



**WRITE**

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**DIY ISSUE**

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SO SMALL  
WE CAN HOLD  
ONTO IT  
FOREVER



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AN IDEA CAN  
BE AS SMALL  
AS A SEED



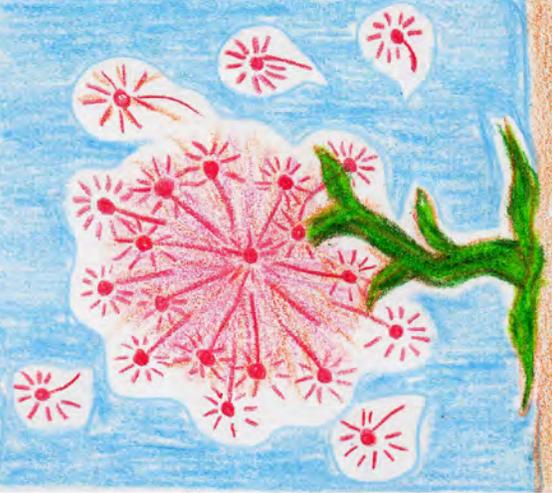
1

BUT IF WE  
LET IT TAKE  
ROOT,



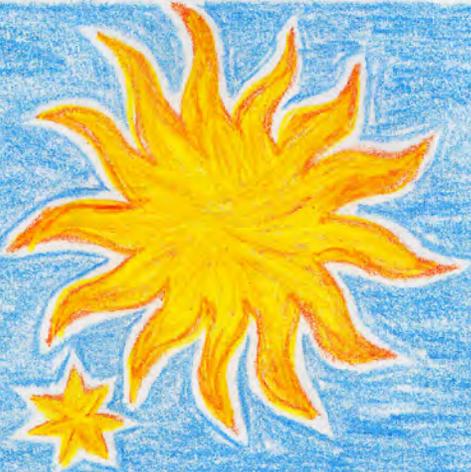
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AND SEND IT  
WHERE IT NEEDS  
TO GO



8

GIVE IT LIGHT,



4

IT CAN MAKE A  
LIFE OF ITS  
OWN



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POUR OUR BELIEF  
INTO IT,



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IT CAN GROW  
INTO SOMETHING  
BEAUTIFUL



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## FRONT COVER ZINE TRANSFORMATION

**Andrés Garzon Espitia** has designed a special DIY cover. Follow these instructions to transform the front cover into a zine:

1. Tear off the front cover of the magazine;
2. Fold in half, horizontally, to create page creases;
3. Cut along the dotted line;
4. Fold in half again, horizontally to create creases; unfold;
5. Fold in half, vertically, with the numbered pages 2-5 facing you;
6. Pop out the middle like an accordion;
7. Fold flat, with page 1 as the front cover, and flip through.

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# Poetry and Film: a fruitful marriage

BY DWAYNE MORGAN



It's nothing new: the marriage between poetry and film. Back in 2000, Quebec's Heather Haley founded the Visible Verse Festival to showcase poetry onscreen. Now, over two decades later, through spoken-word performers and writers well-versed in the art of performance, this marriage continues to flourish in new and exciting ways.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating for many artists. Not being able to get in front of live audiences, creatives from all genres saw the need for an online presence, and many spoken word artists found themselves busier than usual with online performance and presentation requests. Versed in performance, they sought out opportunities to create work using new visual mediums to explore their creativity and generate new audiences.

"Spoken word poetry is a multi-dimensional experience. The artist engages audiences through visuals, sound, and layers of meaning. New worlds are conjured, the fantastical becomes reality where metaphor and deeper insight add purpose to the performance," says Ian Keteku, a former World Poetry Slam Champion.

*Dreams in Vantablack*, a 12-part series streaming on CBC Gem, is Keteku's brainchild. He worked with Black teens to create spoken-word poems, which were then animated. This was not Keteku's first foray into animation, but it represented a great opportunity to showcase new voices through a medium usually hard to access.

"Animation is not bound by the borders of physics or what we deem to be 'real.' In this way, animation and spoken word can complement each other in wonderful ways. Each drawing out the poetic and rule-breaking aesthetics of either art form," Keteku says.

For Titilope Sonuga, Poet Laureate of Edmonton, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two mediums. "When I write, I'm translating the pictures in my head and attempting to animate them on the page. Working in a visual medium feels like the gift of returning poems to their most natural, dynamic state. Film gives my work the freedom to move through the world in more expansive ways."

Emerging poet and filmmaker Affrica has taken things further with the creation of Voetry an annual series of spoken-word short films that she self-produces and showcases on YouTube. Each year, Affrica seeks out new voices and stories that she can film for the series.

"I've personally been in awe of how the two artforms can lend to each other. In a way it feels natural to me. Spoken word in particular with all its theatrics, rhythm, play on words — it's the essence of performance, and film can lend to that," she says.

With more poems appearing on film, there is a great opportunity for writers to expand their audiences, as many film festivals around the world are programming short films. The opportunity, however, isn't just via the medium but is also subject-specific. There are film festivals dealing primarily with mental health, race, identity, etc., and having a poetry video that speaks to a specific narrative increases one's chances of being selected and having the opportunity to have more eyes on your work.

In the world of the spoken word, the question is how well you can lift your words off the page and have them dance in the minds of your listeners? Exploring film creates yet another avenue for artists to choreograph an experience they want their audience to engage with.

Whether on YouTube, social media, or at film festivals, there is a growing audience consuming visual poetry, creating new opportunities for writers and filmmakers to collaborate and have their work travel beyond their immediate location.

With increasing opportunities and access to filming technology becoming more affordable, it is safe to say that this marriage is likely to continue blossoming and evolving for years to come.

*Dwayne Morgan began his career in the spoken word in 1993. Affectionately called "the Godfather of Canadian spoken word" by his peers, Morgan is the author of 14 published and 10 audio collections of his work. Morgan is a 2022 winner of the Toronto Arts Foundation Celebration of Cultural Life award, 2016 finalist for the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Arts, and a 2013 inductee into the Scarborough Walk of Fame. To date, Morgan has shared his work in 18 countries internationally.*

# Start Your Own Reading Series

BY GREG FRANKSON



By the time the fourth person told me that they loved being able to experience Black Canadian poetry in the suburban community of Ajax instead of having to go all the way to downtown Toronto, I knew I was in trouble.

It was June 2022, and we had just concluded a poetry showcase to promote *AfriCANthology: Perspectives of Black Canadian Poets* (Renaissance Press). As its editor, I had gone through an arduous yet fulfilling process to get the book into print and was going with contributors to as many places as possible to amplify the voices in its pages.

This stop, at a deconsecrated church-turned-community-arts-centre in the heart of historic Pickering Village, was significantly different than the others. The audience — energized, engaged, appreciative, and predominantly Black — had more than the anthology on their minds. That night they claimed the St. Francis Centre as hallowed cultural space that honoured, respected, and lionized their culture.

And once the claim was made, they wanted to renew it on an ongoing basis.

**“Starting a reading series is often daunting, but seeing a clear need and knowing you are in a unique position to fill it has motivated many a person to create one.”**

The town of Ajax, in the Greater Toronto Area’s easternmost regional municipality of Durham, is the nation’s Blackest town. According to the 2021 census, one in six Ajax residents is Black, and there are about 66,000 Black people overall in Durham. This is an astonishing level of diversity that speaks to Toronto’s reputation

as one of the most multicultural places on earth. However, a dearth of cultural activity that caters to the Black community has created a need in the region that desperately needed to be filled.

This is why I knew I was in trouble. Starting a reading series is often daunting, but seeing a clear need and knowing you are in a unique position to fill it has motivated many a person to create one. In this case, the need was one that is cropping up more and more frequently: How can ethnocultural suburban populations that typically must go to the core of the neighbouring big city to get any kind of culturally relevant experiences get their fix closer to home?

First, test the idea to gauge interest levels. The *AfriCANthology* showcase demonstrated that there was enough demand to sustain a reading series. Next, look to the local community for allies and partners. Ajax Public Library was the presenter of the showcase, and after seeing the response from patrons, they eagerly signed on to help. Finally, be patient. People don’t expect this kind of programming in the suburbs. It may take some time before it catches fire.

These efforts are now bearing fruit. A year later, BlackLit Durham is a thriving series that takes place every other month and highlights the voices of Black Canadian writers in all genres.

To learn more, visit [Blacklitdurham.com](http://Blacklitdurham.com).

*A. Gregory (Greg) Frankson, is an award-winning poet, author and essayist, public speaker, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism subject matter expert. His writings have been published in four poetry collections, six anthologies, and numerous literary and journalistic publications. He is the artistic director for the Canadian Black Literary Festival and a fellow at the Public Imagination Network. Greg’s first creative nonfiction work, Alphabet Soup, will be published by Dundurn Press in summer 2024.*

# Thinking of recording your own audiobook? Proceed with caution.

BY KELLEY JO BURKE



I am sitting inside a motley tent of blankets, sheets, and towels nailed, suspended, and draped about my bedroom closet. It is July in the Prairies, and the summer air is another blanket, slowly robbing me of cognition. The heat coming off the microphone, computer, and lamp in the tent adds to the temperature rise and what feels like my IQ plummeting. My producer, web-camming from a desktop across town, has a very unflattering view of my backside — but less-revealing clothing is not an option if I'm going to get through this without passing out. I wish I had stored my mukluks somewhere else. Or at least cleaned them. There are a lot of dogs in my neighborhood. The muks seem to have acquired a “Memories of Dog Butt” scent before they got thrown to the back.

“Can you take that back to the top of the page?” comes through my headphones.

“What's wrong?”

“You're thirsty. We can hear your spit clicking.”

Ah, the glamorous world of audiobooks.

I am voicing *Wreck: a very anxious memoir* (Radiant Press, 2021) — i.e., recording a reading of my own book for audio release. In addition to being a professional audiobook narrator, I have decades of experience as a CBC radio arts host/producer voicing the writing of others as well as my own documentaries. I've also hosted a weekly show — work that was done in a lovely, climate-controlled studio with proper lighting and a booth on the other side of soundproof glass. But this is independent audiobook production. I'm lucky to have a closet. A colleague had to record an entire book under her duvet.

With my background, I was the clear choice for this job. But despite years of work as an audio professional, I had told the publisher was willing to do it for free.

That didn't happen — I did get paid. But why did I offer? The same reason many writers offer to voice their own books. They know what it sounds like in their heads. They know that is the only way it *should* sound. And they dread their work going out into the world, sounding wrong. I get that. And as a 20-year audio producer, four times out of five, I would hire an actor to read your book instead.

## “The narrator becomes an intimate third party in the literary relationship.”

### The intimacy of audio

Audio art is tricky. Print is invited into the eyes. You read. Your imagination enters into a pas de deux with the text to create images, speech, scenes in your mind. Indeed, a complete version of the book that is only yours. But with an audiobook, the narrator becomes an intimate third party in the literary relationship. The tens of thousands of interpretive decisions made by a narrator over the course of reading a book aloud can enhance or ruin that intimacy.

There are skills needed before presuming to get that intimate with those who want to hear your book. That you wrote the book can be one of those skills. And yet, it may also not be enough.

Heather Brown is a digital audio producer and narration instructor, and for those who grew up on CBC Radio's *Morningside*, an audio literature icon. I asked her if an author should or should not narrate their own work. She said that all things being equal, having the author narrate, especially first-person work like memoir, can be ideal.

“The writer does tend to know their own work best, the tone of the piece, the nuances, and the driving reason behind why they wrote it in the first place. And we want to hear things from the horse's mouth. It offers an authenticity that we crave.”

However, Brown says that while every writer has the right to ask to audition to narrate their book, a lack of any professional training in turning prose into lucid, connected spoken performance — delivered in a voice that is both confident and easy on the ear — can offset the value of that authenticity.

“They have to be able to perform it for the ear. The sound of the author’s voice may be either monotone or ‘sing songy.’ Sometimes authors have unfortunate audible artifacts in their voice (too nasal/clicky/monotone). Sometimes that can be corrected with practice, but if they cannot do this, then I would go to a professional.”

John Kennedy, co-founder and co-publisher of Radiant Press, the only indie in Western Canada which releases audio versions of *all* their books, is blunter: “Most writers should not voice their own work. Writing and reading are two entirely different skills.”

The most important skill for me (and it is more a quality than a skill) is being extroverted. Not “life of the party” extroverted, but having a mind that figures out what it knows as it speaks. This quality of discovering story as it is rendered is sort of the secret sauce of great narrators.

Then there is vocal training of some sort, mouth strength and flexibility, breath management and relaxation, understanding how to time for emphasis and tension, being able to represent different characters, even doing accent work.

### **Go ahead and audition, but be prepared to not get the gig**

Caleb Stull, Penguin Random House’s technical director for audiobooks, really wants folks to know that no one should feel discouraged from *offering* to read their own work. “If an author wants to read, we will try to make that happen. Who reads is a collaborative decision.” But “actors come with a wider and more diverse set of tools. They’re trained in finding the emotional resonances in dialogue and characterizations and the different layers that can be excavated from the text, all the while centering the words and the writer’s intentions. Actors can also perform consistently for hours at a time, something us common folk can struggle with.”

And, Stull adds, voice actors have the additional awareness of the technical aspects of narrating. “An untrained narrator won’t be practised in delivering while motionless, not swallowing or inhaling at awkward times, or hearing when they’ve slightly flubbed a word or phrase.”

Brown, Kennedy, and Stull all stress that if writers want to audition and they have no previous mic experience, they might want some training.

“Get some voice coaching. Take a workshop on mic technique. Good workshops are available free on YouTube and online through places like ACX (the Audiobook Creation Exchange, Audible’s publishing service). The video resources for (ACX) are all by industry workhorses.

For a fee, several other credible organizations offer mic technique classes and audiobook narration classes,” Brown says. “Then (writers should) record themselves, even if it’s just on their phone. Listen back *without* following the text. Get used to the sound of their voice so they can get past the ‘Is that what I sound like?’ and move on to ‘Did that make sense?’ ‘Was it too fast?’ or ‘Was there emphasis on the wrong part of the idea?’ Get someone they trust to listen to the segment and answer those questions as well.”

And know your form, adds Kennedy: “Listen to other audiobooks. Find a narrator you like and ask yourself what you liked about the performance. Practise, practise, practise. Send it to the publisher, and dare them to find someone better. Good for you, either way.”

If the gig is got, then the tech questions kick in. If you are fortunate enough to publish with a company like Penguin, the technical aspects of recording your own audiobook are looked after. Someone like Caleb Stull will put you in a studio, arrange a studio-to-studio link with Penguin, hire a director to walk you through the narration, record and edit the read, and upload the reading to the sites where the publisher sells audiobooks as well as to library systems. But if you are working with a house that does not have a dedicated audio arm, you may find yourself in a closet, hoping your sweat doesn’t short out your mic.

Even in that case, which is where I usually find myself, you should still have a producer who collects the sound, gives you feedback during the narration, and edits and processes the raw tape for you. I own a good microphone because I’m a sound geek. Not everyone is — and so a producer may have to ship gear to you and walk you through setting it up where you plan to record.

For my home, which comes with a busy street, noisy backyard, three dogs, multiple house members and, in the winter, forced air heat that makes my office sound like the inside of a 747, the closet and many many blankets were the only choice at the time for getting a recording without overwhelming ambient noise. But the good news is that audio technology has come so far in *two years* that I am no longer kept in the closet and get to work well away from footwear.

### **“Remarkable” technical advances**

Sean Prpick was for many years with CBC Radio, and is now, with his daughter Zoe Beaulieu-Prpick, an audiobook producer for a number of publishers, including mine.

He says, “In the last five years or so... I’ve seen some remarkable advances. Hardware makers and software writers want to be part of the boom in home audiobook and podcast production — and tools that used to cost

## “Audiobook narration should not be an unpaid grind.”

thousands and thousands of dollars now cost hundreds, sometimes less. What this means is that within some limits we can make any room in a house a recording studio.”

And the post-production software is also eerily good. This means recording with an independent producer, or, if you have the technical chops (say a background in podcasting, music producing or radio) recording yourself, does not have to produce amateur-sounding results. And despite my offer to voice my book for free, it should not be an unpaid grind.

“You’re... helping create another edition of the book from scratch, after all — and should be compensated for this extra work. ACTRA, the Canadian performers’ union, has agreements in place with major Canadian publishers that guarantees a Per Finished Hour (PFH) rate,” Prpick says.

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COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE

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He adds, “If the final version of your audiobook is 10 hours long; each hour is considered a finished hour. But it takes more like three hours of studio work to get that hour. ACTRA requires that narrators covered by their agreement should get \$266 PFH.” But with much smaller publishers and independent producers recording in home studios, there is no such agreement. “Still ACTRA says in these situations the narrator should never earn less \$309 for the entire book.”

So, you can make more money, while guarding your work, not only through the narration fee, but by registering as the narrator with Public Lending Right. Hands up: who wouldn’t mind a plumper annual PLR cheque?

However, unless you are coming in with some serious performance chops, and serious resilience, it may not be a sustainable way to make money. The last 300-page book I voiced took me seven days to record. I had to do eight different character voices. By the end of the week, my well-trained throat was raw, and my tongue chewed up. Plus, the job itself may be disappearing. “AI is depressingly close to disrupting this sector, so don’t spend too much on the training. We’ll all be listening to our AI overlords reciting stories to us before long,” says Radiant’s John Kennedy.

But if you are that rare writer who is also a verbal storyteller, if you’ve auditioned and gotten the gig, and you have either the tech expertise or are being technically supported by your publishing house, narrating your own work can be a wonderful, art-filled experience, and an opportunity to relearn your writing’s lessons.

“I’ve had authors exclaim to me, after a marathon couple of days of reading their own work, that they wished they had incorporated reading aloud earlier,” Caleb Stull says, “and that they learned much about their own work in giving it voice.”

So that might be worth seven days in a closet.

*Kelley Jo Burke is an award-winning playwright, creative nonfiction writer and documentarian, editor, professor, and for many years a CBC radio host. Narrating audiobooks is her favorite side hustle. Her latest book is Wreck: a very anxious memoir (Radiant Press, 2021), and her latest play is The Curst (world premiere, Dancing Sky theater, 2023). FMI check her website at bigocean.ca.*