself and not, like -- not put yourself down but be gentle and be kind to yourself.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. How do you do that, Britta? Tell me. Share that fount of knowledge of me because I just --

Britta B: I journal.

Qanita Lilla: Okay.

Britta B: But I also like -- I love -- I'm -- I love burning bridges. So, like, I love, like, setting up this, like, goal in my head for things that I'm going to do for, like, let's say for a month. Like, okay, for a month, I'm not going to eat Cheezies. So now I have this goal in my head --

Qanita Lilla: Or chocolate.

Britta B: Or chocolate. And then if I break that rule, I'm like, haha.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Go easy on yourself.

Britta B: I'm like, yo, I'm doing good. I did it for two weeks. I'm happy about it. Now I'm going back, and I savour it even more.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Yeah, you've got to -- you've got to just build yourself up, you know. That's so important. Like, how do you teach that? It's so crucial. Like, how do you teach a child of colour, black child, to love themselves when so -- like, so many generations before just haven't? Like, we struggle with it.

Britta B: Right.

Qanita Lilla: Because everything is, like, against us, you know.

Britta B: Right.

Qanita Lilla: I think it's just --

Britta B: We're against us.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, we are. We are completely. And we're completely complicit. It's not as if it's this, you know, like, outside. I mean, they can't care. Like, the outside really don't. That's the problem. You know, they don't include us in an imaginary even. But I think, yeah, we definitely have to make that like a priority, definitely in various ways.

Britta B: It sounds maybe exactly what a teacher would say, but. I think if we read more and read more regularly, it doesn't have to be an everyday thing. But the more we read, the more vastly we read, the more writers of colour we read, like, I just think that that will help so much. And different genres we read. Yeah, that time.

Qanita Lilla: Yes. Yes. I get you totally. Totally. Totally. I mean, that is what saved me for sure. Like, public libraries saved me totally.

Britta B: yes. Shout out to the public libraries. Absolutely. I'd be borrowing books, and not bring them back on time. I'm happy about it. Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: No, for sure. I mean, it saved me, like, as a kid. And it was -- that was the door, like the opening to see other people's minds, you know, to realize that, like, what I see and what I experience right here and right now is limited and crazy. And everybody is crazy here. That's okay because there's a whole room full of books that helps me.

Britta B: Yes. There's a whole room full of books and worlds and universes --

Qanita Lilla: And voices.

Britta B: And voices. And that will also open up that imagination. It will open -- that will help your critical thinking because you're being shown different perspectives. You're being shown different voices and different personal traits that you can be more like or you could be less like. Like, I just think reading and that opportunity to also read with others. It's a way of doing that self-care and the community stuff at the same time. Yeah, I think we definitely -- I need to read more. I'm reading way more than I ever have. But I still need to read more and more and more.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And it's amazing. It just gives you a sense of, like, just how much. And that is just so empowering, you know, that -- and that you can be part of that conversation. And, you know --

Britta B: Yeah. It's lovely. Like, I love when I overhear people talking about books or when, you know, back in the day, when we used to ride public transit --

Qanita Lilla: No, this is my day. I'm riding public transit.

Britta B: No, I just mean because of COVID and the pandemic when we used to ride public transit. But I see people with a book in their hand. And I, like, oh, what are you reading? I like seeing the cover and the title and everything.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And you immediately know that's a certain kind of person.

Britta B: It's a certain kind of person.

Qanita Lilla: It's a certain kind of person, which is amazing.

Britta B: And then you can make recommendations. Yeah. It's so cool.

Qanita Lilla: It's awesome. You -- it's amazing. Like, your future. You're going off to be a professor of spoken word. Britta. Man, that's awesome. That is so totally awesome. I wish I could take your class.

Britta B: Yeah, me too.

Qanita Lilla: Oh, yeah.

Britta B: I'm, like, writing my course outline. I'm, like, "Damn, I want to take this class."

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Yeah. No. Geez. Yeah. Like, tell me about it. Tell me about your journey there and how you see your role.

Britta B: Yeah. I think as an artist, you're -- a lot of artists that I know, especially myself, I love living in the unstable conditions, not knowing what's going to happen, where my next job will come, the next opportunity, how much money I'll be able to make from it. Will it pay my rent? And will it pay my bills?

Qanita Lilla: I don't know if you love it.

Britta B: I love it.

Qanita Lilla: It's a bit thin, like 10 years later.

Britta B: Yeah. I love the unpredictability because it's such a surprise when things grow and things evolve. Things have -- my trajectory has always just, like, doubled every year, like more and more, little by little, but more and more every year. And so when I started thinking about I have a husband. And, you know, if we were to start a family, what sort of security can I bring to our household? I started thinking about, well, what would that look like if I'm -- if I don't have anything published yet and I just keep touring or keep performing, like, what's the thing that will hold us together? So I started thinking about, you know, publishing, but also going back to school and teaching and what -- I don't know. I don't really know if I exactly chose this route because what's funny about this particular job at Seneca is that I was hosting something earlier this year at Seneca for Black History Month. And a professor there happened to love me. And I was asked this summer if I would be interested in teaching. So it wasn't even something that I had sought after --

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, but it found you.

Britta B: But it found me for a very, like, beautiful, particular reason because it's exactly what I want to be doing. So much of my life is that. So that's why I love being open to the opportunities, the unpredictability of it, because I just want to be able to choose it myself all the time. I love what finds me. And this is another one of those -- one of those moments. It's definitely full circle, too, because -- and it's an opportunity for me to be in a room that I didn't have when I was on my spoken word journey and now curate the next person, the next artist's, the next poet's journey and their trajectory into performing and doing spoken word on a whole other level and contributing to the culture of spoken word in a whole new way. So I'm very excited about it. And who knows, like, what will happen from it. Like, you know, we're talking about, like, oh, I wish I could take this class. I literally want to take this class. And because I want to take a class, I'm like, okay. Everything I'm going to get the students to do, I'm also going to do it. You know, if there's goals that they're making, I'm going to make goals. I'm going to achieve those goals. So it really reinforces again. It helps me to learn more on a deeper level what it is I'm teaching but also reinforces how I'm also contributing to the culture of spoken word.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. That's awesome. You're going to have such a fantastic time. And they are going to love you.

Britta B: Yeah. I hope so.

Qanita Lilla: Thank you so much, Britta, man. Geez. I'm just so happy that you could come here to Kingston --

Britta B: Thank you.

Qanita Lilla: -- and join us today.

Britta B: Thank you for having me. And shout out to the 613. Shout out all my high school, my alma mater, Loyalist Collegiate, Vocational LCVI Lancers. What up? Legacy.

Qanita Lilla: Cool. Thank you so much.

Britta B: Thank you.

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Thank you for listening to *With Opened Mouth: The Podcast*. Special thanks to our guest, Britta B, for speaking with us today. This podcast is hosted and produced by myself, Dr. Qanita Lilla, and produced by Agnes Etherington Art Centre in partnership with Queen's University's campus radio station, CFRC 101.9 FM. The music is composed by Jamil 3DN and produced by Elroy "EC3" Cox III. Subscribe now so that you don't miss our next episode. You can find the podcast on Digital Agnes, CFRC's website and on podcasting platforms like Apple, Google and Spotify. We'll see you next time.

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