



BOAT POETS 2022

A COLLECTION OF RIVER INSPIRED POETRY

THE BOAT POETS



AIYSHA HUMPHREYS

Bristol

Aiysha is a poet and performer from Cornwall, living in Bristol.

They explore topics of mental illness, relationships, queerness, mixed heritage identity and oranges. They have gigged all over the South West, London and this year performed and worked in Romania with Tongue Fu exploring the relationship between music and spoken word. They are currently the poet in residence for the SS Great Britain and are working on their first poetry pamphlet due out in February which explores queer joy, heartbreak, god, chosen family and the nuances and intricacies of girlhood.

Aiysha's Boat Poets residency was with the SS Great Britain where they explored the grade 2 listed Albion Dry Dock.



SID PLIMMER

Bristol

Poet and songwriter Sid Plimmer has a preoccupation with the neglected details of quiet lives.

Much of his work revolves around hard working people; principally because of the years he spent working as a labourer.

He's preoccupied with documenting sayings, rituals and stories from the past and present that he's collected living in these spaces.

Sid's Boat Poets residency was at Underfall Yard in Bristol, a historic boatyard on Spike Island serving Bristol Harbour.



SHADAY BARROWES-BAYEWUNMI

Plymouth

Shaday Barrowes-Bayewunmi is a Plymouth based Performance Poet who is exploring: how vulnerability and empowerment can co-exist in a charmingly LOUD way.

This year she has focused on drawing from her experiences of having Alopecia Universalis, using it as inspiration to create work that's daring, political and spreads awareness for the community. Her work also explores themes such as identity, race and mental health.

Most recently; she has written and performed an autobiographical scratch, as part of her final project, as a creative artist in residence role at Beyond face 2021. She was chosen to be a part of the BBC Words first scheme 2021 and Crowned Spork Poetry Slam winner 2022.

Shaday's mission is to increase visibility for bald black women on stage & in creative spaces.

Shaday's Boat Poets residency was exploring Plymouth's rivers, harbours and waterfronts with Green Minds, a Plymouth City Council led project, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, Urban Innovative Actions.



KANE JOHN MILLS

Plymouth

Passionate about highlighting & fighting injustice, Kane John Mills is a Dance, Theatre, & Spoken Word Artist (Facilitator, Maker/Choreographer, Performer, Director, & Writer) whose work seeks to challenge societal norms, and uplift & champion those who experience marginalisation.

He makes bold, innovative works as an independent artist, as commissions for companies/ organisations, & as a creative lead for community/socially engaged projects.

He creates space for people to share their stories, and draws upon lived experiences & observation to explore the mundane, magical, personal, & political.

Kane believes his words are for everyone (especially anybody who feels 'othered', unheard, and/ or unseen). He writes to try and understand this messy world & aims to make it a more accessible one.

Kane's Boat Poets residency was exploring Plymouth's rivers, harbours and waterfronts with Green Minds, a Plymouth City Council led project, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, Urban Innovative Actions.



TATENDA NAOMI MATSVAI

London

Tatenda is a Zimbabwean-born facilitator and devised performance maker, working with spoken word poetry in theatrical and non-theatrical contexts, with a focus on community engagement.

Their work is bio-mythical, infusing their lived experience with myth, to challenge colonial cosmologies as an act of self-recovery. They love Ritual, Physics and Afrofuturism.

Tatenda's Boat Poets residency was with Totally Thames, an annual season of unique, diverse and accessible arts and culture throughout the month of September with activity taking place on, beneath, and along the River Thames.

HANDS

by Aiysha Humphreys

This is for the worker hands
Those calloused with muscle memory hands
You who learnt the rituals of the water from ancestors
The knowledge passed on by grandads to dads to sons
Those who show us how much pride you can have in your palms

This is for the men bringing home the remnants of their working day
Trousers covered in black, red, flour or clay
Carrying timber back and forth for sixteen shillings
Sometimes for nothing
Some days told to drag themselves home with no guarantee of pay

This is for those who striked for better pay and working conditions
Bristol born and bred who've kept this city and industry afloat
For the kids who'd one day work here too but for now are still all innocence and play
Sneaking onto the dock floor after the sun has set
Jumping over keel blocks

One Sunday a man is found dead on the dock floor – must've tripped and fallen
A mother sits at home praying he's not her own
She strokes her youngest hands, already sand paper rough before he's turned sixteen
By Monday, it's back to work again
Men sing a song for their lost friend as they tug tug tug

I stand here now, feet treading two centuries of history
Thinking about how a city changes shape so quickly
But after all this time, Albion remains
And working class stories are passed on from mouth to mouth
Kept alive by the grandad's, dad's and sons
We remember their worker's hands
Their calloused with muscle memory hands
Those who show us how much pride you can carry in your palms

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The sky bruises
Boat cruises
Belt sanders (and)
Old tin in a skip

Brick chimneys fight the wind
The faithful masts of this aged ship
Seagulls cawing
Sparks are falling...

Sawzalls, overalls
Through a crack in the wall
A man saw it all
The Underfall, the Overfall
The Underfall, the Overfall

The ships will sleep in neap tide
- hear the turning of their bones
Gulls will land like lovers
Welcoming them home

Sawzalls, overalls
Through a crack in the wall
A man saw it all
The Underfall, the Overfall
The Underfall, the Overfall

ME AND THE 3 FISHY'S

by Shaday Barrowes-Bayewunmi

In her dream, she made friends with the fishes
Went for a swim with the fishes, had a giddy moment with the fishes
In real life, She's unsure of how to swim in this pond, It feels too deep

Her Subconscious whispers to her in her sleep
Hours, Minutes, Seconds,

Picture this, A group of Aliens
Okay not aliens
Well known species
Yes. A species
Beings, Entities, Spirits, Not humans

She whispers to her in her sleep, Hours, Minutes, Seconds

Just picture this
Plymouth waterways
A group of freewheeling fish

The first one is bob

Bob's like – I got Got fins that could swim threw tanks, pools, oceans, lakes,
anything , I'm your fish

Yeah im it, I'm the shiiiiit

Swimming, Moving, Grooving, Dancing, shaking, skating through the ripples of waterways
I got Got fins that could swim threw tanks, pools, oceans, lakes,

He Can't Swim through anything and everything, needs his surroundings to be nice
and clean,

Needs to be able to thrive, he can't be in an atmosphere that's grimy and contaminated
if you know what I mean

Do I have the ability to clean my own space Yeah I do, Bob's on a mission to create an
unpolluted place

Her Subconscious whispers to her in her sleep
Hours, Minutes, Seconds,

Next it's Snoopy They have bright eyes that can see into the future,
He watches, sees, notices, observes everything,
Compare him to a wise old teacher, an overachiever,
He notices the weather changes, the dangerous bacteria, the pretty plants he gets to
see day and night,
He notices the living and non-living
His friends call him supernatural
Snoopy's like

Snoopy's like the guardian of the ocean he checks in on the regulation of
the climate

Snoopy's watching you so don't do anything you shouldn't do
Seriously he's a sorcerer, he will come for you

Her Subconscious whispers to her in her sleep
Hours, Minutes, Seconds,

Then theres Orion, He's the life of the party
He always Guzzling nuzzling, Fo shuzzling,
Blinking, Twinkling, Making shapes, Saying Sup G, A Social fisher-fly,

Always taking care of nature, he can't rely on you to do it now can he

Her Subconscious whispers to her in her sleep
Hours, Minutes, Seconds

These three fishies, Start nestling, start wrestling, they feel like there is something
pressing on them,
They feel the temperature changing and they can't swim around and do nothing.
Cos they don't have a choice really, and to be honest neither do you.
Neither do I. Me, you?

Hours, Minutes, Seconds, s n o o o z e

They start spending their days and nights studying trying to think of how the earth can
start recovering,
Whilst there on their quest the water quality starts changing, they spot things that don't
look like other fishes
So snoopy does some investigating calls on his animal friends that live on land
But wait,
They aren't answering this time...
Snoopys like: Why aren't they answering this time?
Snoopy goes back to the office and continues studying, gets out his fishy books and he
tries to figure out whether its
Methane, nitrous oxide or carbon dioxide
Or whether it's the deforestation
Or maybe its these weird species, not aliens, but humans
Snoopy calls on his mates
Orion, and Bob and they like busy toned him or something
Snoopys like 'Nobodies answering, What am I gonna do
The days go by and the weather changes rapidly,
It goes from hot to cold to hot to cold almost daily
Snoopy's supernatural, so he uses his superpowers to look into the future
He fast-forwards to the 22nd century
All he can see in his crystalized ball is dissipation and wastefulness
The world is empty,
Destruction and No opportunities
Snoopy starts howling and crying so he takes himself out of this distressing state
He says to himself what am I going to do?
How am I going to figure this out mate
Snoopy turns back time and levitates out of the ocean in a ball of ocean
Yes, a ball of the ocean.
Are you still with me?

Minutes, Seconds, s n o o o z e

Good, cos snoopy deserves you to be.

Snoopy does what he needs to do and calls on the humans

Explains what he sees, the destruction, the warming, the crisis

Tells them to respect the life of bio-diversity

He speaks to them concernly

We are on the brink

We are on the edge

Seconds

S n o o o z e

Here's the problem, they don't take him seriously

Cos he's just a fish out of the water, ain't he?

They don't even take each other seriously

They aren't taking the world seriously

How many sacrifices, spells or lives is snoopy meant to make until they can see

Until they discover the seed, the reason for their being, the bright path that they seek

Seconds

Seconds

Seconds,

Seconds,

She Wake's up, her alarm has been going off for ages,

Her Palms sweaty, pillow drenched, head in hands, no. more. snooze.

She Wake's up, Comprehending, Time hasn't run out yet,

She looks in the mirror, tells herself, don't snooze the alarm any longer

Her Subconscious screaming at her.

No. More. S n o o o z e .

STILL CURRENT

By Kane John Mills

The River: What do you know?

The Writer didn't answer back.

The River: What do you know?

The Writer: Not a lot.

The River: What do you know?

The Writer: I know impatience.

The River: What do you know?

The Writer: I know validity... but not very well.

The River: What do you do?

The Writer: I know compassion... oh... sorry, do? I, um, I listen?

The River: What do you want?

The Writer: To sleep.

The River: What do you need?

The Writer: Is that not the same thing?

The River: I don't know, is it?

The Writer: I need time.

The River: What do you need?

The Writer: To not feel smothered or alone.

The River: What do you need?

The Writer: To not be terrified.

The River: What do you need?

The Writer: A hug.

The River: What do you need from me?

The Writer: I don't know.

The River: What do you need from me?

The Writer: I don't know.

The River: What do you need from me?

The Writer: I DON'T know.

The River: What do you need from me?

The Writer: Distance.

The River: I can give you that.

The Writer: Thank you.

The River: But to do that I need to know where you are, so I know to not be there... Where are you?

The Writer: I'm not sure, I'm lost.

The River: Is there anything you **are** certain of?

The Writer: That I have been answering your questions but have asked you none.

The River: And do you intend to change that?

The Writer: I think so... Before you go, could you tell me a secret?

The River: I didn't ask for company.

The Writer: Oh, I—

The River: I didn't ask to be taken for granted.

The Writer: I don't think I do—

The River: I didn't ask to be a constant.

I didn't ask to be in motion but I am refused stillness.

I didn't ask for pollutants.

I didn't ask to be necessary.

I didn't ask for people to find themselves in me.

I didn't ask for people to lose themselves in me.

I didn't ask to be violated.

I've swallowed people whole.

I know guilt, and I know the deepest pits of grief.

I don't know my limits, or what I'm really capable of, but I believe I may be extraordinary.

I don't want to envelop others, snuff out those faint embers, but it is beyond my control.

I know my mass can intimidate but I don't mean to seem threatening.

I can be pretty unforgiving.

I don't intend to be oppressive but so many just take and take and take from me,

I am left feeling empty.

So perhaps **you** should back off.

I've been avoiding you for years.

And I think it's embarrassing you're making a poem about a river somehow still about you.

The Writer: I didn't realise I was—

The River: I know you probably think of me as unpredictable and volatile but I am far from irrational.
I am a home for most but so many of you cull my shelters.
My pain is minimised, and my strength is demonised.
My safety is all of your responsibility but so few treat us with priority.
When you look at me, do you just see yourself or the ones who came before you too?
The others who did nothing to maintain and sustain my kind.
Do you see a portal?
A gateway?
A garden?
A guardian?
Do you see suffering?
And disarray?
And borders?
And mourners?
I don't understand why so many destroy those who cross me for refuge, to flee and seek a better life.
The fearful are not criminals.
I do not discriminate.
I am decimated by your waste.
You say we're not fighting wars anymore but my pockets splayed reveal that is a lie.
Why does nobody tell the truth?
Why are most allies just performing?
Why do you all find me so boring when I'm crying out for a remedy?
An antidote for the poison you've all sent my way.
We crave calmness but you all forbid us.
We're invaded for your self-care routines.
You say 'cold water therapy is what you need',
when we're the ones who need to breathe.
Our numbers dwindle as we suffocate,
whilst you all alienate, and desecrate, and segregate, and mutilate.
Why are you all so selfish?
When will you wake up?
I bet you'll 'make change' when it's too late, and there's nothing left of us.

GILLED N' GULLY

By Tatenda Naomi Matsvai

i sit
river split
thames knows i ain't never been
one or other
been all *that*
sea gushing,
fresh water meeting ocean,
estuary open at the kiss off my
'Mumma-handed-me-these'
thighs.
formless thing,
river banks all eroding thing.

ii

i been eroding
Things
off river banks
me yeah, i
carry scooters skateboards bodies clay pot centuries
old gold boys buried with buttons
and pipes
and pieces of blue stained china

Here, tucked in tight,
my banks gurgle,
spit up
heavy histories
tear stained like tombstone
you know,

"boy done drowned
over at embankment bridge
neptune took him
at low tide,

where his kingdom begins,

cuz he was, you know *of the sea*

someday them coyote brown boys will throw the whole
river back and laugh at you
wet gilled and breathless
For crying
cuz he was freed
of straight and narrow streets
sea gushing at the kiss off his
'Mumma-handed-me-these'



Boat Poets offers opportunities to emerging poets and spoken word artists through paid residencies on boats, barges and ferries on their local waterway.

The artists are supported through a programme of development to create new work based on their experiences. The project offers strategic performance, filming and publishing opportunities to help grow new audiences for the poets' work.

The project also offers a comprehensive range of education workshops for local schools and community groups. These are tailored to the needs of the group and focus on exploring site specificity in poetry.

If you would like to host a Boat Poet on your vessel, or get involved with any of the many workshops and events run by the project then get in touch at **boatpoets@gmail.com**

Boat Poets was created in association with the Thames Festival Trust in 2017 and has been supported using public funding by the Arts Council. Boat Poets 2022 supported 5 poets from London, Bristol and Plymouth.

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