

With Opened Mouths Podcast

Transcript of Episode #2: The Art of Black

SPEAKERS

Qanita Lilla (host), Jameel3DN (guest)

[Music]

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

[Music]

Today, I'm excited to meet Jameel3DN. Jameel wrote the incredible music for this podcast. And when I first met him to discuss the project, I knew that I had to include him and talk with him again. Raised in Toronto's West End, Jameel3DN discovered solace through storytelling at a young age. His Jamaican background instilled in him the importance of feeling in the performance arts. It is something he has carried with him closely while making music throughout his career. What began as an outlet for jotting down the goings on of every day as a child, transitioned into poetic stanzas that unveiled the observations of life lessons of adulthood? Holding nothing back, Jameel3DN rhymes or candid spitfire tales of his experience as a black man. He takes listeners on a ride as he sheds light on the obstacles he has faced that are often tied to the colour of his skin. His last four projects was a four-part series called *Letters Form, Words Speak*. This project invites you to take a journey with him through his most trying experiences. Though he doesn't come out the other end unscathed, he is a better man for it. As a father of three kids, the emcee understands the weight of his words and uses them to share messages that encourage personal and communal elevation rather than conformity, especially within the black community. Flipping to the next chapter, Jameel3DN has faith in the path he has chosen and wants his music to be received with an open mind and a clean heart. Welcome Jameel.

[Music]

Jameel3DN: Hi, how you doing, how you doing? That sounds so beautiful [brief laughter].

Qanita Lilla: It was beautiful. That was awesome. Thank you so much for providing such an honest introduction for me.

Jameel3DN: No problem, you know.

Qanita Lilla: Okay, so I wanted to talk about this first sentence, how you discovered solace through storytelling. Can you start by giving me a background of what it was like growing up?

Jameel3DN: Yeah, no problem. Well, I'm the only boy out of three, you know, three children in my house at the time, because my father went on to have another child. And I was the middle child. So for me, you know, I would say it was difficult, because my eldest sister, she was my mother's favourite and my youngest sister was my father's favourite. So I was kind of just, you know, not only being the only boy, but feeling like nobody's favourite. You know, I was angry to be honest. You know, I felt as the boy child, you know, I should have been my father's favourite [brief laughter] as dumb as that sounds. But it never went that way for me. So early on I would act out. I would act out a lot actually, I had anger problems, had a terrible temper tantrum, not in the way, like, you know, the media kind of explains it, because, you know, in a Jamaica household, you can't be too what we call bright. You have to have manners and respect, but when I would go outside and with strangers, you know, the littlest thing would kind of set me off and I'd get in trouble. But I would say my mother saw that within myself, within me, and she tried to -- and she did actually successfully get me to understand my emotions and my feelings. And she would ask me what I know now as, you know, difficult questions, you know, as a mother with a son, you know, how I felt about my relationship with my father from like a very young age, like from six-seven years old. And I think that's what kind of started off, you know, my story, because through that I was able to understand some of my feelings, not completely because I was still a child, but, you know, through that, I started writing short stories literally about my home life. I went to Calico grade five, you know, after being kicked out of so many schools that my teacher, Mr. Daley, you know, started me off, you know, by writing short stories. So I used to have this thing called -- even though this is, you know, I can't be sued for it, but I was a kid. I used to read a lot of Jigsaw Jones books. So I had my first story ever was Jigsaw Jones, Jameel Cones [assumed spelling]. And [brief laughter] pretty much I used my home life and things that were going on in my house to write these stories. And it was a way, you know -- it was serious, but it was a little comedy. And that's how I kind of started getting out my feelings and finding peace within, you know, some of the things that were going on. And from there, it just developed into poetry. You know, and then from poetry, I went into rhyming. So a lot of times when I'm going through hard times, and I'm not understanding certain emotions, you know, I use my writing ability to find peace in my situations, whether it's a short story, a poem, or a rap or a song. You know, I write a lot of songs too that I don't sing, because I don't believe I can sing, but [brief laughter] you know what I mean?

Qanita Lilla: That is not true. That is not true. You have an amazing voice. And like in one of your emails, like in one of your emails, you actually said, you know like that you didn't want to sing. And you know, like who in heaven's name said that you could not sing? When did that happen?

Jameel3DN: From a kid, so from a child. Again, you know, I'll say this, I'm a big believer in anything we face as adults, you know, within ourselves or any struggles, I do believe it starts from childhood. You know, from a child, they would say I was talented, and I could do almost anything I put my mind to, but sing. So it's like you know, Jameel can do everything, but he can't sing [brief laughter]. And that stuck with me to be honest. To this day, I go to the studio and a lot of singers and even my engineers are like, Jameel, you can sing, you just have to like practice, you know, get a little bit more training. But even if I went to training, I couldn't take myself serious, because I feel like, I think I'm a singer and then I get too full of myself. And then I just feel like that would happen to me personally, because, you know, I don't want to get too ahead of myself, but that song specifically, it was -- like I said, I like to -- emotion is important to me and people and even just myself feeling a song, like that supersedes everything. So that's the why I did it, you know. I just turned the lights off and I kind of just, I like to, I feel like I -- I get in touch with my story and I deliver what I think is necessary.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Yeah, I wondered. I wondered like what, you know, what like inspired you? Like what -- you know, was it the subject matter? Or, you know, it just felt like really close as if it was the sound that was being bottled up for a long time and then it just -- you know, you kind of finally just opened up that bottle.

Jameel3DN: That conversation we had that day when you explained the podcast and the exhibit. And I don't want to butcher what you said, but it was along the lines of -- well, the part that was inspiring to me was, you know, the similarity between what the mass went through and what African people went through in terms of, you know, slavery. And for me, that's something that's very dear to me, because I was directly affected by that. And that's something like kind -- I don't struggle with it, but it's hard for me to understand why, because of the effects. Like I still feel the effects, you know, my children feel the effects, you know? And it sounds like, "Oh, it's so long ago, how do you feel affected?" Just that it was trauma passed down. You know, if you want to think about trauma is passed out also through DNA. So --

Qanita Lilla: And it's like it's intergenerational, you know. And if we don't talk about it, then it just gets buried, and we don't -- you know?

Jameel3DN: Exactly.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: And so yeah, so like, so for me, like I said, you inspired me, because like, it was a story that I felt I wanted to tell. Well, I didn't know I wanted to tell. So when you sparked that -- when that creativity was sparked by what you told me, I felt it, it sounded like something I thought about, you know what I mean?

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: It felt something like -- you know, a lot of times you write, you know, you're thinking about a story. That was different. Like, it was almost like spiritual maybe.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And yeah, like I got that feeling that it was there. You know, with a lot of you know, the people that I talk to, but even like that's why I knew I had to bring you back, because I got that sense that it's been there, you know, it's stuff that's been there and that needs to, you know, it needs like an outlet. So anyway, but I'll talk about the song again. I want to go back to your childhood and, you know, what were your challenges, you know, because it's -- I get a sense that it was tough. It was, it was difficult to find your voice, even though you were, you know, doing a lot of story writing, but it wasn't as easy as that, you know. It must have been really tough, like growing up as a boy, you know, having a creative outlet at all, it's unusual for, you know, boys to kind of -- to write, I think.

Jameel3DN: [Brief laughter] I would say, you know what, I never thought of it like that. When I think about it, you're right. I was probably one of the only male writers when I think about it. Like I said, I can credit my mother, because my mother -- I think first -- I think the reason why there's not a lot of boy writers, is because we're not really in touch with our emotions, you know, from young. But my mother, she made it a priority for me to understand my feelings. I think once you begin to understand your feelings, you can kind of write about it, whether it's personal or for, you know, public consumption and -- I would say that growing up, I did feel like I wasn't heard. You know, I felt like life wasn't fair to be honest. My older sister -- so this sounds terrible, honestly, and I apologize to my older sister. So my oldest sister's father, he passed away before she was born. And my father and my mother got together and then three, four years later they had me. But no, no but, but no well, my father, you know, paid a lot more attention to my oldest sister. So me knowing all the details as a kid, I always felt like, and this is very selfish of me, which like I said I apologized to my sister when I got to like 18, 19 years old. I always said like, man, this is my real dad. And real my dad loves me less than, you know, the adopted daughter. I couldn't understand as a kid. Like anything my oldest sister asked, she got. If I asked for anything, it'd be like, what do you want it for? You know, I played sports to impress my father. He never was really -- never paid attention to me. My mother was so consumed with my, you know, my sisters, because they're women, you know? And this is like; I was on the back burner for like -- honestly all my life I felt like that, to be honest, you know, in terms of my parents. So the only way I felt like people listened to me was when I did write, you know? And maybe it was a way to kind of get attention maybe I did that. I was good at it. For the first time I wrote my story, you know, everyone was like, "Oh my God, Jameel is so good." You know, but it was real for me. But my real story was good to be -- I don't know how to explain it. It was people found -- people found -- I don't know how to explain that. Even though these are my, you know, true stories and through I express myself and the way I was heard I felt, I kept on doing it because I felt like I also received the attention I didn't get at home. You know, I won awards for these things. You know what I mean? So maybe it sounds a little messed up, but as a child, you know, when you don't get -- you know, when you don't think you're -- you don't think your parents love you in the way you expect them to love you, you kind of look for it in other ways, and sometimes unhealthy ways. I'm just thankful that I picked up writing and not something else honestly, if that answers your question, I'm not sure if that answered your question [brief laughter].

Qanita Lilla: Being a man and like having like a lack of like a role model, you know, like really wanting that from your dad? How do you think this played in to like your idea of like wanting like positive reinforcement?

Jameel3DN: I think I was lucky. I think at 13 years old -- so I was expelled out of my middle school. I went to another middle school, Pierre Laporte, and there was a vice-principal there, Mr. Malabre [assumed spelling]. He kind of took me, he changed my life actually. He changed the trajectory of my life. Honestly, if it wasn't for Mr. Malabre, I would probably be a jailbird [brief laughter]. No, honestly it was a Jamaican vice-principal and most teachers saw me and didn't think nothing of me. But Mr. Malabre, you know, he saw more than like the athlete or the troubled kid, you know, he saw like potential almost. And it was in grade eight when I decided to be a better version of myself, and that I didn't have to kind of be -- I didn't have to be the person I was becoming, the bad person I was becoming, because definitely that person was bad. So the lack of role model, I would say that, you know, I was lucky to have people come in my life at certain key points to where I can always look up to somebody. As far as it not being my father, it did affect me. I think it still affects me a little bit, you know. I don't understand that story. I love my father, we're on a good -- both my mother and my father, we're on good terms, because I understand we're going to get one. But to be honest, it's still affecting me, you know? No, you can't -- you know, you only got one father, you know, and as a kid, you know, my father was like a superhero to me. And I can remember my mom kind of used to say, why do you love him so much? Or why do you look up to him like that? You know, he doesn't really do much for you. It wasn't till I was like 12, 13 years old when, you know, I think I needed some school clothes, and he didn't buy them from me. And then I did develop like a small hate for him for a short period of time. And, you know, it was like a reality check for me. And then, yeah, and then when I moved away, you know, I think -- I thank God for wisdom. Wisdom kind of showed me that, you know, regardless, you know, your parents have their own traumas and their own struggles; I guess I'm a child. I really shouldn't have -- I should consider them, but wisdom allowed me to consider their issues and what they had to go -- you know, going through. And, you know, through that, I've been able to find peace with both my parents and just accept them for, you know, who they are and what they've done for me, regardless of how, you know - - you know, if there was minimum -- I don't think it was minimum, because I'm here. I could have died or they could they could've gave me up, you know. So much things could've happened, but you know, at least they did give me 15 years where they were there for me, you know, and that's more than what a lot of other people get.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: But it had a big effect on me.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah and it sounds just -- it sounds like tough. But you know you made it out the other side really. You know, especially like during that difficult time, like adolescence, you made it, you know, out. Besides like your school teacher, who were your other inspirations? Like who did you look up to, who kind of gave you a window out of your situation?

Jameel3DN: So Mr. Malabre, he was one. That was when I was 13 years old. I would say as a kid -- so as a kid, I would say only probably Mr. Malabre as far as inspiring me. And then as an

adult, you know, I met a gentleman named Rob Thorndyke, you know, a good friend of mines. You know, always believed in me, you know, always invested in me. He also showed me like light within myself. Sorry. As a kid, there was a friend, this girl I used -- this friend I had, her name was -- I don't want to name drop her name.

[Laughter]

Qanita Lilla: Come on?

[Laughter]

Jameel3DN: I don't want to name her [brief laughter]. But my friend Holly, she met me when my mother left. My mother left to go live in Miami and my father got remarried. And so it was just me and my little sister in our house. It was government housing. And she kind of would always talk about being selfless, right. And --

Qanita Lilla: Wow.

Jameel3DN: Yeah, young, 15, 16, she was beyond her years. She always talked about being selfless. And I never really understood it, but it always interested in like yes, being selfless. And she's like, oh, you're selfless. And I'm like; I didn't even know what that meant. You know, for somebody told me I'm selfless, I don't know what that meant. I was confused. It wasn't till I was a little bit older where I started to kind of understand a lot of her conversation, but she made me see beyond myself in a weird way. I don't know how that makes -- or she made me want to see beyond myself and like, not always be fully concerned about my situation, no matter how bad it was. You know what I'm saying? I don't know how to explain it. Like, I think --

Qanita Lilla: No, I think you're explaining it perfectly. And I think that idea of a collective good kind of thinking of the bigger, greater picture is like a profound thing for like a child to communicate to another child.

Jameel3DN: Yeah. I mean, I -- -- I always say like at that specific time in my life, that was definitely a needed message, even though I didn't act on it fully then. As I got older, it became very important to me, kind of like my purpose, you know, when it comes to, you know, my people, to be honest, you know? Like I said, I always give that girl her, you know, her flowers, I try to give her a flower. There was a time that we didn't talk for a while, but you know, recently, you know, I had to, because I don't know, you never know who's going to pass away. You know, I reconnected with her and just let her know like those words and just the conversations we used to have, it was another bright spot or light in my life in a very dark time, you know? So I would say her, Mr. Malabre -- and it's funny because she's a woman, but like she really did -- some probably looked up to a little bit, you know, kind of like inspired to be like, you know spiritual-wise. And then as I got older Rob Thorndyke and then I think that's pretty much it, to be honest. You know, yeah. That's pretty much it though.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. I think, yeah, it comes through, you know, it's like really like her influence especially, it comes through. And it's interesting how like the people that we meet along the way, just shapes us and shapes who we are.

Jameel3DN: No, I agree because at 16, like she said some stuff to me about myself that today I'm looking like, yo, I don't know how she kind of knew that or saw that, you know. I don't think -- I think people don't really -- I think sometimes people can't see themselves. But to see someone in the way she saw me at such a young age where I wasn't even developed, I wasn't even near who I am today. That's like I don't know vision, foresight, I don't know [brief laughter] all of them in one, you know, so yeah, yeah, yeah.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. That's amazing. So now I want to talk a bit about like *The Art of Black*.

Jameel3DN: Yes.

Qanita Lilla: And how it came to be like your creative process, how did everything come together? Could we talk a bit about that?

Jameel3DN: Okay. So it's actually funny, because the song originally had a whole different -- the music was different at first.

Qanita Lilla: Really?

Jameel3DN: Yes, it was.

Qanita Lilla: I can't believe that.

[Laughter]

Jameel3DN: I'll send it to you. It was different. It was completely different. And I actually put my brother, not by blood, but by choice, you know, Tobias, NamedTobias, he's also a phenomenal artist in my opinion. And I got a name drop [brief laughter]. And he was singing on it at first, but the beat and just the way it felt it didn't -- I didn't fully express the way I, you know, the way I wanted it -- the way I wanted to express the feeling I got when you first inspired me. So it was telling me, I'm like, man, I can't send this to you. There's no way, you know. So that was the first day I went to the studio. It was April 7th if I recall. April 7th? No. When did I sing? Oh, beginning of April, maybe April 1st or 2nd, I think. But I'm like, you know what, I love the words, but I don't like the song. Like the words were it.

Qanita Lilla: That melody is so smooth and it's so gentle and, you know, it makes such a contrast to the words, you know, the words are really -- it's powerful, but it's more kind of thoughtful, you know. But that melody really carries it through and it makes you want to listen, you know, because it's just such -- it's so smooth. It's just such -- it's sweet. It's a sweet -- it's sweet.

Jameel3DN: Thank you. Thank you. I also was very considerate about this being a podcast, right? So I've thought about what information would be shared and how do you get listeners to kind of lock in to receive, you know, you know, this type of information, you know, because you have to pique the interest in my opinion. So I said to myself, if you're hearing my voice first or last, how do I make it memorable, you know? So the music was important. I remember you said you like the *Letter J* a lot. So at first I'm like maybe a little different, but then when I heard the different I'm like, I don't like it. Let's go back to the letter J feeling. So by that music, and then I

formed the words around that music or it's instrumental, it's a beat. I formed the words around that and I kind of just took my time. I really do believe sometimes when you rap, if you slow it down a little bit, you can digest what's being said, you know, better rather than be so caught up in what we call flow, you know what I'm saying, and you missing an opportunity to reach a listener. You know what I mean?

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: So I feel -- like I said, there was no singing even on that version. And then when the rapping was done, I'm like, man, there's still something missing. And I was like, wracking my mind. I'm like, you know, Mike, just let me sing [brief laughter]. So then I sung, you know, from the beginning to the end.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. Wow. So the singing came at the end of the process. And you thought, well, you know -- yeah, that's -- yeah. It seems like the --

Jameel3DN: That was like the glue.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah, it really seems like that. You know, I really love this like the letter of the letters of the alphabet, *Letters Form, Words Speak*. Can you talk a little bit about that, because it's a huge project and it's amazing? It's very diverse, you know, it's got so many different themes and things going on there. Can you just kind of going back to that as an inspiration for this Art of Black?

Jameel3DN: Yeah. Well, when I first started -- well, when I first got the idea for the project, you know, I'm kind of -- I'm like -- I would say I'm a visionary, you know. I try to have meaning to everything I do. Actually don't try it, that's the purpose. Everything I do has to have some kind of meaning. I was 22 years old at the time, 2012. And I was in a very complicated situation, a very stressful situation. And I just didn't understand the people around me. I didn't understand at the time why I had to go through so much. And how was I going to express all my feelings and all of my -- -- all of my journey from that point forward to where people could digest it the way I wanted them to digest it, you know, not just, I feel like complaining. I do complain in my first letters. That just make it sound like complaining, but you know, bring them through the -- bring them -- what's the word I'm looking for?

Qanita Lilla: Pain. Pain.

Jameel3DN: Pardon? Go ahead.

Qanita Lilla: Pain.

Jameel3DN: Pain. Yes. Let them understand my pain [brief laughter]. Yes, exactly. And then bring them through my evolution or let them see my evolution through the music. So I remember the first song, *Letter A*, I was sitting in my friend's basement, I'm broke, I got no money, nobody got money. And I'm thinking to myself, man, you know, I got three friends, all broke, curse word [brief laughter]. We lost hope. At nine to five, that's how I die slow. At nine to five, that's how I die slow. I can't remember. I'm tired. I can't remember the rest of the lyrics, but it was pretty much explaining my situation and just being frustrated at the -- you know, like

we're all sitting here, all broke, no hope all working nine to five, we all feel like slaves. And it's just like, where did we go from here? You know what I mean?

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: Kind of mad at my friends and mad at myself, mad at my family, mad at my girlfriend at the time. I'm just like, man; this is a big waste of time. And as for me personally, I've always had aspirations. You know, I've always said, you know what, we got to build businesses. We got to do this. We got to do that. And I felt like I always dragging people. I was always trying to push people to become more than what we were at in the moment. And at that point I was just tired.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: So, I wrote letters and then -- sorry, let me go back. Oh, I apologize. The entire project was basically a way for me to make songs using the alphabet, give it to people. And hopefully for me giving my emotion through alphabet, people can start talking about their emotions and what they've been through, because the common thing in the black community is to not talk about what you're going through, to not be transparent. I'm super, super transparent. And I feel like it's helped me. It's been its own therapy, even though I do believe people should go through therapy, I've been to therapy, I still go to therapy. Learning to express yourself and learning to be transparent about what you're going through in the moment is therapy in itself. And it would help a lot of us not to be angry all the time, like I used to be. You know, so the *Letters Form* was just my -- it was like my gift to my, to my people. Like this is exactly -- because everything in that project that I was going through, I was going through at that moment. Every single thing is true.

Qanita Lilla: Whoa.

Jameel3DN: You know, at one point letter F I questioned God. I believe in God. I was questioning God. I'm like, yo, I'm going through all these things. Where are you at [brief laughter]? You know, like where are you at? Like, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you, but it feels like you leaving me out in the dry. This is *Letter F*. *Letter G*, another song I talked about, I was talking about the mentality of the ghetto and you know, the gangster culture and the hazards of that, and wanting to be free. Like, is there a place where, you know, where dreams can last forever? You know what I mean? Like it's a range of emotion, testimonies, you know thoughts and just, yeah, I hope that answers your question. I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. No, that's awesome. I mean, I think, and I think, you know, something that you pick up again in like *The Art of Black* is the idea of the fold that black people inhabit. Like, what is this? What is the fold that you have to protect, like protect the fold? I kind of get an idea that it's kind of about like space and a safe space, but can you talk a bit about that?

Jameel3DN: All right. So I purposely -- when you sent me the questions, I purposely tried not to look at them so I can give honest answers, you know, because for me, I overthink everything,

you know. And then by the time we got through this, I would've just been giving you like a rehearsed answer. So for me the fold, you know, so that's a very good question. Like I said, that wasn't a -- that lyric was not written down. That like was a freestyle.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah.

Jameel3DN: And like I said, it came from that same place where you inspired me. So for me, the fold has always been like, you know, my people, you know, from old to young. You know, I feel like throughout history, we've done things for ourselves, you know, not all of us, but there's been particular people who've looked out for themselves and kind of didn't care about the "fold" or the rest of the people. Now, a lot of people would call them sellouts, you know, but I don't want to focus on the sellout. I don't want to focus on the mentality. You know what I'm saying? Like, when are we going to get to the place where it's not just about me, it's about us, you know? You know, for me, it's always been about us. Everything I do is for us, you know. And when I say us, you know, it goes deeper than like, you know, we have children -- yes, I have my children, you know, I love my children. But do I save my children and kill my people? You know, I feel like -- I don't know if that makes sense to you, but these are conflicts that I have with myself for my kid is its like, you have to make the hard decisions to protect the fold, to protect the people. You know, we give away a lot of us, we give a lot, we give away a lot -- we give ourselves away a lot, you know? And we don't concern ourselves of the future a lot of the times, not all of us, but you know certain people. And I just feel like, not just like the people, but the things, the culture, you know, like art, you know, like cuisine, like everything that is attached to us as a people we need to protect, because in protecting those things, we protect us. And because we didn't protect those things, we destroyed ourselves. You know what I'm saying? Obviously, we understand the history and it's not necessarily us destroying ourselves, but you get what I mean. That's my idea of the fold; you know everything pertaining to us as a people, not just the people itself.

Qanita Lilla: And then like in the -- you know, towards the end, you talk about, you know, like the worth of a sister and the worth of a brother and protecting the soul and protecting the fold, you know, and how it's kind of -- how it's bound together, how it's all bound together, like your sense of identity and your soul and your sense of belonging and all these things. And you know, I wanted to -- like earlier you sent me an email with this idea of the griot.

Jameel3DN: Griot.

Qanita Lilla: Griot, yeah, griot. Yeah.

Jameel3DN: Yes, the West African language.

Qanita Lilla: Yeah. And I wanted you just to, you know, end off by talking about that because I really -- I got a sense that, you know, there is so much of this kind of this person, this person in your writing, especially in this piece, you know, about like messages and about like history and sharing, sharing with like, you know your community about, you know, like your ideas.

Jameel3DN: Okay.

Qanita Lilla: So who is the griot?

Jameel3DN: So how I has introduced to that term, my brother NamedTobias again, he used to be a producer and he turned a rapper, but we had this project called *The Rise of the Nation* in 2011. And the last song, he said, he named the beat Griot. And I said, what does a griot mean? He goes; it's a West African word for storyteller. And I'm like, oh, that's like -- that's dope. And from then on, you know, I researched what the griots were. And the griots were pretty much like, like I said, that the people in the tribe who would pass the stories now, you know what I mean, to generations and stuff like that. And that's what I feel like I do. You know, I don't really consider myself an emcee, like in the email we were talking about our master of ceremony. I really do consider myself more of a griot, because all my music, they're all story-based, you know, they're all intentional, they're all speaking of our history, or I feel like writing about our future, you know. So for me, who the griot is like in terms of -- do you mean like who do I feel I am as a griot? Sorry, just to clarify.

Qanita Lilla: Yes.

Jameel3DN: Yeah. Okay. So that's a good question.

[Laughter]

I feel like -- -- for my generation -- I feel like -- I don't know if this answers the question, but this is the answer I do have. I feel like through my stories and through the music, I'm showing other men that it's okay to be, you know, emotional. It's okay to be in pain. It's okay to love. And at times you're going to go through heartbreak, you know, everything is not going to be okay, but, you know, keep telling your story. That's hard. That's who I feel like that's my identity as a griot, you know, just showing the full spectrum of being a black man, and sometimes a black person, you know. I don't know if that makes sense, but that's my answer [laughter].

Qanita Lilla: That's perfect. That's perfect, Jameel. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. And thank you so much for like writing this incredible song. It's just so beautiful and, yeah, it was amazing. And I'm so happy that you agreed to come and talk with me today.

Jameel3DN: Thank you for inspiring it. I promise you if we didn't have that conversation that day, and you know, you didn't share with me -- I do believe it's how you felt as well as the history of, you know, the mass, I wouldn't have never -- I don't think that song would have ever came to existence, because as a writer, as a griot, that's how I work. I need to be inspired. Something needs to be sparked within me. And I'm glad that we were able to create such an impactful song. Yeah.

Qanita Lilla: Fantastic.

Jameel3DN: So thank you very much. I appreciate you.

Qanita Lilla: Thank you, Jameel.

Jameel3DN: No problem.

Qanita Lilla: Thank you so much.

Jameel3DN: Have a wonderful day guys. Take care.

[Laughter]

[Music]

Qanita Lilla: Thank you for listening to *With Opened Mouths: the Podcast*. Special thanks to our guest Jameel3DN for speaking with us today.

The podcast is hosted by Dr Qanita Lilla and produced Agnes Etherington Art Centre in partnership with Queen's University's campus radio station, CFRC 101.9 FM. The music is composed by Jameel3DN and produced by Elroy "EC3" Cox III.

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[Music]