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# CAMEo

## CUTS #11

Words and Black Music

JACQUELINE SPRINGER

## CAMEo CUTS

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# WORDS AND BLACK MUSIC

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In this edition of CAMEo Cuts we interview the broadcast journalist Jacqueline Springer about her long career as a writer, presenter, consultant and curator of black music and black popular culture. From her earliest attempts to break into the media, through to her current roles making music programmes and documentaries for radio, and curating her own media platform *Contemporary Black Music Culture*, we explore the changing nature of media work and the problems faced in establishing a presence and voice for black culture in the UK media landscape.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacqueline Springer is a London-based broadcast music journalist, university lecturer, and event curator. She began her media career in print, in the 1990s, writing for a number of specialist music titles as well as lifestyle publications, broadsheet newspapers, international music imprints and music-related websites. She was then employed by the BBC as a Senior Broadcast Journalist in radio, working in entertainment news, variously for Radio 1, 1xtra, The World Service and 6Music and contributed to output on BBC Radio 4, 5live and television (BBC Four, BBC2, BBC News Channel). Jacqueline continues to contribute regularly to BBC television and radio arts and news programming and arts festivals. She is a co-founder of fashion, culture and identity studies event curation duo *Union Black* (London College of Fashion, British Library, the Victoria & Albert Museum) where the relationship between music, sartorial style, race and cultural identities are explored via bespoke commissions. Under her registered trademark of '*Contemporary Black Music Culture*' (for more details see <https://www.jacqueline-springer.com/about>) Jacqueline continues to create, curate and present diverse artistic works exploring intersections of race, culture and musical expression.

# WORDS AND BLACK MUSIC

**CAMEo's Mark Banks interviewed Jacqueline in London in summer 2019; this is an abbreviated extract from that interview.**

**MB:** Who inspired you to the extent that you wanted to communicate your thoughts about music?

**JS:** The whole 'thing' with me and music journalism was that I was never going to stick with it. I was pursuing it because I wanted proof - and by proof I mean approval - that I was good enough to write. If I got that approval - and for me that would be measurable by publication - I could say, 'okay, your work is good enough, so now go and write scripts.' Then I could send some scripts in to BBC Two and everything would be fantastic. I used music journalism to prove something. It was never a case of reading (absorbing) music journalism to get *into* music journalism. I was always reading. I'd read [authors'] work and I *knew* I wanted to write because I'd finish the sentence before I finished reading the sentence. I'd finish the sentence in my *head*. If I got it right it made me feel 'I think just like Judy Blume! I think like John Steinbeck!' Which of course I don't, but that action made me feel like I was having sort of communion with them, a creative communion.

I knew from about the age of seven that I wanted to write. Between seven and maybe 21, I knew what I wanted to do. And then once I got to 21 I got hit with: 'but am I good enough to...?'

**MB:** So tell us a bit about your education then. So you'd got to 21, had you been to university?

**JS:** No, I hadn't gone to university. I went to Uxbridge College after attending a different college the year before in Harrow. I studied Journalism at Uxbridge in a module included in

the Editorial Assistant's course I was enrolled in. I have always been very practical. I did a course in secretarial and office management prior to that because I knew sexism and job boundaries would always exist - where people didn't want to write their own letters. I figured I would temp and that would help me fund my writing. The Editorial Assistant's course had slivers of creativity embedded in it which appealed to me; the creative components seemed to exist to reward my practical outlook.

**MB:** Did you have a sense of what kind of journalism you wanted to do?

**JS:** No, I didn't.

**MB:** So what were your plans then in that time?

**JS:** I followed through with the secretarial temping - I went to lots of agencies and got really good at all of their typewriting speed tests - I was knocking out 60 to 70 words plus per minute, so I was getting booked. But I didn't like the instability of being a temp and so I took a permanent job in London's financial market. It was stupid money there. But I began to feel trapped by the allure of the money. I was like: 'you're sticking here for the bonuses'. And so I thought, I have to get out. So I left, deciding I *had* to get into media. Media is where my all of my creative interests reside.

I went into television research, working for a company that helped to calculate viewing figures and after that for a large-scale advertising company and then one of the big five accounting firms. All of these jobs were in

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support roles – if it wasn't THE creative job I wanted (which was not office-bound), then I would work in a well-paid environment and that would *fund* my creativity.

When I was working for the television research company I attended a gig – Incognito at the Jazz Café – and wrote my thoughts on it and decided to approach a music magazine with the 'review' I'd written. I decided, 'I'm going to take it to them and ask, '... is this good enough? [for publication]'

**MB:** Take it to who, sorry?

**JS:** *Blues and Soul* magazine. The editor said it was good enough, but that he'd already commissioned a review. He invited me to cover an upcoming gig. It was as easy as that. I started doing more and more gig reviews for them.

**MB:** So how did you become to be interested in music writing, particularly? Was it just something you were trying along with other things?

**JS:** Music was a part of my life - it was something that was ever-present, so I could write about it because I had an opinion on it. When I was 13 I'd entered a competition in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper for their 'Young Journalist of the Year' competition. I was runner-up. I wrote a fictitious interview with Michael Jackson and I won a typewriter.

When I was writing for *Blues & Soul*, I wasn't writing about the *culture*, it was all very descriptive, it was all very basic. But I knew I *could* write in different contexts, in different realms. The reviews could be a bit passionless, but they could also be highly perceptive. And so the development of an ambition emerged: I've done all of these gigs, I now want to interview that artist. I don't want to do gigs anymore, I

want to do a *feature*; I want to do the cover. That's exactly what happened. And I want to write for THAT title. And maybe THAT title, too.

**MB:** Well, tell me a bit more about that process then.

**JS:** The editor at *Blues and Soul* was very, very amenable and at the time I didn't question it. I didn't want to ask him too many questions like, 'Are you sure? Are you sure you want *me* to cover *that*?' My confidence grew so I'd pre-emptively suggest features and reviews to *him*. These pitches were, obviously, based on my own interests, but now and again I'd receive a call beyond my expectations. You always wanted a cover. To have the cover was to be entrusted with an interview – researching it, executing it – that would carry that issue on the shop shelves. YOU, your writing was considered good enough to sell a complete issue.

My first cover was Carleen Anderson and I burst into tears when I saw it. Because Carleen Anderson is an emotively articulate woman and, on balance, she was a perfect subject for what a cover at that time meant to me. Admittedly, I overworked the piece, but I framed that edition. I have several, important, *Blues and Soul* covers framed because they were moments for me of the journey of writing and of music and creative development. It's less of the brag on a wall, more a visual reminder of 'look... do you *remember* this? Them? Them and you?'

**MB:** So having walked into the editor's office... Why do you feel they accepted you or they gave you a chance?

**JS:** I think they just wanted more hands on the deck. I don't think they actually paid for reviews, but you got the tickets free, which made you popular with your friends. They didn't have an enormous staff and they were

primarily competing with *Echoes* so there was an emerging awareness of camp [publication] loyalty despite the scene creating friendships and creative partnerships. Loyalty was rewarded with more work, more opportunities.

Eventually you started to see that you were part of a black music journalistic community - I'm talking about *Hip Hop Connection*, *Echoes*, *Touch* magazine. We were not in the same sales figures league as the *NME* or *The Face*. But we felt, and I stand by it, we *felt* that we knew our shit. We *absolutely* knew our shit.

**MB:** Just put a date on this for us. So early 90s, mid 90s?

**JS:** This was mid to late 90s.

**MB:** Late 90s.

**JS:** I started writing for *Blues and Soul* around 95, 96. And working for them helped me. I felt it provided me with a creative purpose while I was still developing my creative confidence and outlook. I was ravenously reading other magazines which constantly reminded me that I needed to up my game.

**MB:** Presumably, you had writing skill already; otherwise, you wouldn't have been taken on. But were you learning how to write as you were doing the job?

**JS:** Yes. But I felt that I was learning and making mistakes publicly and measuring myself against other people's craft— musicians *and* writers.

**MB:** Did they start to pay you?

**JS:** Yes. Oh yes, features were paid. You got £25 for a cover story.

**MB:** Which would have taken you how long to write?

**JS:** Oh, it's the transcription that kills you. That's what really started to kill my love of music journalism. I *hated* transcription. And I remember being asked to do a double-page spread on Jamiroquai. I absolutely loved that band. But I knew interviewing Jason Kay was going to absolutely kill me, because he can TALK.

I'm unsure how long, in memory, that would've taken to write, but it would have been a lot less in duration than transcribing the interview. One of the joys of transcription is, of course, that while you're doing it you can 'see' and 'hear' the article forming: a particular statement shows itself to be THE best anchor for the opener; something strong screams that it's the conclusion. You know where, narratively you will interject to summarise details on releases, to explore descriptions of how the music *sounds*, to confront known issues relating to the subject, insert their response.

*Blues & Soul* had very little spare revenue. It was part of the black British music cottage industry. It was starved of advertising because of the existing way in which race and advertising function in the mainstream media and it was competing, as mentioned, with *Echoes* for the small pot afforded to record labels to promote black music within the structure of the British mainstream. At one point I was so broke I asked if my invoice could be settled in cash. This was approved, but I knew I needed to be paid more.

**MB:** So what happened?

**JS:** I carried on writing for them and then I started doing more for other titles. Style magazines, newspapers... you start the '... am I good enough' process all over again. There was also a new magazine called *TRUE*...

**MB:** What was that?

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**JS:** *TRUE* was a style magazine. Very much like *Dazed and Confused*, based in the same building as *Dazed and Confused* [a warehouse in Old Street]. But it was a black music focused magazine. And the photography in there was just delicious. They had a *fantastic* shot of Method Man smoking that became a poster. Everything had a bold, confident, ‘why NOT?’ approach to their field of vision. The editor, Claude Grunitzky was hyper-busy, but dedicated and inspirational. Their transatlantic view of black music was inescapable.

They sent me to the States to interview Vernon Reid – the co-founder of Living Colour – he cried during my interview because we had the time and space to really explore music and meaning and expression. The depth of what making music meant to him. And as with Carleen Anderson, I felt I was making connections with people who musically and creatively I respected.

I was working with people who had the budget, unlike *Blues and Soul*, and it wasn’t *Blues and Soul*’s fault, but *TRUE* had the budget to commission photo shoots or a photo spread that would actually elevate attraction and attention to the words. This was a period of indulgent spending on American black music: millions of dollars on videos. *TRUE*’s timing with a visually sumptuous magazine with a broad vision couldn’t have been better. When I went to the States to interview Vernon Reid, I actually felt like I was a music journalist.

**MB:** Your moment of recognition.

**JS:** Yes, because I really understood, I felt I understood, that it was a privilege to be entrusted with that understanding. I wasn’t going to squander it. I was going to get further understanding *with* the subject. With

confidence growing, I approached American magazines. I was published in *Vibe*, twice, on Roni Size and DJ Rap. That meant a great deal. Each leap, each feat meant a tremendous deal.

You develop contacts in the music industry itself and some labels would ask you to write the biographies to accompany single or album releases due for release to the press. You knew you had a captive audience, but a *different* audience in this context. Writing for specialist magazines provided its own pressures because you were speaking to a highly knowledgeable, sub-culturally aware reader demographic. Writing bios for the labels meant that peers as well as editorial staffers *and* possible title editors would be reading your work if they were sent the product by the labels. You could then reference that when approaching them. It showed, like a cover story, that you were trusted. It was another, editorially expressive, opportunity to show your skill.

**MB:** So did you feel you were being taken seriously or did you feel you had to prove yourself more than the men or were you not really thinking about it?

**JS:** I wasn’t thinking about that because I knew that *I* was taking it seriously. In terms of being taken seriously as a woman, it came to a head at *Blues and Soul* when I was called a ‘bitch’ for not doing more work than I’d been paid for and also being accused of wanting to interview an artist because I ‘fancied him’. I was like, ‘well, this is where it ends. You’re not going to talk to me like that and then have me still work for you.’ That was it. I never called back.

**MB:** So you didn’t go back to *Blues and Soul*?

**JS:** No. I’m not going to be in a peculiar relationship like that! I remember thinking that throughout life you take what you possess with

you. My ability to write is *within* me, so I walked away *with* that. I still *have* that.

**MB:** So where did you go, or what you were you running in parallel?

**JS:** Well, I was already writing for *Touch* magazine. I was writing for *TRUE*. And then I approached *Elle* and I did a small feature for them. I also submitted something on Gabrielle to *The Guardian*. When you do that just once you end up thinking, oh, it's opened the door. It doesn't always. But the idea that it *does* drives you on.

**MB:** So you really, you're doing all the work yourself, all the legwork?

**JS:** Yes. It's tiring. But everyone else is, too.

**MB:** Were you making a living doing that or were you doing other things?

**JS:** I was still doing the admin work. By this point I was working in advertising but I'd worked there because it was a part-time job. The two worlds weren't bleeding into one another. They were separate. I could organise my interviews, transcribing and writing. There was balance. But it still wasn't enough!

**MB:** So you had parallel things going?

**JS:** Yes, I always have duality in employment. Even now. I don't believe in one job. It's never enough. I also don't trust my creative happiness in one field, space or the hands of someone else.

**MB:** So you started as a writer but what you do now is not writing as such, but broadcast journalism and university lecturing.

**JS:** Yes.

**MB:** But that didn't happen overnight?

**JS:** No. I fell into it. The BBC finally acknowledged that black music existed as an entity and the News Editor at Radio 1 contacted me because he was going to be heading up the news output for the BBC's then new black music station, 1Xtra.

Prior to that, I knew Trevor Nelson from the music scene and he'd invited me to come on and talk on his radio show, which I did.

**MB:** What show would that have been at the time?

**JS:** I don't know the name of it, possibly Rhythm Nation. He was Radio 1's R&B DJ.

**MB:** Is this on Radio 1 or 1Xtra?

**JS:** With Trevor, that was on Radio 1. 1Xtra didn't exist at this point. He and I get on really well and I try and make him laugh by being quite vulgar. But we have great conversations about music - he comes from a side of music, pirate radio, that I still find immensely interesting - the bravery of breaking the law to give us sound. We meet, discursively, in the middle and have a ball discussing the beauty, banality and everything of black music.

The editor sent me an email asking me whether I heard of 1Xtra, and I hadn't, it didn't exist at this point, but there were rumblings around it apparently. He asked if I was interested in doing music journalism for radio. I'd never thought of that - making a lateral move from print to broadcast.

As matters stood, this came up just after I'd left another part-time job as editor of *NMESoul* for IPC Media. They'd decided to create web portals for rap, soul, pop to complement their published output on the *NME*. It worked for a while, but myself and other editors of those portals were made redundant. So the

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timing was perfect. I'd placed some black music in the pages of *NME* magazine while working as editor of the soul portal: a feature on a soul singer called Bilal, I'd reviewed R Kelly at Madison Square Garden, but I didn't revolutionise coverage of black music there by any means. They were never going to fully embrace it as that was not, historically, what their reader demographic wanted. I'd written and commissioned sly, witty critical and informative reviews on *NMESoul* but it was all over as quickly as it had began.

At 1xtra – which I began working at after a short stint online at Radio 1 - myself and all the other recruits went through a lot of training. There were a lot of young people in news, in the on-air and production crew. It boasted a really good atmosphere.

**MB:** So what kind of work did it involve?

**JS:** [Mainly] doing news summaries before moving into Entertainment News coverage. It was great *and* terrible because radio is exhausting. When I later worked on attachment for the Caribbean Service I became more aware of the links between the print journalism and the broadcast journalism I'd been undertaking... that the histories of music(s) and of their cultures were starting to take shape through the pathways I'd followed... that I needed to now change direction again in order to pull *from* these resources, to lean in on what it was I'd been learning.

My Caribbean Service editor, I once watched broadcast on air. They played a clip she'd introduced and she calculated (while it played), space for her to add another comment that wasn't scripted after it, to cue up another clip and then come out of *that* clip and do a sign-off. She was script-editing and backtiming

live. I looked at her in awe and I just thought: 'I can't do that and I don't want to do that.' That doesn't drive me in the same way. But it's a stunning skill. That and other things clarified what I wanted to do: create ideas for programmes that expand understanding of black music and its related cultures. She saw this in me. She introduced me to a senior at the BBC World Service. We got on fantastically. He recommended I freelanced on some of their arts programming. I did. And I worked on a couple of music documentaries, one for the World Service on the rapper Tupac and another when I returned from attachment to 1xtra on Marvin Gaye's legacy on post hip hop soul musicality.

**MB:** So you were able to do creative, generative things?

**JS:** Yes.

**MB:** So 1Xtra was a kind of training, a good training?

**JS:** Yes, they had good training. The BBC is not perfect at all, but I do have a desire to continue to have my work on there. Not only because they're one of the only people asking me to, but also because there are organisations that are listening in that need to hear the truth about black music.

**MB:** Well, we'll come back to that one later. But just from a biographical point of view, let's have a recap. So this is...

**JS:** Oh, this is the early to mid 2000s.

**MB:** So it's quite an exciting time because 1Xtra is supposedly mainstreaming black music.

**JS:** We weren't trying to be mainstream.

**MB:** Or at least generate an audience.

**JS:** It was having everyone *catch up* with what was happening. 1xtra was ‘the home of new black music’.

**MB:** So how long were you doing this for?

**JS:** It felt like 14 years, but it wasn’t, it was just a couple of years.

**MB:** But did you go back to writing?

**JS:** I wasn’t doing *any* writing at this time because this was such a sea change for me, radio broadcasting. And then I started to think about what opportunities I could get and make for myself.

**MB:** But you loved words, you love reading, you love writing, but it sounds like you’re leaving it behind a bit.

**JS:** Yes, I was.

**MB:** Why was that?

**JS:** Working at a radio station meant that I was not listening to music for my own pleasure. I was listening to it as part of my, then, full-time job. It wasn’t music I’d discover and unfurl and consider and dissect naturally. It was music selected and played out in the office via the station’s playlist *all* day. When I got home I didn’t want to hear any music, I just wanted to think. Working in a radio station disrupted my natural relationship with music because it professionalised it, it wasn’t instinctive, it wasn’t creative. How music came to me was not the natural way it had before then. Of course not. I was working for a disseminator. I eventually left 1xtra for another BBC music station before leaving the BBC.

**MB:** So what year was that?

**JS:** 2008. It was when I was just about to leave that I rang the University of Westminster and

asked them whether they needed somebody who specialises in contemporary black music. The man who answered said, ‘Funny you should mention that, yes, we’ve got these tutorials we’d like someone with specialist music knowledge to help with.’ So I went to meet him for an interview and I got a job – as a part-time Visiting Lecturer.



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It was while I was working at the BBC, following that realisation at the Caribbean Service about the strands of past work coming together, that I started working (at home) on something to unite the journalism and my expanding interest in the cultural examination of music.

I created an umbrella reference under which I still work called *Contemporary Black Music Culture*. I trademarked the name. Commissioned a logo and website and sought to unite the two fields through my broadcast work and, later event curation. I approached other educational institutions to examine music’s relationship with fashion – and through that met my co-partner for *another* brand I co-created called Union Black. He and I have been commissioned by the British Library, the V&A and others

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to mount events on black music and fashion that extend the expectation of coverage in this area. Essentially, it was about uniting and professionalising my freelance output and taking it forward into new areas. Talking about music with musicians. Looking at the underbelly of music. Pushing myself and this agenda forward. I wanted to lecture on this to bind it together academically.

But no-one was interested in the UK. So I approached American universities and I was invited to visit to lecture. Berklee College of Music – educational home to Duke Ellington and Quincy Jones - Purdue University. Suffolk University in Boston. NYU. This inspired me to then approach – much later – British universities. I made content for broadcast *during* my lectures. My lectures are *always* illustrated with content to provide context of the time period, of the musical impact. Of course, after lecturing in the States, UK universities and institutions were more amenable, but I didn't want to lecture professionally about music full-time. I didn't want what had happened to me and music working full-time in radio to happen again with me and music in education. So I guest lectured and eventually at a place I visited as a guest lecturer, I was invited to rewrite one of their undergraduate courses with a view to teaching it. I did and a year after submitting the draft syllabus it was approved by home campus in the States and months after *that* I began teaching a media undergraduate course. I now teach two courses there – at Syracuse University, one on media and one on black British music, and another two at Fordham. Both are US study abroad universities here in the UK.

One of the first things I did under CBMC was a series of lectures on black music and cinema for the British Film Institute in 2005. One of the

most public was serve as producer's friend on the BBC News Channel when Michael Jackson died. There's always variety in the work, but it's always wedded to music, culture and meaning.

**MB:** So *Contemporary Black Music Culture* is a way then of, actually say of bringing all of your activities into one kind of house?

**JS:** Yes, it was bringing the past together, my past knowledge. I think I was subconsciously honouring what I'd done in the past, not letting it fall away because I knew that I'd let writing fall away before.

**MB:** Had you fallen out at all with writing or did you just not want to write anymore?

**JS:** I just didn't have time. I didn't have the mental space.

**MB:** Or did you just feel there was too many other things that you were trying to cram in?

**JS:** Yes, and I didn't feel I had time. I didn't feel I could hear who I was. Once I'd entered education, the only time I'd hear my 'writing voice' was when I read back the feedback I'd write for my students. Work took me away or I allowed it to take me away.

**MB:** So creating *Contemporary Black Music Culture*, what would you call it, a kind of brand or...?

**JS:** Yes, it sounds really lame, my brand.

**MB:** Or let's call it vehicle.

**JS:** Yes, my Škoda.

**MB:** Your Škoda. Was it partly a way of getting back in touch with your voice, in a way, or was it about consolidating?

**JS:** I think it was both of those things and I also think it was a case of ring-fencing it. When

you're in broadcast media it's very competitive but your final output doesn't belong to you. It belongs to the broadcaster. When it comes to that which you create as a freelancer – in writing, in lectures, via event curation, for me you share it, you don't give it away. You absolutely don't give it away. There's an essence of gift-giving in this exchange, but I still feel I own whatever it is I share. The insight. The route outlined.

**MB:** So in the way that your career as a journalist has developed, it's really a consolidation of what you've always been doing really, which is things in parallel, different kinds of work.

**JS:** Yes.

**MB:** As your own career has developed, one thing I'm interested in is how you, maybe this is always part of your thoughts and your writing and your inspiration, how your own politics came to shape the kind of work you took on or undertook or accepted? Both in writing but then in broadcast journalism and since really, since you had the *Contemporary Black Music Culture* to work under. Were you always conscious that race, culture, music were all wrapped up in one another?

**JS:** Yes. I think the best way to answer that is to actually weirdly use an example that doesn't use race at all. Dolly Parton once said that she didn't know she was poor until someone told her. So you don't know that anything's quote wrong, so you're getting on with it. Why do you dance like that? Why's your hair like that? All of this inquiry comes from the external. I never questioned loving a bassline. I never even questioned feeling an obligation, a desire, to learn the words to *Rapper's Delight*, I just knew that I had to do it because it was part of my

identity. Talking about how the external world impacts on the musical arts, on the quality of life IS to talk about black music.

I think there needs to be more honesty in the programme commissioning process because if there were it will then impact on the quality of the output. I feel both as a black woman and talking about black music, that I mount a defence almost every time I discuss black music. I'm *expected* to mount a defence because the mainstream have cultivated an arrangement where some musical genres like reggae, rap and grime have to be understood by being accused or excused. I believe if somebody [white] goes on the *Today* programme or on an arts programme to talk about music they're invariably not asked to justify what a person from the genre they specialise in commenting upon has done. If I go on it is framed around an embraced presumption that 'X' genre is predisposed to 'X' kind of misconduct and to mount my commentary from a standpoint of working *from* that presumption *and* discussing the issue that had me invited in the first place. I'm supposed to defend black people in a way that white journalists are not to defend white artists. So you can have all the memorials about Ian Curtis, but rarely do journalists consider the fact that he was a racist, because he connects to people emotionally. We can talk about Morrissey being a racist, but then Nick Cave will write an open letter and downplay Morrissey's racism as 'inanities.'

There's a double-standard concerning the over-interrogation mounted from an imperialist standpoint about what and how black people should express themselves and an unwilling lack of interrogation regarding 'home' cultures, beliefs and musical freedoms. The beauty and the basis of my work is knowing that difference. Working

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from the point of difference. That's what keeps me interested, really. And gets me angry.

**MB:** But as you say, that was an expectation, an imposed expectation or requirement of a largely white broadcast or journalist mainstream music industry...

**JS:** Behemoth, yes.

**MB:** Where you're called to account for other black people's actions or you're called to account for a whole genre in fact.

**JS:** What's interesting is that rap, it broadly came into being about '73. Most people acknowledge it from '79. Either way it's a middle-aged genre. Rap is treated as if it's just arrived and so it's discussed as if it's just arrived. So it's a case of, 'well, for our listeners who may not know', why the fuck don't they know? Rap is everywhere. Rap is selling Marks and Spencer's food. It's selling TUI holidays. There's a sense that if you're not into rap you're not obligated to understand it. But you are expected to understand classical music. You should know all about Brit Pop because you're from Britain, aren't you? There's a lazy expectation that every time you come in, you *reintroduce* people to the culture that they are actually living in the midst of.

**MB:** But the assumption is that they're absent or removed from it?

**JS:** Yes, that they need reintroduction and within that reintroduction you have to bring them up to speed *and* discuss the issue at hand. And remember, in radio especially... we've got four minutes on this. It's a beautiful challenge, but it's also... you're only called on to talk about black music when black music does something that the white mainstream think is exceptional or reprehensible. So Kendrick Lamar getting

the Pulitzer, exceptional. Unknown T yesterday, arrested for murder, reprehensible. I was called by a very popular breakfast radio show to come on and talk about the fact that in one of her concerts Beyoncé's hair got caught in one of the huge on-stage fans. And I was like, 'Well, why?' 'Oh, you know'. No. Now, if that was, I don't know, Adele, would that be funny? Why is that funny? Is that journalism?

**MB:** To finish, I suppose I just want you talk a little bit about why is it important to continue to do the work that you do and for others to do it, I guess?

**JS:** Because black music is an extension of black identity. I'm black, I love black music. Black music talks about the joy of existing with other people, not just black people. But it also, depending upon the genre, talks about the racialised identity that is unique because of the way in which history and contemporary societies in the West were set up and operate and consequently, how we're viewed and treated in lieu of that history and within the modern function of Western society.

It's an absolute joy to listen to a song and understand elements of the world, whether it's just the exchange of love or the tyranny of oppression, and then to make, I was going to say an article, but I don't write! - but to make something of it.

**MB:** To make something.

**JS:** Yes, to have a discussion about it. To create. So yesterday was emotional because I went to voice the links for the documentary I've made. I haven't made it, somebody's produced it with me, on the Country and Western singer, Charley Pride. And that documentary has been in my head for nearly ten years. It's 27 minutes long. He's 85 years old. He was the biggest selling

black Country and Western artist in the 1970s on the RCA label.

It's the way in which 10-year-old me, listening to a [Charley Pride] album, makes something manifest from those memories in 2019. I voiced the links for it. It's words. But they really mattered. I think words are just... words matter. Words matter.





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