WRITERS MOSAIC

Dean Atta

In Conversation with Del Jessop

> 'Two Black Boys in Paradise. / They won't be here forever, / maybe just as long as this poem. / These two Black boys in paradise. / Two Black boys: can you see them?'
>
> — Dean Atta

[Music]

Presenter: This is *WritersMosaic, In Conversation*. Del Jessop talks to Dean Atta about making the stop motion animation of his poem, 'Two Black Boys in Paradise'.

[Music]

Del Jessop (DJ): I have the pleasure of being joined by poet, writer, and filmmaker, Dean Atta. Dean, how are you doing today?

Dean Atta (DA): I'm doing really good. I'm feeling—what's the right word for how I'm feeling? I'm feeling grateful.

DJ: Yeah?

DA: I think there are a lot of amazing things happening in my life right now, and I'm just trying to remember to take stock of that and to be grateful for that and recognise it and not just be like a hamster on a wheel, just running, running, running, but actually pause and recognise each thing, and yeah, appreciate it.

DJ: Good. That sounds really positive. Amazing. Dean, today I'd like to speak to you about 'Two Black Boys in Paradise', that's what I want to focus on primarily. It's a nine-minute stop motion animation based on the poem of the same name. I wonder if it would be nice for us to start off, for our listeners and myself as well, if you wouldn't mind reading that poem out for us, so we can get a flavour and frame this conversation. Thank you.

DA: Yeah, so this poem comes from my collection, *There is (still) Love Here*, which was published by Nine Arches Press in 2022. And that's not quite as long as the animation took to make. So, the animation actually took five years to make. So, we were working on this before the book came out.

DJ: Okay.

DA: So, I was performing the poem at spoken word events. It was actually first commissioned by the Courtauld Art Gallery. I was asked to write a poem in response to a picture in their collection, which is currently at Somerset House in London. And so, I picked a portrait or not portrait, well, it depends if you think they're real, of Adam and Eve [laughs] in the Garden of Eden by Lucas Cranach the Elder. And yeah, it's a beautiful painting of Adam and Eve naked, surrounded by various animals. And yeah, it really was just striking to me. I grew up Christian, so I've always had the biblical imagery in my mind. And it comes up a lot in my writing as well. Yeah, so, with Adam and Eve, [laughs] I used to have this thing said at school. Even before I came out as gay, people would say, 'Oh, it's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve.' So, I'm kind of responding to that. I'm kind of responding to wanting to find a place for Black queer people to feel safe, and sometimes that is a place in our imaginations. So, this is 'Two Black Boys in Paradise'.

[DA reads ‘Two Black Boys in Paradise’.]

‘Two Black Boys in Paradise

They won’t be here forever,

maybe just as long as this poem.

These two Black boys in paradise.

Two Black boys: can you see them?

These two Black boys are free.

These two Black boys are happy.

Black boys are real boys.

Black boys are not just little men.

Do you believe Black boys

are real, like for real for real?

Real black boys feel.

These two black boys are a healing.

Did you poison the apple already?

Did you dig up the tree?

Are you trying to plant

these Black boys in the ground?

Did you call them apple thieves?

Did you call the police?

There are no police in paradise?

There are no white people in this paradise.

The two boys in this poem have Black boy names.

They have grown up now,

but their names still suit them.

Masculinity has not been required of them.

They are in love with each other,

and they are in love with themselves.

One kisses the other's Adam's apple.

They don't make babies.

Maybe paradise is just meant for two people at a time.

Maybe it will be two Black girls in paradise next time.

Maybe they won't have to be

boys or girls.

Maybe it will be you in paradise

with that person

you have in mind

right now.'

DJ: Thank you so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Paradise, obviously mentioned in the title and subsequently six times throughout the poem, what does that look like to you, paradise, and how has that idea of paradise changed in the time that it's taken to bring this short film together?

DA: I mean, within the film, I think paradise is depicted as, well, a—it was inspired by the Scottish Highlands. And I spent a lot of time in Scotland with my partner. So, we lived there in Glasgow for three years, but we had a campervan, so we'd go out into the Highlands quite often and swim in locks and climb mountains. So, the landscape you see is inspired by that.

But then the counter to paradise is the marketplace in the film, and that's a place where there are lots of eyes on the boys, and they're being judged or they feel judged. And that's coming from experiences I've had where I've experienced homophobia, racism, being stopped by the police, being shouted at, or even beaten when holding a pattern's hand. So, those things exist in contrast to one another. I think if the boys lived in paradise full time, would they even appreciate that it's paradise? But the fact that they go between this real world and paradise is when you really appreciate even more what paradise you have. And the paradise, I guess, we're trying to depict is when someone sees you, accepts you, loves you, and you feel safe together and there's no interruption to that safety that you have.

So, for me, in this poem and in many of my other pieces of writing, I investigate this way that sometimes whiteness or white supremacy can interrupt the joy of Black people and Black queer people. And so, that is what I'm trying to depict. And it was really interesting to work with a team that is really mixed. So, we had white people, Black people, straight people, queer people in the team. So, it meant there were a lot of conversations about the implications of what we were representing on screen and how we all had different takes on it from our own lived experience. So, yeah, paradise, when I was thinking about it, was originally inspired by the Garden of Eden.

DJ: Yeah, I wanted to speak on this.

DA: I've never been there [laughs].

DJ: Me neither.

DA: But I had a great time in the Scottish Highlands, so I said to the team, 'Can we use that as the model for paradise?' And then our wonderful designers, set builders, went about doing that. And it's been such an amazing collaborative process in that regards. So, our director, Baz Sells, and our producer, Ben Jackson, assembled an amazing team of artists and people that made this film come to life. And I got to talk with them about how I saw things, but then everyone put their own input and creativity and magic onto the film. And so, I really believe this was—is greater than the sum of its parts. We all brought our own skills and experience to it, and because we all trusted one another and collaborated in such a beautiful way, it just turned out to be beyond what I could've ever imagined. It's exceptional. And it's funny to speak that way of something you're part of, but I can't even be humble when thinking about this film because I'm just like it's so good, like objectively good [laughs].

DJ: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I wanted to, I guess, circle back to something you mentioned earlier. So, you said you used to be a Christian, and some of the imagery in this film you can see that, and I'm so happy you touched on that. The bit that got me in particular was the line, as you say in the third stanza of the poem, was: 'Do you believe Black boys / are real, like for real for real?' Now, for those who haven't seen it, obviously we've got a trailer that'll come up on WritersMosaic.org.uk, so go and watch that. But obviously, what I'll do is I'll describe it. We've got our two Black boys in what seems to be a small boat, and they're on a river. It's very idyllic, as you said, almost Eden-like. And what happens is they're looking over the edge of the boat, and you see an apple bobbing there, this luscious green apple. One of the boys reaches out, and as he goes to get that apple, his hand's pulled down into the water by a white hand. And what happens is there's a real tonal shift. And as you mentioned earlier, we end up on this cobbled street, and you've got a judge. And it feels familiar in the sense that we know there's an accusation, we're looking at these two Black boys, and it feels familiar in that sense and we know it. And what I wanted to know was why an apple.

DA: [Laughs] Okay.

DJ: Because I watched this with my wife, and we spoke about it, and she kindly reminded me that if we're looking at a Garden of Eden, forbidden fruit etcetera, forbidden fruit is not an apple. What does the apple portray? What symbolism is there?

DA: Well, before the apple I'll say, the moment you described, we had a really great Letterboxd review for it, and someone said, 'That moment is the best white hand jumpscare since *Pan's Labyrinth*.'

DJ: [Laughs] You'll take that. That's good, yeah.

DA: I thought that was amazing. So, the apple, I wanted to play with a simple metaphor that could be used in many ways, I think. So, because I was gonna use the term 'Adam's apple'. Because it was about two boys and men in that space, I was playing off this idea of masculinity. Yes, it doesn't say in the bible that it was an apple, it says it was a fruit, but for me, the red apple is very quintessentially British as well. I liked that red apple. I grew up eating that red apple, and I didn't like green apples for no good reason [laughs]. I always just thought red apples were sweeter, but I'm sure you can get sweet green apples. But yeah, apples, oranges, and bananas were my childhood fruits, and I didn't really veer beyond those. I was quite basic [laughs].

DJ: No, each to their own.

DA: But yeah, the apple and the market stalls, we went to lots of market stalls when I was younger. And I just felt the market stall was a very British thing. And when I was at school, one of my friend's mum ran a market stall, and if we'd go there, we'd get free fruit and veg, and it was really nice. But also, that idea of being accused of stealing. I hadn't had that on a market stall but so many times in shops, especially when I wore a backpack. I once had a security guard just grab my backpack that was on my back and hold me back and say, 'I need to check you,' with no probable cause. And it was a Black security guard, which made it worse for me. But in other instances, yeah, being stopped by the police, being asked why I was in a certain area, or why—I was in this park. Have you ever been in a park when they lock it up, but no one lets you know. And the police are like—or the security are like, 'Why are you here? What are you doing?' So, I've been in so many situations where I've been met with this suspicion, and I wanted to put that across.

But we had to simplify things. We couldn't show too many different versions. So, we just thought, *the apple's mentioned in the poem, and they're accused of stealing an apple,* so thinking about showing that in the most simple way on a market stall and the judge doubling up as both the stall holder and the judge himself, and then the police come

in. And yeah, just talking about the apple, stealing it, burying the boys in the ground, the Adam's apple later, that callback. I like in my poems to have one key metaphor that runs through a poem.

In the film, there are other visual metaphors that are—that come from the imagination of our director, actually. So, for example, the peacock; that's not mentioned in the poem in writing, but then the peacock becomes so essential to the storytelling visually, especially during the beautiful sex scene that you see. But I can't take credit, but I love it. It's one of my favourite moments in the film when the peacock lands on the boat and is watching the boys make love. And it's just like wow, wow. And so, the apple came from me just picking a fruit. It doesn't say what the fruit is in the bible, but I just think the apple made the most sense to me. And then just seeing then when you have a solid image, how people can run with that. The apples on all the fruits on the stalls are handmade and hand-painted by people, and that's just so lovely to see all the care that went into the making of all the props and sets and puppets. Because I think when you watch it, you can see the human touch on them all. And I think that's what's really beautiful about stop motion as well, that it's unlike any other type of animation that it's physical.

DJ: There's a specificity to it.

DA: They exist. These puppets, these props, all really exist in real life. Whereas in other animations, they're in a computer or they're flat drawings. These are all real things. We've actually had the puppets and sets exhibited. And it's really lovely when people can actually go and see them and see the scale of it all. It just makes it even more special, magical. Or maybe the magic is the fact that it is real, that they are real things, they're real artifacts, and they look—our director talks about everything looking imperfect. He didn't want straight lines or anything to be too smooth, so there's some crooked, jagged, bentness to it all, which I think really works.

DJ: You really see that in the boys' bodies as well. When they're being exhibited, you really can see it, I guess as emblematic of our bodies, that they're not completely perfect in that sense.

DA: And there are many models of the boys because in stop motion, puppets aren't usually naked, so they have clothes covering up where you move them and the joints. If you're moving them back-and-forth too much on their joints, they can split. And so, a lot of the naked puppets would split. And so, they could either be repaired, or you could just have backup versions. So, there's clothed versions of the boys and naked versions of the boys, which you needed a few of. So, it's weird to know that there's

more than one version because these look like singular people. Dula and Edan were the names we gave to the characters. The fact that there are multiples of them is uncanny and strange, but that's just the behind the magic of filmmaking. You need backups.

DJ: This is it. This is reality, right? You pose a fifth stanza of the poem with a line that says, 'There are no white people in this paradise.' Big line. Solid line. I wonder if you could speak a bit about that and if there was any worry of maybe alienating a cross section of people that may be reading or watching this. How did you deal with that? Is that something that came into a line of thought?

DA: Yeah, we discussed it. And even when I had first written the poem and performed it for the first time at the Courtauld, I had white friends there, my partner who's white, many white people in the audience, and I was nervous saying the line. I thought, *how are people going to take this?* But afterwards when I spoke to people, they were like, 'I get it. This is a paradise for those two boys. Why would I be there?' And so, I got reassurances early on when I'd first written the poem that this line was okay. And I don't know if I would've changed it if I had any bad reactions, but I never had any bad reactions. And I think because at the end of the poem I say, 'Maybe it will be you in paradise with that person you have in mind right now', so then there's the invitation for

anyone to imagine what their paradise would be. So, that, I think, solves it if there were a problem.

But also, it was interesting having a white director, white producer work with me, and several white people in the team. They all just had to get on board with this line, and they did because we all understood we were talking about this special fictional world for these two boys. So, it's allowing other people to imagine what they would feel like outside of the prejudice they may experience. Because we all experience the world differently, and so paradise is a place where you can go to feel like if you're allowed to be your full self without anyone judging or scrutinising you, what would that feel like? And for Black people, that might be the absence of white people. For some people, that might be something else. And so, I just wanted to say this is what I'm imaging for these boys, what would you imagine for yourself? And that was the comment I get so often, like, 'It's so interesting. It was so specific. And then at the end you invited me in, and I felt so grateful.' And actually, going back a couple lines where I say, 'Maybe they won't have to be boys or girls', a lot of nonbinary people have spoken to me about that line and how touched they were because they're not often thought of, and to say they could be free from gender was a really special thing, and they didn't expect it because the title of the poem is 'Two Black Boys in Paradise'. They didn't know it would invite people who didn't subscribe to gender. So, that was really nice as well.

So, no, the feedback for the lines, whether it's about the exclusionary lines or the inclusionary lines, it's all been good. The filmmaking process or the filmmaking—who the filmmaker are has sometimes had some negative feedback, which maybe I shouldn't give airtime to. But it does hurt sometimes when people are like, 'Well, he's mixed race. What does he know about the Black experience.' Or, 'He worked with a white director, so how is it a Black film?' Those types of things have really irked me, but—

DJ: Irked you how? What is it about that comment, for example, the last one that you said?

DA: Because the team was incredibly diverse. And I think a director, yes, may be seen as the figurehead of a film, but I think the way this film worked, all voices were heard and everyone's opinions were taken into account. And our director always said, 'The best idea wins.' And they would never do anything that I didn't agree with as well, so I always felt like I had a voice in the process. And it's interesting because it's not my voice on the film. I chose someone else. We chose Jordan Stephens to narrate the film. And he's straight. He's a great ally, but he is lending his voice to this as an ally. I see it that way anyway. And so, I'm really keen to let people be allies. I don't think Black people or

queer people have to fight all their battles by themselves and tell all their stories in a silo. I think we can—I think when you have other people helping you tell a story, you're probably gonna make that story even more accessible to people from lots of different walks of life and backgrounds. So, I actually found it really productive being in those conversations where maybe a director or producer was asking me questions because they weren't entirely sure if this was okay or how this would come across. And then me, and also had another Black, queer exec from the BFI, Aoife Hayes, who—the BFI, the British Film Institute, funded the film. So, she was in a lot of meetings with us and gave really great insights. And also, her mission, as the funder, was for us to be really bold. And initially, we weren't going to show the sex scene. We were gonna just have the boat rocking, and you imagine them having sex.

DJ: I was going to speak to you about that, yeah.

DA: But Aoife was like, 'This doesn't have to be a kid's animation. You can show sex if you want to. It's up to you what you want your film to be.' And then we were like, 'Let's show the sex.' And so, that got really exciting. But I think we needed someone else to give us that permission, and then once she did—the film's got a 15 rating, which I think is the right rating for it. But yeah, it does mean that—I do a lot of work in schools, and I write young adult novels, and so usually my work is for aged 12+, but this can't be. So,

it's a 15, which it can still be shown to the older end of school. But I also don't mind that I made something for adults. I'm moving into my adult era. I've got an adult book coming out in September called *Big Man*. And I've just realised that I've written lots for kids and that is there, and adults need these stories too. Because, yes, we need to show these possibilities for young people, but I think adults still need to see these possibilities because we didn't have it when we were young. I didn't have any LGBT representation when I was at school. I didn't see much in terms of Black queer representation on TV when I was younger or in films, really. And I wasn't put onto the books that existed. I didn't know about James Baldwin until I was in my thirties, for real. So, some things just missed me [laughs]. And so now, it's great to be catching up.

So, when people say, 'I've never seen anything like this film' or 'I've never read anything like this poem', it's out there, but we're just not always put onto it. And winning an award, I think, means our film is known by a lot more people than if we hadn't won a BAFTA. Now we've won a BAFTA it means, okay, now people are seeking this film out. Whereas before, to get people to watch a short film is quite hard [laughs]. But actually, now because it's won an award, people are like, 'Let me check this out, see what this is all about, see what the fuss is all about.' And then when they watch it, they're like, 'Wow. Wow.' So, that feels really good.

And so, we're really grateful for all the festivals that have screened it and the awards we've been given along the way, all the way up to the BAFTA, because we've won 22 different awards from different festivals and stuff. So, it's been an amazing year. And yeah, it was all made from a place of love and allyship and people just coming together to make the story of this poem work on screen. And thankfully, we got the funding to do it because I don't think we could've done it without that, the funding that we got. It's not a small thing to make a stop motion animation. It takes so much time, so many people, so much patience. And it was five years, like I said, in the making, and worth it, I think, for everyone now that we've had this amazing result.

DJ: So, we've spoke about the poem, the infancy, how it came about. Can you shed some more light on the process? So, five years, hell of a long time, what does it look like? What are the stages to bring this to fruition?

DA: So, stage one was our producer, Ben Jackson, saw me performing the poem at a poetry reading in Berlin. He was living there at the time with his partner, Kai, and they were both fans of my writing so came to this event. And then Ben said, 'I do stop motion with my creative partner, Baz. Would you be up for turning one of your poems into a stop motion?' So, I said, 'Yeah, let's do it.' So, they did an option agreement with me to lay out the terms of what that would look like, and then they started seeking

funding. There was some private funding that came in, including a little bit of money from Ian McKellen, which was really nice, and then family support from Ben's family, and then some funding applications that were unsuccessful, and then finessing that application by working more on the script and the storyboard and the whole pitch for it, just making everything really clear, so people could see the film when they opened the package that we put together. So, you do a lot of work without being paid to prepare a film, that development period. But then once the BFI said yes, then it was all systems go. So, they set up a studio in Manchester where they made the film and got the sets and puppets and everything built and the team on board. And they shot for 18 months. So, some days they were only getting a couple of seconds a day made because it's just such a slow, slow, intricate process. And then, after the 18 months shoot was all the postproduction stuff, so recording the voice over with Jordan at Abbey Road Studios, recording instruments for the soundtrack, they recorded an orchestra in Budapest for that. So, [missing name] were the sound team that worked on that.

DJ: The score is incredible.

DA: The score is incredible.

DJ: It pulls you in first, you know what I mean? It really, really grabs you. Sorry to jump back in again, would the storyboard—for our listeners who aren't aware, a storyboard is essentially a series of shots that are gonna be used and basically tells what we're gonna see visually. As a writer, how involved were you? Because essentially what you're doing is matching what you've written to an image, and that's what's gonna become—

DA: So, our process was a bit topsy-turvy. So, they went from the poem straight to the storyboard, and then BFI required a script, and so we had to work backwards and describe what was happening in the story in words. And so, that was where I really came into—I'd seen the storyboard that they'd made, and then I helped them say what is happening in each shot in words. So, that's where I came in.

And I also had another process down the line where we had to do an audio described version that was part of the accessibility criteria of BFI funding. And so, doing the audio description, having that meeting, and working on the script with the audio describer was really special because it's like, *okay, if you can't see this film, how can we paint these pictures in your mind?* And that was another really special process because I think access to films is a really wonderful thing to offer, whether it's putting subtitles—captions on a film or audio describing a film, it's just making it so that anyone and everyone can enjoy it. It was just a really lovely thing to be part of.

But yeah, the storyboard does show the frame-by-frame almost of what's gonna happen. But we also did this thing called an animatic, which is a moving story board. So, it's still line drawing, but it moves between the shots, so you can see the pace at which things will go on. It's slightly jumpy, obviously. It's not a full-blown animation, but it still gives you a sense of the movement within. And on that I think they also put a guide soundtrack as well, not the orchestra recording but something done on the computer, so we had a sense of what the music would be. Obviously, the final version was even more incredible.

But yeah, lots of processes were happening in parallel to one another. So, the editing started whilst things were still being shot because some things had been shot, so they could start getting them edited. So, it was nice; every department was involved from fairly early, which meant there was a lot of people. But my—I took a step back from getting involved with every single department, and I mostly just communicated with Ben and Baz and Aoife and for troubleshooting and also looking at rough cuts of things and giving my opinion there. And because I live in London, I wasn't physically in Manchester to go. I went once onto the set, and it was just so incredible, such a special thing. And we can share with you the behind-the-scenes video because I think that's nice for people to see as well, and you can see what the sets looked like and the

people manipulating the puppets. And it's just so cool when you see the scale of it and just the tricks behind making it look so magical.

DJ: I guess I'm also intrigued, as a writer, how did you preserve the integrity of the original poem? Often what's heard is people will say, 'Oh, it's not as good as the book' or 'They butchered did this' or 'They moved that.' And I didn't think that was the case at all. Obviously, I watched it, and I had the poem right there. How did you, as a writer, make sure they preserved that throughout the process?

DA: Yeah, I mean I was really trusting and just said, 'What you think is best, just speak up. Don't be shy.' There's a couple of lines cut from the poem because you see it on screen. There's a line: 'Did you call the police?' You don't need to say, 'Did you call the police?' because you actually see the police arrive. There was a line: 'Masculinity has not been required of them.' And where that happens in the film, there is quite a crescendo in the orchestra. And so, the line sometimes, because of the balance of sound, felt a bit lost. So, we considered taking that line out, and we had some time where we sat with it without the line in. But actually, we decided to put it back because it's an important line.

And when we were recording Jordan's voice over in Abbey Road Studios, we sat down, and Jordan wanted to discuss that line. And he asked everyone in the room to say what masculinity meant to them, which is very Jordan, if you've seen him do interviews, that he loves talking about that. So, it was really nice that it provoked this discussion, and I hope the film will provoke those discussions, like what is masculinity, what is paradise? I just think asking those questions, if a film can make you take stock of how you see the world or what you want the world to look like, I think that's a really lovely thing for our film to be able to do. So, yeah, I felt like because we were having lots of good conversations whilst we were making the film, I was starting to imagine what kinds of conversations it would let people have once they saw it. So, I just trusted them. I knew that when I write a poem, it's to make those pictures in people's minds. And so, once I started to see the pictures in the storyboard, the animatic, and then on screen once they had started shooting it, I was like, *wow, I will never be able to see in another way*. If someone has read the poem, they might picture it in their own way. Once you've see the film, that's it. That's what it looks like [laughs].

DJ: It's cast [inaudible].

DA: [Laughs] And I love that. I love that because I couldn't have asked for a better depiction of this poem, really.

DJ: Just to circle back, Jordan Stephens, he was the voice that we heard. I thought he did an amazing job. I wonder what the process of casting looked like? Did you have him in mind prior to getting into making the film or is it a thing of I want these certain vocal tones in to tell the story, essentially. What did that look like?

DA: Yeah, no, I wanted Jordan. I'd seen him in a really great film called *Tucked* where he played a drag queen, and I'd also seen him in another role where he played a queer character. And I just knew he could do it; he could lend himself to this work, not that the narrator of the poem is cast as queer, but the work is queer, so I just thought, *does he get it?* And the fact that he'd done these roles, I thought, *he does get it*. And the fact of the conversations I'd had with him over the years and just what I—I just respect him. And I just thought he could lend—he's got a lovely voice. It's so smooth, but it also feels grounded.

When he actually came into the recording, he did a first delivery of the poem. It was a bit more RP, and we just said, 'Relax. Be yourself. We don't need you to act this. We just need you to say this.' And once he did that, it was just perfect. Because I just wanted him to see the boys as they're his mates, they're people he cares about, and he's, like us, watching over them. And that was the notes that we gave him, and I think he took

them really well. Yeah, he was the first choice, and he said yes, so that was the best-case scenario. So, I was really happy.

DJ: It's always good in that way, right. I wonder if you would be able to point us in the direction of what you've got coming up next. What's happening for Dean? What's going on? Because I'm sure you've got bits on.

DA: Absolutely. So, one thing that's been announced is my adult novel, *Big Man*, which is coming out with Cipher Press on the 3rd of September 2026. So, that is my first adult novel. It's about a Black, gay man going through a midlife crisis and taking stock of his life and reflecting on his younger years when he got up to all sorts and ran with all sorts of people, some of whom are somewhat questionable, and he has to take stock of who he had in his life and the implications of that. And so, it's a book about found family, it's about love, it's about finding your place in the world. He's got a line in the book where he says, 'I feel like I'm a big man in a small life.' So, it's about aspirations and expectations of yourself. And, yeah, I really enjoyed writing because it's very much for adults; it's got lots of sex in it, which I had so much fun [laughs]. So, that is my, yeah, my new phase of life, I guess, being an adult author, because I've been this children's author for quite some time. And I love all my kid's books, but there was part of me that

was being slightly repressed. I felt like I had to be this squeaky clean, like a kid's TV presenter. But I was like, *I contain multitudes*. So, I wanted to let out.

DJ: There are levels.

DA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I'm also working on a new collaboration, which I just announced this week, called 'I Don't March to That Drum', which is a music and poetry collaboration. I'm working with a drummer called Antosh Wojcik, and he's live scoring 20 of my poems, which are from my forthcoming collection, *I Don't March to That Drum*, which will come out next year, in 2027. But we've already begun working on the performance which we hope to tour next year. So, that's something that I'm really excited about. And maybe we'll release it as an audiobook or an album. That's to be decided. But the live performance is the thing we're focusing on. And then there'll be a full collection. So, we've got 20 poems as performance, the book will have around 50 poems in it. So, it's a fresh collection of poetry for me. It'll be my third collection. [Music] So, it's really exciting to have that. And then some things that haven't been announced yet but very exciting as well.

[Music]

DJ: Okay, we'll keep an eye out. Dean, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for sitting down and chatting with us at *WritersMosaic* today. We appreciate it. And best of luck with everything in the future.

[Music]

DA: Thank you. I really appreciate the questions and the support.

[Music]

DJ: Thank you so much.

[Music]

Presenter: Dean Atta was in conversation with Del Jessop. To hear more writers, go to writersmosaic.org.uk.

Dean Atta was in conversation with Del Jessop

A recording of this interview can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**