

## [Taking the Mic: Black British Spoken Word Poetry Since 1965](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

August 15, 2022

Location:

United Kingdom

Subject Fields:

Black History / Studies, Colonial and Post-Colonial History / Studies, Literature, Theatre & Performance History / Studies, Women's & Gender History / Studies

### **EXTENDED CALL FOR PAPERS**

#### **Taking the Mic:**

#### **Black British Spoken Word Poetry Since 1965**

*Aesthetics, Activisms, Auralities*

Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, UK.

Friday 18th November 2022

Keynote Speakers: Carolyn Cooper, Professor Emerita, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica and Jay Bernard Writer and Artist, Berlin and London

Conference Convenors: Dr Deirdre Osborne FRSA, Dr Emily Kate Timms, Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE

Conference Assistant: Shannon Navarro

#### **Deadline for Abstracts: 15th August 2022**

**\*\*\* Limited travel subsidies available for poets, activists, PhD students/ECRs and untenured academics (UK internal travel) \*\*\***

Black British\* poets have long pushed the aesthetic and sonic boundaries of performance in spoken word poetry, creating a compelling public voice for poetry. The legacy of this work both on and off the page follows diasporic routes in and out of Britain from Una Marson to James Berry, from the Caribbean Artists Movement to Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean 'Binta' Breeze, John Agard, and Roger Robinson through to the twenty-first century poets Patience Agbabi, Jay Bernard, Anthony Joseph, Raymond Antrobus, Warsan Shire, and Caleb Femi to name a few. While fashioning electrifying performance personae, Black British spoken word poets have equally claimed, redefined, or rejected the term 'performance'. In his classic essay, Kwame Dawes (2005) argued that 'the position of the black poet in Britain has become inextricably linked to notions of "performance poetry"' and that this association inhibits recognition of the fact that many poets were writing for print publication. In response Corinne Fowler (2016) reflects, "The lack of parity between so-called "page" and "stage"

poets points to a long-running, unresolved argument in Britain about what poetry is, and who it is for, an argument that reaches back to the British poetry revival of the 1960s.'

To what degree does Black British spoken word poetry offer an ongoing 'avant-garde'? From the Black People's Day of Action to #BLM, to decolonising the curriculum, spoken word poetry plays significant roles in Black activism; bears witness to contested and forgotten histories; and imagines new futures, communities, and belongings to numerous cultural lineages. To rhyme, rap, or speak of poetry performance, its lyrical forms, beats, and bars is also to invoke the voices of Black British poets and collectives across Britain's geographical breadth. From Grace Nichols's meditations on the English countryside, to the Mancunian Blackscribe Black feminist poetry collective; Khadijah Ibrahim's poetic histories of Chapelton and Harehills, and Benjamin Zephaniah's accounts of Brummagem; to Eric Ngalle Charles's negotiations with his adopted 'home' in Wales to Jackie Kay as Scotland's Makar; or Caleb Femi's testimony to North Peckham— these locales, regions, and their nations reveal the multiple genealogies of Black British spoken word poetry's performance communities.

Thus, it is timely for poets, academics, and critics alike to 'take the mic' and embark on a sustained examination of Black British spoken word poetry and the relationships that might be traced between its aesthetics, activisms, and auralities. This one-day conference combines critical and creative perspectives and invites 20-minute papers, presentations, panels and/or performances exploring any aspect of Black British spoken word poetry in performance since 1965. Such presentations may include, but are not delimited to, explorations of Black British performance aesthetics, audience interactions, performance reception, education, and engagement with creative industries.

The conference will form the basis for a special issue with a scholarly journal. **This conference is a free event with options for remote attendance.**

\* Black British indicates a scope, for ease of reference, to the work by poets of African or Caribbean descent who live(d) and/or published/performed a significant body of work in Britain, in a context of literary history.

Please email abstracts of no more than 250 words and a short biographical note (80 words)\* to: [takingthemmic2022@univie.ac.at](mailto:takingthemmic2022@univie.ac.at), follow us on twitter @PoetryOff\_Page. You can also find out more information at [www.TakingTheMic.net](http://www.TakingTheMic.net).

With best wishes,

### **Taking the Mic Conference Team**

Dr Deirdre Osborne FRSA

Dr Emily Kate Timms

Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE

Shannon Navarro

Follow us at @PoetryOff\_Page

For more information see [www.TakingtheMic.net](http://www.TakingtheMic.net)

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