Writing To Make a Difference with Joelle Taylor

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**SPEAKERS**

Joelle Taylor, Nelima Begum

**Nelima Begum**

Welcome to the Being A Writer podcast Joelle, how are you feeling this morning?

**Joelle Taylor**

I'm feeling good, actually. Thank you.

**Nelima Begum**

Great! So today we're talking about writing to make a difference and I feel like this is something that you can really speak to, and I'm excited to just get started so let's jump in and start right from the beginning. So, when did you first start writing poetry?

**Joelle Taylor**

I mean I feel like it was always sort of a part of me but what I called poetry then is not probably what the you know the traditional institutions and academic poets would call poetry, it's more like song lyrics. You know, I come from a working class background access to the arts was non existent, you know, in my community, we were all miners, or, you know, or servants, so we, you know, we cleaned up after people, we dug things out for people so there wasn't really a space much for art, per se. Well there was a library, and there was music, and punk music was really inspirational to me. There was an entire - that was a university within itself.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic, so music made a massive impact on you growing up?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah because I mean a lot of the punk poets, obviously, the, the whole genre and the whole urge, the motivation of the movement was to look at alternate ways of living, an alternate politics, you know. And so that meant that, that you might be watching someone like Crass who to, you know, who might sound quite kind of blunt and abrasive as musicians. They lead me on to people like Bodeler, they lead me on to Wilfred Owen, you know, they were always citing references, and it led a kind of, to a whole generation of working class kids being able to access art for the first time in an independent and quite exciting way.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic. So thinking back to when you were young was there, was there a particular poem or song that you listened to that just that kind of kick started everything for you?

**Joelle Taylor**

I mean there were several, I think, um, in terms of in terms of my understanding music and poetry I mean I was, this is really embarrassing, but I was really into kind of people like Don McLean and American Tapestry, and all these kind of big ballads, you know, because basically they had all the lyrics printed on the album sleeves so that's - I would listen and read at the same time and through that, you know, learned to write what were basically lyrics, you know, but then from there, it was Wilfred Owen made a huge impact and a poem called Anthem For Doomed Youth, which doesn't remain one of my favorite poems of all time, but it just introduced me to something you hadn't thought of before, you know, using rhythm in such a way and the strength of the imagery and it's unrelenting morbidity, I guess this was perfect for a punky teenager - death basically!

**Nelima Begum**

So it definitely had a huge impact on you.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, and it wasn't just the poet's I mean I'm George Orwell was a huge early impact as well just the idea of writer or poet as as social justice, you know, in terms of role models for the spoken word on the poetry scene though, there was only Jules. That's the only female poet or spoken word artist as we call them on the stage of that time. And the vast majority of people like you know John Cooper Clarke, Tiller the Stock Broker, Seething Wells, it was a very masculine energy. Yeah so, I guess... I can't even remember what you asked at the beginning of this sorry.

**Nelima Begum**

When did you first start writing poetry but it's great to hear how much of an impact it's had as you've gone along and you've kind of just recounted your entire journey.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, yeah, I mean it was so linked to, the whole scene was so linked to the music scene in those days, and that was the way that working class kids could access - and marginalised kids in different communities, you know, which meant we all met each other and suddenly we had not just ideas and things we were reading that were counter to the norm, but we were living it, you know, so poetry for me has always been about inciting change, you know, positive change, positive community-led change.

**Nelima Begum**

I like how you said that it just brought so many people from different backgrounds together, there was like a nice lived creativity that you all had in common, no matter where you came from or what your upbringing was.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, absolutely. Poetry is a bridge, you know, between people. and I think what we possessed, as, as the kind of pioneers of the spoken word scene was that poetry and the way you lived with the same thing. So you didn't live in a beautiful surroundings and write delicate poetry and publish it and, you know, thin interesting pamphlets, etc. It was you squatted and you lived together and you, you're as much an activist, an artivist in a lot of senses as much as an activist, as, as an artist, which has changed you know there's a professionalism in the scene now which I really enjoy, if I'm honest, because it leads us to kind of a career, you know, beyond sort of simply the way that we're living.

**Nelima Begum**

It's fantastic that you get to do what you love for a living.

**Joelle Taylor**

I know. I know. Yeah, well all you have to do you know, it's I tell mentor kids, and it's just remain. That's the most important thing you do as an artist is just don't stop, just keep doing what you do and remain, and try to develop as time goes on, try to learn from each other. Because, you know, I've seen as it's the last free art, in a sense, spoken word poetry. There isn't any other art form where you know an audience member can just get up before the opera and do a quick little soprano piece, or you know show their sketches at the Tate before the main artists, but it's an absolutely accepted part of our scene that if a big poet is going to be performing then open mic people will come up before them as well because it gives them a little bit more of an audience, and you know, it's, it's validating to perform with people that you respect, you know,

**Nelima Begum**

So it's inclusive as well. What was it about poetry that stood out to you as an art form, and creative outlet, and was there a moment where you transitioned into performance, or was that always part of your practice anyway?

**Joelle Taylor**

It's always been core to my practice, performance, and I think that came from the fact that I understood really early on, being a sort of teenager in my bedroom, 15, trying to send off poems and short stories and things on my old typewriter to people, that the only way for me to bypass literary gatekeepers was to literally stand up on a stage, and access the audience directly. So that always was a really huge part of what I was doing. I don't, I don't think I'm a natural performer but I've kind of learned to become one. I don't, I'm not sure if anybody's really a natural performer but you have different you know intentions and different motivations to make you get up on that stage, but essentially, it's because it creates a clear dynamic between you and the reader or the or the listener the audience.

**Nelima Begum**

I think it's very powerful that you said that you physically got up and just created a space for yourself and just stood your ground.

**Joelle Taylor**

This is a really cool part I say to kids all the time, you know, say what you want to say with the whole of your chest. Like, you know you have three minutes. Generally per poem to make an impact and when you asked earlier like what was it about poetry, It's because you can be sitting on your own, somewhere, it can be in a cafe or in your own home, and you can come across six lines and feel so, feel like you've been at the cinema, you know, poetry is such an involving, an intimate experience. And I, I say as well, that the spoken word club at its best is a very intimate experience, it might be quite loud at times, you know, and you might feel it's quite showy but when a poem, really hits somebody, there's a moment of collective understanding and a moment of collected of empathy between all people. I think that's why I'm attracted to poetry is because you need nothing but yourself. You know, and either something to write with, or the ability to memorise your words, which many poets have done you know who had difficulties with writing memorised the work. It gives you so much independence and freedom.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, it's fantastic because I feel like with spoken word and performance, sometimes it's just this electric energy that only people in the room can feel. Yeah it does feel it's intimate as you said, but it's amazing.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, it really does and it doesn't translate in the full way to film or auto radio, you know, because the thing on radio sounds like someone's apps going absolutely psychotic and hsd lost it in the actual moment in the actual event, it's a conduit for the way everybody's feeling and so it becomes this energy, not something that you throw at people for something that's created together. You know it's the it's the third script so you have your poem you have your body and then you have the energy. And these are all things you must write when you, you know, when you're in that moment on stage and think about when you're actually creating a piece of poetry.

**Nelima Begum**

Amazing So you and your poetry have been described as fearless and bold and rightfully so because you touch on some difficult topics but with this unique approach that strikes a balance between sensitivity and impact, like you're an absolute powerhouse. So what's your thought slash / process like when you're writing, and how important or not, is it to imagine potential responses from your readers and audiences?

**Joelle Taylor**

Well yeah the jury's still out on whether we write for me, I write for an audience, I don't mean I write for a physical audience it can be a reader. But I write, and it affects my work in this way, and I try not to let it but it affects my work in the way that the, the people who I really want to be able to connect with my material I'm not necessarily interested in poetry, and they're not necessarily interested in the verbal linguistics, you know, whilst I find writing the sense of pure poetry really, you know it's a joyful thing. What I've noticed is, with my newer work which is arguably better poetry doesn't go down as well because people can't instantly connect to it. So for me it's about striking a balance between giving an audience what they can understand, and what they in the moment and what they want to understand what they want to connect with and also trying to lead them to other places they haven't expected as well. Yeah, so that's what I mean, what was the rest of the question?

**Nelima Begum**

So first question was what's your thought / drafting process like and you kind of led by saying, it's, it's about giving people something that they're familiar with but also taking them somewhere new.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, it'skind of about that, I mean, obviously you're always searching for the original thought, or I am. And coming from a kind of performative spoken word background, I think of lines, you know lines, sort of assault me, and they've become, they've become something, or I might I might take a line from something else I've written, and just give myself a free right to see what happens from that. And I really enjoy doing that - I really enjoy stealing from myself. I know that sort of odd kind of process to have, but inside every poem is another poem, and you've just got to keep fishing around because what it is and what I think excites most poets, whatever, whether they're performative or whether you know performance based or whether they're publishing based what excites us all is, is to find something out about ourselves that we didn't know, we're trying to write say about fish, but this poem comes out which tells us a lot about ourselves and our journeys. But like fish, you know, poetry is really slippery, it's very slippery thing, and I'm very cautious of people who try to define it.

**Nelima Begum**

Ah, interesting so it defies labels. I was just about to ask you ,do you think poetry because I know yyou write across formats ,do you think poetry is perhaps the most experimental?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yes, I'd have to agree with you that it gives so much experimental space is allowed, I'm the commissioning editor for Outspoken Press as well and I've just commissioned five poets to produce books - they're coming out over the next year. And one of the most exciting aspects of that has been to forget performance; we've been in a pandemic and lockdown, you know the performance world has entirely changed, it's gone digital. And starting to come back now. But it meant that it's given us this intimacy with the page that perhaps we wouldn't have got, otherwise, you know, we're literally thinking about what can this page do that, we were able to do in a club for example, what does this feeling look like on the page what pattern does it make, and so I do, I think it's very experimental, I think it's a very challenging form, it's very wide very wide, you know, and it's, it's an adventure, all of it is is a massive adventure of discovery.

**Nelima Begum**

It's interesting that you mentioned the pandemic, how has that impacted you and your creative practice, and also the people that you work with, have you noticed a significant change in how you maybe approach your work?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, well certainly for me, I just received a commission to write my new collection C+nto: & Othered Poems which is out now. And this is based, it's a book that's based on butch women are masculine presenting women, dykes, in the dyke bars the underground dyke bars in the 80s and 90s of London. So it's about masculine women it's about LGBT community, it's about, you know, friendship and grief, and what, I've got my own stories about that. But normally, and what I tried to do was to, you know, dig through as many archives as I could so I did a lot of digital archives, but I wasn't able to get to any physical archives apart from Bishopsgate Institute. So I became my, my library, I became the archive, and I had to interrogate myself and a lot of the sort of stories. So the first thing that happened was it, it forced a long period of self reflection, which obviously we always try to have as writers, but there was literally no escape button for me you know and I'm quite hyper. And so it meant that all my energy had to go into a piece of paper, and it had to focus into this point, And it's created a quieter set of poems. There are a couple in there still that are very kind of epic in form and much more any, you know, most more traditionally spoken word or slam. But the main, the majority of the book is a story, you know. So that's how it changed me. I wanted to write a book that, that was one long story that was about the quiet moments as well as some of the loud things. And it said, the other significant changes have been what everybody's been through it's been the Zoom revolution. And that's really affected the way that we're able to connect with each other as artists and poets. So, we're hearing and seeing more poets than we ever have before. You know I've been in some very famous poets front rooms during the pandemic, looking over their shoulder, you know that book collection...

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic yeah it's like inside access.

**Joelle Taylor**

 - You know what I mean!

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. You get to peer into the background, going to look their furniture and stuff as well so yeah, it was interesting. You said it made you really dig deep, because I think that's, that's definitely something else that has come up quite a lot with other writers who have kind of written in to tell us that 'look this really made me sit down and focus on my writing' because as you say it's just you and the page. So when you started writing, did you write for the purpose of making change, and when and how did it become a part of the process?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, even, even as a child, because I was very fascinated by the idea of the political journalist, this is George Orwell, I don't know, even where I came across him, but I was very young, so he's kind of been a huge part of my, the way I view, art, and the way I view the purpose of poetry and the purpose of writing as a communication tool, and as a way of passing on, you know information about difficult subjects or challenging aspects of ourselves, you yeah I mean because the punk movement was so tied into social justice movements. It was a very natural thing for me to start thinking about that, because of my own background as well there were a huge number of things I wanted to be able to talk about which were taboo in the, in the 80s they're really were so I wanted to talk about child sexual abuse and the only way for me to do that or to provoke a discussion was on stage and to be really courageous and brave, which you had really had to be then to talk about these things but again it tied in with the punk aesthetic and the punk way of doing things. So yeah, it's not, it's become, you know, these were - the personal is political. And I think that the understanding my work falls into is some very personal stuff there's always a moment where it's, It's become a, it's come from a small seed that's about me that's inside me. And but it always kind of tends to look outward at the wider community as well. And I wonder if somebody once said to me, another poet, that's a very female thing to do. You know that instead of writing a book about just your experience you kind of open it up and try to include other people in the community. And I don't know if that's true or not but, um, but it's something to bear in mind though, like why, why do I need to do this, am I actually hiding or am I aiding?

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, it's definitely thought provoking. So, moving swiftly on - this leads on very nicely to the next question actually. So your poetry is very personal and tells us a lot about you and your experiences, and it feels very natural as well, even though I know you said the performing aspects of it didn't come so naturally, is it ever difficult to be vulnerable for the sake of your art?

**Joelle Taylor**

I think it's always difficult. I think it's supposed to be. That's the point, so, you know, I think about performance as the impersonation of the self. And, but I also think about it as it's not acting, it's remembering certainly in my work. You know there are times I've been on stage and I've absolutely been acting because I'm doing sort of a very difficult or very challenging piece that's challenging to me emotionally. You know, and I've done it maybe 100 times, and it's difficult for me to go back into that space but you can really tell the difference in terms of performance, the words are the same, the pattern's the same, the musicality, what I do with my body is probably the same, but the energy changes so I think it's really about, as a, as a performer, about honoring what you're talking about and returning to that moment so it feels like it flows from you, rather than it's a poem about something, you know,

**Nelima Begum**

That's really interesting. It's about finding that moment and growing from it - do you think the growth happens where it's difficult?

**Joelle Taylor**

Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it'd be interesting to see what other spoken word or other performers or other live poets think whenever I'm backstage with people I've just done Edinburgh Festival with Francesca Beard, where we headlined the Toast of The People, event, and we were as bad as each other, you know, and she's a worldwide renowned performer. We're all backstage going 'why on earth are we doing this?'. Me too. Okay, see you at the gig tomorrow, you know, so it's a sort of compulsion to get on that stage and because like I said it's the third thing, you're also writing an energy as well. Yeah. Again, I've lost what the question is I keep going off on tangents.

**Nelima Begum**

We're going from question to question it's lovely. Yeah it was is it difficult to be vulnerable for the sake of your art and you've said it's always difficult in some way...

**Joelle Taylor**

it must be, otherwise it's, it's fake, isn't it.

**Nelima Begum**

So have you ever felt blocked in any way, artistically. And how did you overcome that feeling, how do you overcome that feeling, because I imagine it carries on no matter how experienced you get?

**Joelle Taylor**

The first important thing to remember about being blocked, is that you're doing it to yourself and to ask yourself why and it certainly happened to me for over, over a decade, longer. You know I worked on a novel which ended up being 200,000 words long whilst having this sort of performance career so you'll find most performers are far more introverted, and you can both credit for, as well so when we're alone we do like really, you know, geeky long novels about weird things, but like, I think of it as page fright, you're frightened. What are you frightened of? Well I'm frightened just like stage fright, that the page gonna laugh at me, that what I write is going to be proof that I am useless because I know I am actually useless, that one of the things that happens is, the better you get as a writer, the worse you think you are, because your understanding of writing broadens. And so you doubt yourself more. At which point you start panicking and here comes, here it comes page fright. And the only way to get through it, is to write. The best advice I can give you is write just write, I cannot write today everything I write is coming out, and just carry on. Carry on. Carry on, carry on. Keep going. You know, it takes a little bit of work but just acknowledge, first of all you're scared that you're never going to be able to write - that's what's stopping you scared that you're ordinary as a writer that there's nothing you can say is brilliant. So just relieve yourself of the pressure to be brilliant.

**Nelima Begum**

Just carry on doing what you love, it will come with time, eventually,

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah this used - you used to do this without being paid, it used to be fun. So, just remember who you are, you know, and, and good luck to you all because it's a horrible thing. Yeah, it's an absolute terror, of, of succeeding.

**Nelima Begum**

Like that you've been very real, with saying that you know as you write more, the feelings do kind of kick in a lot more and get worse - is that the same with the imposter syndrome as well and just the self doubt?

**Joelle Taylor**

Possibly, I mean, again, I think it needs looking at in terms of different demographics, how we all you know respond differently. But my feeling is, the more I've understood poetry, the less I've understood it as pretty much a direct quote from what's it called Feynman the quantum physicist you know if you understand quantum physics, then you don't understand quantum physics. I think that's kind of, I feel about poetry and writing in that way. So it's not necessarily coming from a place of absolute self doubt, although yeah, that's there, it's how can you know, when you can see how brilliant the world is and how incredible writing is and how very different and varied and how many trends there are, you know, and how many themes there are that some are popular on are you trying to write to be a Booker Prize winner, are you trying to write for your community center. When you start to think about the great web of writing and poetry, how can you not feel awed in the middle, you know.

**Nelima Begum**

Absolutely, I mean writing, I feel like it's coastless and you just keep swimming, and you have to keep interrogating that feeling and your purpose.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, I mean when I was 15 I was the best writer in the world, because I, I knew nothing. It was a really great place to be.

**Nelima Begum**

Great. I know earlier you mentioned that from the start you have written to make a change, but how have you felt a sense of responsibility to do that as well?

**Joelle Taylor**

Hmm. I mean I think because of the, of the different communities I've been involved in so I founded Slambassadors National Youth Slam Championships for the Poetry Society and its whole ethos, was to take the margins and, and put them in the center of the page, you know, through the, the medium of slam poetry that energy thing I'm talking about again. And certainly, you know, for a good 17 years, count them, I was writing for a 14 year old age group, essentially, aiming 14 year old disaffected youth from the ends, facing very different issues to me. Some of them, but I you know some of the issues also resonated with me. And so yeah, I felt a responsibility to be part of that conversation and part of that dialogue, like I wouldn't get up and do a poem about being a butch dyke at a Slambassadors gig. You know what I mean, not because there aren't butch dykes in that space, but because back then it was much more about community cohesion and kind of economics and gang culture. So yeah, I felt a responsibility, you know, I don't know, it goes back to... If you feel something, trying to find, follow the thread where does it lead this, this bit of thread stuck in you follow it, where does it go or not. So just an, an instinct with that comes from the only books I read or it's coming from being female or or, you know gendered woman, or whatever, it's, it's certainly there. So yeah, I do feel a responsibility, but also joy.

**Nelima Begum**

Interesting. I like that you've touched on your work with young people because you do a lot of work with others in the form of teaching, workshopping and mentoring. How important is this as a part of your life as a writer?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, my life changed radically when I understood that I could go into schools as a poet, because it meant that I was suddenly free from, you know, trying to work an ordinary job as it were, I could just learn how to adapt my poems for different children or students or older students, and I kind of taught myself. It's a whole creative process within itself, it's an art form, you know, because you're if you're going into whole school, believe me, only three kids in the entire 12,000 students may be even vaguely interested in poetry so it, you know poetry becomes the vessel that holds it. And so the work has to become quite declamatory, it's got to be very strong and powerful, it's got to be about relevant issues, you know, and the whole workshop styles got to reflect that as well. So yeah, I think, I think it's it's vital to individual artists, to be able to lead workshops I think it's a good thing to do to go into both secondary schools and primary schools, primary schools remind you of the joy of play, something we forget when we're being commissioned to create work, because they're genuinely not interested in, in, in imagery that's all really. But you can also, I now, I don't really lead workshops in schools so much anymore I lead, you know sessions with adults, or lead master classes, or I'll go into the community and work with a particular group like a refugee group or something, and it gives you freedom, it gives you money, it gives you the ability to plan projects. So with Songs My Enemy Taught Me, I led 18 masterclasses with different groups of women from different marginalised communities, which enabled me to pass on skills I had to those communities leave them with those things and create a project out of it which led to the publication of Songs My Enemy Taught Me. And also allowed me to publish some of the women from that workshop within the book itself. So you can create projects around things. But the really important reason we do is because you're countering, a couple of 100 years worth of bad press about poetry in schools, you know, there's a reason we had a sudden sort of like outbreak of spoken word clubs and Outspoken which you know I'm the co curator and host off is now resident of the Southbank Centre, and we've, we've sold out every night, which was unheard of when I started doing this kind of thing. And part of the reason that's happening is because of poets going into schools so kids are growing up with a very different kind of poetic, in the front of their mind that I've worked with kind of really interesting poets or spoken word artists, you know, they're making links through music and poetry, and they're coming to the clubs. So I think, yeah, it's absolutely vital. And what it teaches you, obviously, the ability to focus in the what Roger Robinson calls, poetry, empathy machines. You know, so it's not just about what it does to your intellect, it's what it does to your ability, your emotional literacy, your ability to connect with others, and to parts of yourself.

**Nelima Begum**

That's really powerful that you able to engage with so many different people but also provide them with the tools to kind of approach it on their own and have their own creative safehaven and it's fantastic because everyone's got a different voice and a different story to sell.

**Joelle Taylor**

And, yeah, it's a vital thing to do. And in fact, after songs mainly me taught me I went back to those communities and took three of the women who'd done really really well, you know, in the workshops and who were really kind of motivated by them one of the women was from the criminal justice system, an ex offender one of the women was recovering from mental health issues, and the third one was a refugee from Syria who was also a refugee from Afghanistan. And they made films I mentioned them for a year I taught them how to lead their own workshops so they could do that within their communities, and they made films of one, one each of their poems or paintings or films that had like a really small bursary of a couple of 100 quid. But they've all really like blossomed as a consequence, you know, so it's just the, again we're back to physics, basic physics, don't go somewhere, don't take something without leaving something behind, something important, you know, and I think it's our duty, those of us who do have platforms to try and you know make passageways for other people to get on them and, and to use them.

**Nelima Begum**

Absolutely. So you're also a playwright and an author, we've spoken a lot about poetry. How do you feel the writing processes for these formats vary from poetry?

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah. Well I've been writing The Night Alphabet now since 2018. I am very optimistic. My optimistic estimation to my publisher, I was like, I will have this down in a year. And she was like, take your time. So, yeah exactly three years later, and I've just, I've written, basically it's a book of short stories that are interconnected linked together by one main story and I know what the main story is, but I've got a bit of page fright so every time I try to write the kind of the holding narrative, it just feels so labored and clunky and bit Hollyoaks, you know, 'hey, how were you?' So I'm now for the third time going to try. I started yesterday just occurred to me the way I should write it, so I'm going to follow that thread for a bit and hopefully someone will come out, but it's length, the ability to focus on one idea for an incredibly long period of time without going in.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, oh gosh I know!

**Joelle Taylor**

You have, you know authors have minds like steel traps, there's, and also walls covered in Post-it notes, you know, and I've got, I don't have any other novelist, but you've got, like, notes, you will never ever understand again. They only made sense in a short period of time. So there's that. Play writing. Again, you know I'm returning to it with my new book C+unto & Othered Poems, and we've decided to make it into a spoken word theatre show so using, you know sections of the bathrooms choreography, music, etc, to try and we were previewing it in November at the Albany in London, and with the intention to develop as a full piece towards the end of 2022 to go on the road with it, if, if there were any roads left. But, um, so with the original plays I wrote what was frustrating to me is I'd write a play and then it will take so long before it would go on the stage, you know sometimes, yes a full year. And then it would be intense for a short period of time. And so I started performing the more poetic pieces from my plays on stage and that's really, you know the basis of my current career is taking bits of plays and putting them on stage to get longevity. Yeah. And I tell people I mentor as well that you know, it's not separate things, poetry, your novel, your plays. You can use the same ideas like Kay Tempest did really successfully, you can bounce. You know, he can tell the idea as a poem, you can tell it as an opera, you can tell it as a film. You know just keep playing around these different ideas. Yeah, but for me it's time. The time it takes for everything.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, I mean some novels and things are brewing for about 10 years.

**Joelle Taylor**

Oh my god, it took me at least that to write Horror Stories, and then the rewrites I was asked to do on it were just so fundamentally huge. And I tried, but eventually I just like locked my bottom drawer. It's still there, but my you know...

**Nelima Begum**

I love how you say there's no wrong move and that all writing enriches. It's a, it's a great way to look at it.

**Joelle Taylor**

Yeah, I mean, it ties in with activism, doesn't it by any means possible do we get our message across. Right. Writing is communication. So, you know the under, there's an argument within poetry that you don't really get in other art forms. Is it too accessible? What do you mean?! I mean, people can understand it too well what I'm often asked to go on panels which are basically asking if people like me should be able to understand poetry, and you think, well, I'm in the room so it can be complex and sophisticated, you know, and accessible.

**Nelima Begum**

So for anyone who is writing because they want to make a change, what advice can you share about, you know, when to know how they've succeeded, and how do we know that what we write has made an impact?

**Joelle Taylor**

Well, I mean, do we. So, after the monitor, the barometer is the live event. Right, okay, you know, so we have a great tradition you try out a poem in front of an audience. The first time you read something is generally while you're reading it. So you're not really involved in your own poem as much as you're going to be as time goes on when you fully inhabit it. But that's a really great way of gauging response to something. I mean, how do you know if it's changed anything, it changed someone, if you were being really honest, and if you were really interrogating yourself and you wrote the best piece you could, whether it's in a book, or it's experienced in the live arena or recorded. And how do you gauge that it's the tiny change within someone. Very rarely do we get to tell people how they affected us. It's very, very rare. You know, because it can be just something so tiny, where somebody begins to be, you know, understand, the more complex ideas within an issue, but more importantly I think what it does is give a sense of solidarity to people affected by those things. So if you really want to see an impact and say you're writing about Palestine. Well then contact some organisations, first ask yourself why and what you've got to add to that, what your voice is bringing into this moment, if you're not actually in Palestine. But what could you do to help promote ideas within it. And it's a really complicated issue, you know, because certainly as white people, there is, you're colonising other people's trauma...

**Nelima Begum**

And lived experiences.

**Joelle Taylor**

Exactly, whereas the right thing to do is to is to promote other people. So think about ways you can do that, you know, rather than marching on in - there has to be something that is real that connects you to that moment in some kind of a way to get a kind of poetry. What do I call it? Sorry, poetry, reportage. I just call it poetry repartee and was really really wrong

**Nelima Begum**

That is such an interesting way of looking at this as well. Not just, you know, going in and assigning your identity to it but rather taking time to understand the experiences of others...

**Joelle Taylor**

Their experiences are central, you know, so, if I was writing a poem about being, I wanted to write into Black Lives Matter, a particular assault on somebody. I would find that I couldn't do that because it's, it's too far away from my particular trauma but I can write about violence, I can write what it feels like to be overpowered by an institution, right, what it feels like to be ignored, or you know, erased. So that's the way you approach that poem.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, absolutely. And on the topic of meaning, when people read your work and listen to you recite your poetry, what's the main thing you want them to feel, or take away from experience?

**Joelle Taylor**

I want them to feel inspired. You know you're going through a journey, a cathartic journey, certainly the spoken word pieces, but it's, it's rabble rousing in a sense, certainly the live event, it's that feeling of, of, of collectivity, community, but also intimacy. The poem hits different people in slightly different ricocheted tangents. So, yeah, to be inspired, to be motivated, to want to write...

**Nelima Begum**

Beautiful, and if your writing is a window to you as a person, what would you want people to know about you?

**Joelle Taylor**

Such a difficult question. I guess that I mean it.

**Nelima Begum**

So, sincerity.

**Joelle Taylor**

Sincerity, that's the word. Yeah, yeah, although sincerity to me always sounds a bit insincere, you know, maybe it's just the sound of the word. But yeah...

**Nelima Begum**

It's authentically you?

**Joelle Taylor**

Oh that's the word. Yeah, it's as honest and as authentic as I can be. And we're not authentic or honest, as humans, but you know, part of the archaeology of writing is digging down to those moments.

**Nelima Begum**

Such a powerful point to finish on. Now we're trying something different with season two where we end the episode with some quickfire questions so with these ones don't think, just speak the first thing that comes to you. What are you currently working on?

**Joelle Taylor**

The live show of C+unto: And Othered Stories which is going on in November at the Albany.

**Nelima Begum**

What's your favorite poem that you've written? And I know it's like asking a parent to pick their favorite child!

**Joelle Taylor**

Oh, Songs My Enemy Taught Me, about child abuse because it's first time I named it.

**Nelima Begum**

What's one poem that you find yourself always turning back to?

**Joelle Taylor**

I got so many at the moment it is Mumtaz and Mary's, Glory Be To The Gang Gang Gang.

**Nelima Begum**

Beautiful. What gets you in the zone to write?

**Joelle Taylor**

Textbooks weirdly, textbook ideas that I can argue with.

**Nelima Begum**

Interesting. What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever been given?

**Joelle Taylor**

Write.

**Nelima Begum**

Short and sweet. Fantastic. And what writing advice would you give to others?

**Joelle Taylor**

Read and write, read, and just follow your pen. Follow your pen, it knows where it's going.

**Nelima Begum**

Useful, thank you so much for joining us Joelle, this has been such a bold and powerful and insightful conversation and I can't wait for everyone else to hear it.

**Joelle Taylor**

Thank you, Nelima Thank you.