

## Black Theatre Workshop's La Parole

### Episode 3 – Revolutionary Voice

Trailblazer d'bi.young anitafrika on Breaking Boundaries and the Decolonization of Creation

Featuring Dian Marie Bridge (Dian), Lydie Dubuisson (Lydie), and d'bi.young anitafrika (d'bi)

**[00:00:00]** – [Theme music: "Cocktail Music" by Francesco Biondi]

**[00:00:12]** – **Dian:** Welcome to La Parole, BTW's podcast series. Black Theatre Workshop is launching a new podcast series to reach all of the artists and storytellers across Montreal, into Quebec, and into Canada. We are bringing you conversations with some of Canada's most exciting theatre artists, musicians, and storytellers, and we're so happy to have you join us.

**[00:00:36]** – [Theme music continues]

**[00:00:42]** – **Lydie:** Before we start, we would like to recognize that the province we call Quebec is a fusion of traditional territories of the Innu and Inuit Nations, of the Algonquin Nations, as well as Mohawk Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Kanienkehaka and Anishnabeg ne sont que deux des langues originales de ce territoire. Kanienkehaka and Anishnabeg are two of the many original languages of this territory. L'Atikamekw, le Cree, L'Inuktitut, et L'Innu-aimun, font également parti des nombreuses langues autochtones parler à travers le Québec comme langues majoritaires all long before French and English. We, therefore, recognize the important work accomplished by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, to revive the traditional languages of these territories and the advocacy for the official status of Indigenous languages. Nous exprimons notre plus profond respect aux aînés de ces communautés et à tous les peuples autochtones. Yes, we express our deepest respect to the elders of these communities and all Indigenous people who tell the story of the land and waters of Tiótia'ke, who take care of Turtle Island, and who are here at home. We see you. We support you. We are honoured to share our stories on these lands. And now, time for La Parole. Bonjour, hi, my name is Lydie Dubuisson, and I'm the Artistic Associate at Black Theatre Workshop.

**[00:02:12]** – **Dian:** Hello, hi! My name is Diane Marie Bridge, and I am the Artistic Director at Black Theatre Workshop.

**[00:02:17]** – **Lydie:** Woohoo!

**[00:02:17]** – **Dian:** And welcome to La Parole.

**[00:02:19]** – **Lydie:** La Parole!

**[00:02:20]** – **Dian:** Aha. So just for those folks tuning in to us for the first time, we just want to give a little bit of a background about La Parole, this new podcast series, which is BTW's way to reach out beyond the plateau, where our office is located, beyond the island of Montreal, into Quebec, and into the rest of Canada, to bring you some conversations with some of the country's most exciting theatre artists, musicians, and storytellers. We are introducing you to some artists who are elders, some new

artists, and also just very well-known, established artists who have actually left the country and who are coming back more enriched to share their talent with us.

**[00:03:03] – Lydie:** On prend La Parole.

**[00:03:06] – Dian:** On prend La Parole. So welcome, everyone. I am really excited today to welcome our next guest (Lydie squealing) who is a long time love of mine. Um, even before I knew them, I was just enraptured by their— their work.

**[00:03:24] – Lydie:** I want to say I love them more, but hey, you know what? It's a question of opinion. (Dian laughing) Yeah, you love her more. I love her more.

**[00:03:32] – Dian:** Talk, tell me about your obsession, Lydie, because I know (Lydie squealing) you have a little bit of an obsession.

**[00:03:38] – Lydie:** Do we start from here to the from now to the past or from the past to now? Um, um (Dian laughing), because you didn't even say who it is yet.

**[00:03:46] – Dian:** No, I know I haven't, I'm—

**[00:03:47] – Lydie:** Okay, this person is an icon. This person is a must know. It's like when you are a young Black woman in Canada and you want to be an artist and you're like, "Ooo, but why?" and then you find that name and somebody says, "d'bi.young." (d'bi laughing) And suddenly your, your idea of being an artist in Canada, what it means, what it's supposed to... Like, my brain part of exploded. (Dian laughing) It was an amazing moment. I think it happened sometime in 2013-ish for me, officially. But, yes, going to university and finding like, having that name coming to, like coming to your eyes, and then you research and you're like, (gasp) "She was in *Da Kink in My Hair*?" (gasp) She lived in Montreal? (gasp) She studied at Concordia?" All of these things and you look at the work, and it's so amazing. So yes, I have an obsession with this icon.

**[00:04:43] – Dian:** (d'bi laughing) Okay. Well, just for those of us listening who do not know d'bi, I'm going to read a bit of the bio. Uh, d'bi.young anitafrika, is a queer, non-binary, African-Xaymacan-Tkarontonian, dub poet, monodramist, monodramatist and Black feminist decolonial scholar. They are committed to embodying liberatory art practices that ritualize acts of emancipation from oppressions inflicted upon the people and the planet. The three-time Dora award-winning Canadian poet of honour, author of twelve (Lydie sighs) plays, seven albums, and four collections of poetry, was recently celebrated as a Global Leader in the Theatre and Performance by Arts Council England, and is the 2021 recipient of the Rosemary Sadlier Freedom Award. d'bi's, d'bi.young's PhD research investigates how Black women, theatre makers in Canada, uh cultivate decolonial practice -- praxes and pedagogies of transformation through performance. Their doctoral thesis further develops the Anitafrika method, a Black queer feminist framework that emerged out of the dub theory of Anita Stewart, d'bi.young's mother.

**[00:06:01] – Lydie:** (humming) Mm, mm, mm.

**[00:06:02] – Dian:** Amazing. Welcome, my dear. Welcome, welcome.

[00:06:06] – **Lydie:** (whispering) Welcome.

[00:06:07] – **d'bi:** (laughing) I love you all so much! (Dian laughing) I love you all so much!

[00:06:14] – **Lydie:** I only talked about part of my obsession. There are tons of other chapters to this, but this is, this the beginning. Yes.

[00:06:21] – **Dian:** And for those—

[00:06:22] – **d'bi:** I'm so excited to be here. (laughing)

[00:06:23] – **Dian:** Oh, my goodness. I was so excited when you said you were available. First of all, I was like, I don't know where, where d'bi is on the planet. I know— (d'bi laughing), I know.

[00:06:32] – **Lydie:** Thank you, technology!

[00:06:33] – **Dian:** It's somewhere warm. And for those of you listening, just so you know, that light breeze (Lydie sighing) you hear in the background are the coastal winds of... Is it Costa Rica? (d'bi laughing)

[00:06:44] – **d'bi:** Yeah! Puerto Diego, Costa Rica. I'm literally looking at the ocean as I sit here, looking through the mountain forest trees at the ocean. (laughing)

[00:06:57] – **Lydie:** Straight from paradise, d'bi.young.

[00:07:00] – **Dian:** Amazing. (d'bi laughing)

[00:07:01] – **Lydie:** Wow.

[00:07:03] – **Dian:** So we're like super excited to have you here because um, as you know, Black Theatre Workshop has worked with so many people that I know you spent some time here in—

[00:07:12] – **d'bi:** Absolutely.

[00:07:13] – **Dian:** Yeah, in Montreal, and that this, for you, is one of your hometowns, even though—

[00:07:19] – **d'bi:** (overlapping) Absolutely.

[00:07:19] – **Dian:** you're a hot foot, a hot, hot, hot foot. (d'bi and Lydie laughing) But Montreal is—

[00:07:24] – **d'bi:** I came of age in Montreal.

[00:07:26] – **Dian:** Yeah? (Lydie cooing)

[00:07:26] – **d'bi:** I feel like Montreal is where I blossomed into this space of self-knowing. I was going to McGill and working in theatre—

[00:07:42] – **Dian:** Mmhmm.

[00:07:42] – **d'bi:** and the poetry scene there and being mentored by Dave Austin. Oh, my goodness.

[00:07:51] – **Dian:** (overlapping) Oh, my goodness.

[00:07:51] – **d'bi:** Dave Austin, who was at CKUT at the time, Adrian Harewood—

[00:07:55] – **Dian:** Yeah!

[00:07:56] – **d'bi:** at CKUT at the time, Louise Prime Time. These are folks who I grew up watching, working with, and who also mentored me in so many ways. Dave, particularly, was such a fundamental part of my circling back into dub poetry as roots and into re-investigating my mother's work—

[00:08:26] – **Dian:** Mmm!

[00:08:27] – d'bi: and into really asking myself questions around language and identity and legacy and, and responsibilities as an artist, you know, Dave, Dave was there in a, in a few moments where I needed strong, reflective mentorship—

[00:08:48] – Dian: Mmhmm!

[00:08:49] – d'bi: and he provided that. And so Montreal, when I think of Montreal and coming of age there with the poets, with like Blackbird and Alex Boutros, and Kaie Kellough, and Naila Keleta-Mae, so many people, so many of us grew up together in Montreal at ISART, running weekly shows and inviting the New York poets to come down—

[00:09:21] – Dian: Mmm!

[00:09:22] – d'bi: inviting Sarah Jones and that whole crew to come down that rolled with Sarah, and then going on like slam poetry tours. This is like, we're talking about the late—

[00:09:35] – Dian: '90s.

[00:09:36] – d'bi: 1990s—

[00:09:36] – Dian: Yeah!

[00:09:37] – d'bi: early 2000s.

[00:09:38] – Lydie: Mmhmm.

[00:09:38] – d'bi: So poetry slam was a big moment in our story. And so I remember going on tour with the Montreal poetry slam team and really being introduced to the poets in the, in the US, and that experience having such a profound impact on, on, on my life as an artist and realizing, okay, like poetry slams are really incredible, uh but it's not the space for me, I need another, I need something else.

[00:10:10] – Dian: Mmm!

[00:10:11] – d'bi: I want to say something else in another way. So I feel like Montreal and Black Theatre Workshop really helped to shape the foundations of this work that is now 25 years in its growth and developmental process and myself as a human being as well.

[00:10:35] – Dian: Yeah, I remember the first uh show of yours that I saw was um you and uh Naila did a show called 'yagaya.

[00:10:44] – d'bi: 'yagaya!

[00:10:45] – Dian: 'yagaya.

[00:10:45] – d'bi: We staged that show in 1999 in my loft on Avenue des Pins. (Lydie and Dian laughing) The audience came in and sat on the ground. I had this really ridiculously beautiful loft, huge loft, like these mega windows, it was so, it looked like a small theatre, you know, and so we staged the 'yagaya there, and the audience came and sat inside. I can still see it so clearly. We made these flyers, these white flyers, these drawings of, of these two, two girls on the cover and we had a talk back afterwards. And I mean, those moments were so radical and revolutionary (sounds of agreement from Dian) in terms of unapologetically creating space for Black women's voices and Black women's theatre. And we were asking so many questions around form aesthetic and style. And that piece in particular was a real

experiment with dub poetry, dubbing theatre-informed aesthetics. And that, that whole moment has grown into something so beautiful. But I remember, I remember crafting, the beginnings of that piece was a solo show, and then I met Naila, and we thought, "Well, let's make it a two-hander." And then moving to Toronto and still being obsessed with that sort of monodrama aesthetic, which is based on my mother's work, seeing my mother's work at Jamaica School of Drama, and then working with two handers and monodramas as the sort of first experiment in theatre-making that, that is rooted in political action. Because that was for me, and is for me, the whole point is to make theatre that inspires us to change ourselves, and as a, as a result of changing ourselves, we then change the world.

**[00:12:47] – Dian:** Absolutely.

**[00:12:47] – d'bi:** So much room for experimenting. Like, what an incredible moment in time because there was so much space to experiment with form and voice.

**[00:12:59] – Dian:** And we, we can't take for granted that um, that, because right now it feels like this is kind of a template to how you produce your first solo show or how you, how you start getting your voice on stage. But when you were doing it, it was extremely radical. And, and just for folks who just our being the way we wear our hair, just our being in space and taking up space is political in itself. That was even a bigger step, you know?

**[00:13:30] – Lydie:** I'm like, I'm still, I can't believe that you said that you were living on des Pins, and I'm, I'm wondering like, I think, I hope teenage me saw you, and that's why I keep chasing that magic (d'bi laughing), because—

**[00:13:40] – d'bi:** Probably.

**[00:13:41] – Lydie:** I had a friend—

**[00:13:42] – d'bi:** We had so many gatherings.

**[00:13:44] – Lydie:** There was, like, des Pins used to be a bridge back then.

**[00:13:47] – Dian:** Oh okay!

**[00:13:48] – Lydie:** It's not anymore. But the 1999 des Pins is not the same. And I have a picture of myself being at 18 under that old bridge. And I'm like, this is that same era. And you, you could smell in the air that there are things happening. Where are they happening? I moved to the city in 2000, and I was like trying to find, where is it? You could tell, like, there are things happening, but you had to find the right room, the right crew to be in those. Like, in 2004, 2003, I lived the last moments of like those slam poetry jam nights that would happen. Like you would know a couple of days before like this cafe is going to host one. And it's, and until I found Black Theatre Workshop where I was like, okay, this is probably where it all gathers, it all channels this way, and that's where you find your people. But, but oh, my god, so much of what you did had an impact on this city and on Black artists, because, again, in those days, I remember looking for like, what is the art? What is that you want to do? And everybody pushes you towards entertainment. Everybody pushes you towards, like well, be very pretty at doing something, and you can have a career, according to— and you don't want to just necessarily entertain.

You want to know how to do something that is actually meaningful and that's why the fact that you pursued academia that you, yes, you were acting, you were creating, but you were also creating process and methods and ways for us to decolonize our way of creating.

**[00:15:26] – d'bi:** That's an, that's an interesting observation because while we were making that work on the sort of, in the grassroots community, there was a, there was a real, um, colonial conditioning and a real painful reality in academia.

**[00:15:52] – Dian:** Mmhmm.

**[00:15:53] – d'bi:** So I was going to McGill at the time, and I was studying theatre uh and African studies with a bit of English literature. And I found that after a year of being in the program, like I, my spirit was so harmed by that environment.

**[00:16:17] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:16:17] – d'bi:** There was some other theatre happening. I remember we did Tooth and Nail, and that production was a really positive experience. But in my feminism classes, um there was some real misogynoir happening (sounds of Dian agreeing) in that space. And in fact, one of my poems, Ain't I a Woman, Sojourner, came out of that space, where I'm asking in the piece, how is it that we can be studying Gloria Steinem—

**[00:16:46] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:16:47] – d'bi:** And these other celebrated, uh, women in, in feminism, but we're not studying Audre Lord and bell hooks—

**[00:16:58] – Lydie:** Mmhmm.

**[00:16:58] – d'bi:** Sojourner Truth. We're not studying these fundamental Black women-led movements for liberation—

**[00:17:05] – Dian:** Mmhmm.

**[00:17:06] – d'bi:** of everyone. And I actually ended up, uh, leaving McGill.

**[00:17:12] – Dian:** Oh, 'k.

**[00:17:13] – d'bi:** I dropped out of McGill, but continued the sort-of grassroots theorizing that was happening in spaces with people like David Austin, who I mentioned, and um, and the community community of arts practitioners who were gathered. So we were doing our own sort of critical consciousness raising in our art and making art together. I remember my first dub album was produced by Fimo, who's back in Montreal now—

**[00:17:44] – Lydie:** Yes!

**[00:17:45] – d'bi:** who's leading like these just incredible, like, conscious spiritual movements. Fimo was my producer for—

**[00:17:53] – Lydie:** Really!

[00:17:53] – d'bi: *When the Love is Not Enough*, which is my first dub album. You know, Kali and Dub uh produced, my first sort of produced poem on the *Wordlife: Tales Of The Underground Griots* album that featured—

[00:18:09] – Dian: Oh my gosh.

[00:18:10] – d'bi: national arts practitioners, national poets, Black poets from all across Canada.

[00:18:15] – Dian: I have that book! (laughing)

[00:18:17] – d'bi: Right, so I'm saying all of that and naming these people—

[00:18:23] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:18:24] – d'bi: um, some of whom will not be named—

[00:18:27] – Lydie: Mmhmm.

[00:18:28] – d'bi: if we don't archive our own stories.

[00:18:31] – Dian: Right.

[00:18:31] – d'bi: It's like some of these people will not be named for the ways in which they set the foundation and built on a foundation that came before us. I'll get to Toronto in a minute, but you know right now we're talking about Montreal! Um the politics there is different and so it really, if we don't write ourselves into our own documentations and archiving, then so much of how Black bodies and queer bodies and people who identify as female bodies impacted what we understand to be the, the cultural landscape, the poetic and theatrical cultural landscape uh in Montreal. So I left McGill. I ended up leaving McGill because I felt that there was no room there for me—

[00:19:20] – Dian: Mmm.

[00:19:21] – d'bi: to do the kind of critical consciousness raising that, that I come out of, coming out of Jamaica, coming out of the pioneer, a group of pioneered dumb poets, including my mother, being raised in a theatrical and poetic environment in Jamaica. It was, at that point, I'd only been in Canada for four years. So I was still fresh! Like I got here at 15, I went to McGill when I was 19. So I'd only been in the country for four years.

[00:19:46] – Dian: Wow, yeah.

[00:19:47] – d'bi: And I'm coming from a deeply dynamic, political Pan-African background. Like I came to Canada with these sensibilities. They were further nurtured in Canada, but certainly they are Jamaican people.

[00:20:08] – Dian: Yes!

[00:20:08] – Lydie: Mmhmm!

[00:20:08] – d'bi: That is unarguable, right?

[00:20:11] – Lydie: Yup.

[00:20:11] – d'bi: So four years in the country, being in Montreal and, and being in this space where it's like, on the one hand, we had this very thriving community of Black diasporic folks coming from all over

Canada, all over the world. And then on the other hand, we had this really stubborn racism, this very stubborn misogyny and even more stubborn misogyny—

[00:20:37] – **Dian:** Mmhmm.

[00:20:38] – **d'bi:** You know, that, and, and! Both internalized and externalized homophobia. It was like a moment in my own life where, where I was, I would say forced, I would use the word forced because it felt like a force impacting upon me to define myself, both in relation to Blackness and in relation to gender, the articulation of gender and the articulation of sexuality. And let me tell you this, I was not mostly on the side of everybody else.

[00:21:19] – **Dian:** Mm.

[00:21:20] – **d'bi:** Because what I can't do is gloss over that period to make it sort of this nice package of like you know as Black people, we're all working together. Absolutely, we're working together, but we certainly did not agree on many things. And one of those things was the homophobia. (sounds of Dian and Lydie agreeing) I was absolutely ostracized by my own Black community—

[00:21:44] – **Lydie:** Yup.

[00:21:44] – **d'bi:** For refusing to participate in the homophobia. This is the truth.

[00:21:49] – **Lydie:** Yup.

[00:21:50] – **Dian:** Yes.

[00:21:51] – **d'bi:** Ostracized.

[00:21:52] – **Dian:** Yes.

[00:21:52] – **d'bi:** Because at that point, I was like, well, anti-oppression means all oppression! (laughing)

[00:21:59] – **Lydie:** We can't leave no one behind.

[00:22:05] – **d'bi:** Anti-oppression doesn't just mean oppression against Blackness or, or oppression against like working classness! Anti-oppression means to be anti-classist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ableist, anti-homophobic. And at that time, 20- what are we talking about now? What was that? 30 years ago? We're talking about 30?

[00:22:32] – **Dian:** No. (overlapping with Lydie) 20, 25-ish. No, not at all.

[00:22:36] – **d'bi:** 25-ish?

[00:22:37] – **Dian:** Yeah.

[00:22:38] – **Lydie:** Ish.

[00:22:38] – **d'bi:** 2000, 2010, 2020.

[00:22:41] – **Dian:** We're 23 right now.

[00:22:42] – **d'bi:** So 20, 25 years. At that time, like, I mean the sort-of global Pan-African struggle against imperialism and colonization has been going on since the very first person was enslaved in that, in this new slave system. I say new slave system because we also know that on the continent, there are different incarnations of slavery that predate, the Arabs who you know really like grew the system and then came the Europeans who took it to a whole other level of heinousness, right? But slavery, slavery

existed! So it's like levels of slavery. It's really incredible. Levels of slavery we're talking about at this point! As opposed to the idea that slavery didn't exist and then it existed. But, we so, my point is we've been struggling for a long time! Now, the sort of ongoing nuance-ness of our struggles. For example, when I lived in Cuba, Assata Shakur, and I'd sit at the feet of Assata Shakur, I can't believe I'm saying this.

[00:23:53] – **Dian:** I know. I—,I— I'm just like that.

[00:23:55] – **Lydie:** I heard that. Just like that, Assata Shakur just was dropped.

[00:23:58] – **d'bi:** I'm at that age now. I'm at, Dian, we're at that age, oh, my god! (laughing)

[00:24:03] – **Dian:** Listen, we're... Listen.

[00:24:05] – **Lydie:** Assata Shakur, just like that.

[00:24:06] – **Dian:** Listen, I...

[00:24:07] – **d'bi:** Dian!

[00:24:08] – **Dian:** I know, I remember when you said, "Oh, we're the adults now." And I was like, (Lydie and d'bi laughing) Yeah, you're right, you're right. We are big woman. Big people. Big people.

[00:24:19] – **d'bi:** (laughing) Dian, oh, my god! Okay, so—

[00:24:22] – **Dian:** No, your children are, your children are the adults now. They're coming up.

[00:24:26] – **d'bi:** (laughing) This is what I'm saying, D! We're talking about 20 years ago. I definitely just said, "Was that 30 or 20 years ago?" (laughing loudly)

[00:24:33] – **Lydie:** You said that!

[00:24:35] – **d'bi:** I can't. We're here.

[00:24:37] – **Lydie:** Oh god.

[00:24:37] – **d'bi:** So this is why this work that you both are doing is so crucial, like this is why like, I'm just grateful for and to both of you. You're so deeply appreciated and loved because we need this work. We need this work to refuse the erasure that is ongoing and the invisibilization that is ongoing! So Assata, imagine, imagine where we are now, Assata and Nehanda and, and all these freedom fighters. So there, she's in Cuba and she's saying to me, "d'bi, understand that during the civil rights movement, we had to fight! We had to fight to, to be recognized as women in the movement for that intersectionality to, to refuse the erasure within the civil rights movement! We had to fight! And so our fight, our fight entitles you all to work intersectionally. We fought for that!" So here we are in 2000s now, or late '90s, early 2000s. And, and I'm there, and I'm there, and I'm like, "But anti-oppression means anti-all oppression!" And I've got my colleagues, my friends, members of the community, the poetry community, the theatre community, telling me that I'm on the wrong side because Black people or Jamaican people or whoever kind of people are not queer. Listen! (Dian laughing) I'm not hiding my mouth and talking, (continuing in Jamaican patois).

[00:26:18] – **Dian:** Listen, but like you walk into a dance hall.

[00:26:21] – **d'bi:** (overlapping) It's you who are vexed, I don't care, who I'm to be vexed.

[00:26:22] – Dian: But you walk into a dance hall and look at the feathers and look at the plumage, and look at the—

[00:26:25] – Lydie: But you see the simple fact that we have to say, like "We don't care who we're going to—

[00:26:29] – d'bi: Listen, that's where we were!

[00:26:31] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:26:31] – d'bi: That's where we were, and sometimes that's still where we are!

[00:26:35] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:26:36] – d'bi: My point is this, right? My point is this. That moment in Montreal was a really crucial moment as our community navigated its own political growing pains.

[00:26:50] – Lydie: Mmm.

[00:26:51] – d'bi: And of course, we have to navigate our own political growing pains because we have been colonized! Now, now within the community, that necessary conversation about how we acknowledge in a gentle and compassionate and empathetic way that our ideas, our political ideas around gender, sexuality, even what theatre is—

[00:27:16] – Dian: Yes.

[00:27:17] – d'bi: that those ideas are heavily influenced by the colonial conditionings that we have undergone.

[00:27:22] – Dian: Yes, absolutely.

[00:27:24] – Lydie: Mmhmm.

[00:27:24] – d'bi: We've got to talk about that! We've got to talk about that because if we're saying we're on this long term journey of decolonizing, then most certainly we have to look inward. And for me, that has always been the priority. The work that I make is about looking inward. I'm not spending all of my time fighting whiteness! I don't have the energy for that. (Lydie and Dian snapping in agreement) I don't have the energy to spend all of my time being in a battle with whiteness! But what I do have the energy for is to come to members of the community, whether we're talking about the community of queer folks, the community of differently able folks, neurodiverse folks, the community of Black folks, the community of folks who identify as women and/or non-binary. I'm naming these communities because they're the communities that I'm a part of.

[00:28:15] – Dian: Yeah.

[00:28:15] – d'bi: So I'm what I have time for, creatively, emotionally, energetically, politically, economically. What I have time for is to have those conversations with my communities about how are we going to continue this insistence on liberating ourselves. For me, mi no business bout nutten else. Mi not need to get involved in a nutten else. Mi no need to depend nutten else.

[00:28:46] – ["children of a lesser god" by d'bi.young anitafrika]

[00:29:19] – d'bi: *She Mami Wata* is a play that I wrote specifically for Black queer folks. I wanted to have a conversation about the plethora of Black queerness, the way that we perform our queerness. I wanted us to have a conversation about the compassion and empathy that we cultivate for each other in the political difficulties of navigating our queerness. And I set it in Jamaica because—

[00:29:58] – Dian: Mmm.

[00:29:59] – d'bi: That space is a space that I really want to contribute to the critical conversations that are happening.

[00:30:09] – Dian: Yup. Yeah.

[00:30:09] – d'bi: The monologue that I'm going to read is my favourite in the show. It's the culminating monologue of one of our central characters, Niki. And in this monologue, she is simultaneously in church on the pulpit preaching, and she's also in the club dancing on the pole because she's an erotic dancer. And, and it's a juxtaposition of the sort of martyrdom, crucifixion idea and the unapologetic sexual divinity of this character. (laughing)

[00:30:52] – Dian: Right? Can you tell us the full title first, though? Like the...

[00:30:55] – d'bi: The whole title of the show is *She, Mami Wata & The Pussy WitchHunt*. (Lydie gasping, Dian laughing) Niki: “no, no, no more room. no more room for no male god who sanction my death. without me, without me and my black hole, there would be no you, no you, no myth, no story, no science, no culture, no economics, no capitalism, no colonization. no. no more male god to sanction my death. why are you devilizing my punani, my jade palace, my goddess flower that all of humanity come from. why? yuh name call, point finger at, step on, step in, violate, cut open, cut out, stab, batta bruise, burn, chop, tighten, spit on, suffocate, and murder. and murder? you murder the deepest temple which holds all the mysteries. yuh beat mi, and rape mi, and curse mi, and spit pon mi, and torture mi, and impoverish mi. weh you know about liberation, eh? weh yuh know about freedom, there is no liberation until my pussy heal up, until my pum pum stop cry blood, the tears, the amount of tears that yuh instigate over and over and over again, making yuh male god with a penis and forget the cunt that you first kiss when me, yes, me, push you out of heaven. Me, me, me not living under no bloodclaat man guvament. Me not living under no bloodclaat man guvament, yuh hear me? ‘oman, ‘oman, how do men—a talk to oman inna church? listen. It's lies, lies, lies, lies, them telling. yuh not dirty, smelly, whorish, dotish, stupid, weak, ugly. carve out yuh own story, ‘oman. carve out the bullshit that has been pissed down your throat and plant a tree of self-love to grow roots. this pussy shame, this pussy shame, this pussy shame, heh heh! swept into my back like a white man, pride riding my ass uninvited. i feel no bloodclaat shame, no guilt, no remorse. I feel no obligation or allegiance to some idea of ‘ooman society pick up while trying to crawl out of its mother's womb and away, away, away from the mami wata, away from the wata. you, ‘ooman, you decide what is holy, what is decent, what is proper. you, ‘ooman, lesbian, malec, and butch, dyke, femme, queer, genderqueer, polyamorous, androgynous, polyandrous, you, human. because all are we a bloodclaat human. you decide your liberation. you decide your

emancipation. and when you decide, come. come, congregation. come! come, pussy witches. come, come into the mami wata. (chuckling)

**[00:34:49] – Dian:** (inhaling) Ooooo! (Lydie snapping) Oh my word! Listen, I just feel like, I just feel like you're such a blessing. You're such a blessing. Oh, my goodness.

**[00:35:05] – Lydie:** Like, it had to be. You had to be. Like without you, like can you imagine how much...

**[00:35:11] – Dian:** No, no.

**[00:35:12] – Lydie:** Like, you had to be. Like, thank you, Universe.

**[00:35:16] – d'bi:** Thank you.

**[00:35:18] – Lydie:** You had to... It was absolutely everything.

**[00:35:19] – d'bi:** It's been such a road. It's been such a road. And, you know, I—, I thank the people came before me because they gave me so much strength. ahdri zhina mandiola mentored me for so many years. And to have another person in that space for me to look up to really made the difference. Like I grew up watching my mom on stage and watching my mom register her voice in the community. And so that was always an image of a possibility that I had in my heart ever since I could understand myself to be a self.

**[00:36:05] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:36:06] – d'bi:** And then coming to Canada, mom introduced me to ahdri. And it was incredible because at that point, when I came to Canada, my mom was making her way deeper into education as a teacher.

**[00:36:24] – Dian:** Mmm, mmm.

**[00:36:24] – d'bi:** And so being introduced to ahdri gave me an opportunity to continue watching other Black women make theatre as my mom transitions into education.

**[00:36:40] – Dian:** Mhmm.

**[00:36:40] – d'bi:** So ahdri and Alison Sealey-Smith and Djanet Sears and Amma Harris of Theater in the Rough—

**[00:36:49] – Dian:** Oh yes!

**[00:36:49] – d'bi:** Rhoma Spencer. These practitioners really gave me models of possibilities that allowed me to synthesize what they were offering as mentors, and then to look back at my own political locations, you know because we all have these nuances of how we are individually located, and that's healthy. That's very healthy. So I had this tapestry of very complex Black womanhood, Black personhood. And then from that tapestry, I could experiment with my own positionings and with what was crucial for me.

**[00:37:39] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:37:40] – d'bi:** You know, and the Anitafrika Method, which was formerly known as the Sorplusi Method, the Anitafrika method really became the vehicle through which I could gather my political ideas, my creative ideas, and those parts of my identity that were often ostracized in community that

could gather all of that to formulate a framework where first and foremost, I could have room, where I could have room as a human being, as an artist, because there were all these spaces where um I wanted to be a part of, but parts of me were not welcomed.

**[00:38:27] – Dian:** Yup.

**[00:38:27] – d'bi:** So depending on the space—

**[00:38:29] – Lydie:** Mmm.

**[00:38:29] – d'bi:** a certain part was not welcome. So the Blackness would be welcome, but not the feminism. Maybe the feminism would be welcome, but not the queerness. Maybe the queer Black feminism would be welcome, but not the commitment to anti-classist values. We can be very classist. We can be as radical and as revolutionary as we want, but really have something against poor people. Like really have something against working class people!

**[00:38:59] – Lydie:** Right.

**[00:38:59] – d'bi:** And that, that comes out of colonization as well, right?

**[00:39:02] – Dian:** Yup.

**[00:39:03] – d'bi:** To be colonized, to hate the poor, and to blame the people, blame working class people for the, the maldistribution of wealth on the planet, when those same working class people are the ones who are carrying the planet on their backs! Do you know what I'm saying?

**[00:39:20] – Dian:** Absolutely.

**[00:39:20] – d'bi:** Like, Black people carry the wealth of Europe (Lydie coughing) and America on their backs. So we've got a real anti, anti-working people, anti, you know anti-poor people. We look at like the way that workers, it's so difficult for workers to unionize and becoming increasingly difficult for workers to unionize because there is a real violence, a real corporate violence against workers. So for me, watching ahdri, watching Djanet, watching Rhoma, all these, these women had and have such a complex approach to making that is anti-oppressive. And there is a whole legacy of anti-racist action that has embedded in it an intersectional and anti-oppressive popular theatre politic—

**[00:40:14] – Dian:** Yes.

**[00:40:15] – d'bi:** That I come from in Jamaica, that I come from in Canada. It's really important to name these folks. It's really important to name the ways in which where we are now, even in theatre on this sort of movement towards decolonizing, it would not have been possible without the foundational work that the Vera Cudjoe's did in, in our Canadian society, without the foundational work of Djanet Sears and the AfriCanadian Playwrights Festival, the foundational work of ahdri zhina mandiel and bCurrent theatre, the foundational work of Rhoma Spencer and Theatre Archipelago and AfriCan Theatre Ensemble, like Obsidian Theatre and Alison Sealey-Smith, and the folks who collectivized to make Obsidian Theatre, that Mumbi is now doing such a phenomenal job—

**[00:41:02] – Dian:** Yes!

**[00:41:03] – d'bi:** of, of really bringing that theatre into where we are now—

**[00:41:07] – Lydie:** Mmm.

**[00:41:07] – d'bi:** which is like, as Black people, we are nuanced, we are dynamic, we are political! We're political! And we're political by the nature of what colonization has done and how it has impacted us as a people. So we are political, necessarily political. It's really incredible to watch and watch Weyni Mengesha at theatre, Soulpepper Theatre, really bringing that theatre from the brink of ruin uh because of the sort of colonial foundations that it, it sits in and really taking that theatre out of the muck and the mire and bringing it into a now—

**[00:41:49] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:41:50] – d'bi:** that is accountable and responsible. Likewise, for both of you, the work that you're doing to bring Black Theatre Workshop into a now that is accountable to Black peoples, Black people from the diaspora, recognizing that Blackness is so dynamic and multiplicitous, and—

**[00:42:10] – Dian:** Absolutely.

**[00:42:10] – d'bi:** we have a responsibility to, especially when we're in positions of leadership, to address that multiplicity and to root that, that work in integrity, in anti-oppression, in, in decolonizing.

**[00:42:25] – Dian:** Yeah. I want to, I want to ask you to not only expand on Surplusi, but expand on the training that you do for, because I know so many artists who've come up out of Watah, out of the Watah school and out of um the, the retreats that you've done in places like Cuba and Gua- I think you've been in different parts in India, South Africa.

**[00:42:50] – d'bi:** Hawaii, Europe, Africa, Caribbean.

**[00:42:55] – Dian:** Yeah.

**[00:42:56] – d'bi:** All over.

**[00:42:57] – Dian:** And all over. So can you talk to us a little bit about the training, um...

**[00:43:00] – d'bi:** Yeah. You know, the method, the Anitafrika Method, the Sorplusi Method, um specifically was developed when I resigned from Soulpepper Academy, ah because like I, like I was alluding to earlier, like here was a really brilliant idea and, and such a brilliant uh concept to pay artists to study theatre and to make theatre and to work with like people who are masters in theatre, celebrated in theatre! What a beautiful space. It was such a beautiful space and a beautiful idea. But we're dealing with like co- like neo-colonialism that invades all of our spaces. So of course, there's all kinds of issues there at that theatre space that at the time it was not willing to engage, you know. I suggested that we engage those issues, but the, the space was not willing to do that at the time. And so I decided, well you can't, you're not willing to do that, I'm not willing to be here.

**[00:43:59] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:44:00] – d'bi:** And so I resigned and started immediately working on the Method. And, and not only working on the Method, but also while I was working on the Method, I created a space to invite artists to come and be with me as the Method developed. Just like, again, to be able to, to have the support to do that kind of initiative is really quite incredible, because had I not had the support, support from my

mother, support from the practitioners who trusted me enough to come on that crazy ride, practitioners like Kemba King and Amanda Parris and Bahia Watson—

**[00:44:43] – Dian:** Yes.

**[00:44:45] - d'bi:** um, Complex. These people are all celebrated practitioners in their own right in, in Canada now—

**[00:44:53] – Dian:** Yes, yeah.

**[00:44:53] – d'bi:** and in the world. But were they not- if they didn't give me the trust, the initiative could not have happened. It's like we need each other to grow our ideas and to grow each other. You can't do it- there's no island thing where you stand by yourself and you know sort of this, "I think, therefore I am" foolishness. You know what I'm saying? It's more like Ubuntu, "I am because you are, because we are." So I just want to acknowledge that the Method developed because practitioners have been in the room—

**[00:45:24] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:45:24] – d'bi:** to co-develop the method. And so it came out of that initial impulse to create a space that was anti-oppressive, intersectional, that dared to say, "We are gonna, we are gonna to make space for all of ourselves. It is possible to create theatre from all of ourselves, and we don't have to copy each other!"

**[00:45:46] – Dian and Lydie simultaneously:** Mmhmm.

**[00:45:47] – d'bi:** You go to theatre school and it's like, "Copy Ibsen, copy Chekhov, copy this one, copy that one." (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) "And then you'll have a great play." We were like, "Actually, I'm also a playwright. I'm also a playmaker, and I don't need to copy, I don't even need to copy my mentor or my elder or my friend. I don't, actually, I just want a space where I can grow my own shit." And so anitafrika dub theatre was the first incarnation. And, and at that point, I only had, I think, maybe six principles, four of which I took from my mother's thesis that she wrote in theatre school in Jamaica in 1985, looking at dub poetry and dub theory. It also happens that ahndri zhina mandielia was working on a concept of dubbing, dub, dub theatre.

**[00:46:37] – Dian:** Yup.

**[00:46:37] – d'bi:** She, she called her, her concept dub theatre. In Jamaica, when ahndri was studying in Jamaica, she encountered the dub poets and spent quite a bit of time in Jamaica working in theatre, working alongside dub poets, and it, and grew her idea of dub theatre and brought that back to Toronto. Around that same time, of course, the dub poets were also experimenting with dub in theatre and dub on stage, and my mom was a part of that community. And so she wrote her graduating thesis entitled um "Dubbin Theatre: Moving Dub Poetry Into A Theatrical Form."

**[00:47:17] – Dian:** Mmm.

**[00:47:17] – d'bi:** How—, how, you know I think of that and I'm thinking, how lucky am I that on the one hand, my mom was developing this dubbin theatre concept, and then I moved to Canada and my mom introduces me to ahdri, and it just so happens that ahdri is also developing—

**[00:47:32] – Dian:** Yes.

**[00:47:33] – d'bi:** this thing that grows out of the same roots of dub poetry. Like how, you know, for me, when I think of that, I'm just like, okay, clearly, I am exactly where I need to be. (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) And so I consider that the work that I do in the Anitafrika method is really attempting to bridge that earlier conversation that Black women were having, primarily Black women like my mother, like ahdri, were having about the nature of dub poetry and its potential to grow into a theatrical space. I feel like I'm bridging that conversation with my obsession of the artist's process of liberation.

**[00:48:15] – Lydie:** Mm, mm, mm.

**[00:48:15] – d'bi:** That is what I am concerned with. How can the artist be liberated within themselves, within their art, within the community? Absolute emancipation and liberation, because that project that we've been working on since enslavement is not done.

**[00:48:30] –** (Dian and Lydie agreeing simultaneously)

**[00:48:31] – d'bi:** It's not done. If I can't sit here and say to you, "I am a liberated, emancipated human being," if I can't do that, then the project is ongoing. And there is that saying that "if none of us are free," "all of us can't be free until all of us are free." And if somebody is not free, then the rest of us who consider ourselves to be free really have to consider what that freedom means and at whose expense. (sounds of agreement from Dian and Lydie) Essentially, we're moving towards liberation for all. That's what we're moving towards. And whether that is a fancy dream, I'm not concerned with that. I've got to focus on something in this life, and that's what I choose to focus on. Lib-era-tion. Eman-ci-pa-tion. Space for me to feel safe, to be safe, to not cause harm, and to not have harm caused to me. The Method is ultimately trying to support the artist as they engage in that rite of passage. That is what the Method is. And of course, it, it prioritizes art making because it comes out of art making. So it uses art tools, creative tools, in order to do that. And it encourages the artist to focus on the creation of a really fundamental body of work. So that could look like a piece of theatre, or it could look like a, a series of paintings, or it could look like poems, or it could- whatever it- could look like a meal for your family. Any kind of creative venture,

**[00:50:10] – Lydie:** Mmm.

**[00:50:10] – Dian:** Yes.

**[00:50:11] – d'bi:** The method is there to support the practitioner (music starting) as they self-transform as they make art, and as they move into community to transform the community.

**[00:50:22] –** ["gendah bendah" by d'bi.young anitafrika]

[00:51:12] – **Lydie:** Chapter 25 of my obsession with, um, d'bi.young. When I, I— Tamara Brown was one of the first artists to open her arms to me when I decided that art cannot just be a passion on the side after my nine to five. It has to become my life and something that I actually invest all of my fire in. And um, I was very lucky to work with Tamara Brown on a play called *Blackout*. And I think that when we did the workshop, our very, very first workshop to the first draft and figuring out what, how we're going to approach the script, she was coming straight out of your workshop, and we could tell. (Dian laughing)

[00:51:55] – **d'bi:** The one in Vancouver!

[00:51:57] – **Lydie:** I, I know that it was out of town. I know it was in 2018, early 2018 or 2017, late 2017.

[00:52:07] – **d'bi:** Yes, the Vancouver one.

[00:52:08] – **Lydie:** Yeah. She had uh the, she had a map of your cards, cards with words.

[00:52:13] – **d'bi:** Yes.

[00:52:13] – **Lydie:** And like she had all of these tools of inspiration. I was like, "Oh, I finally found my community!" It was so amazing.

[00:52:22] – **d'bi:** Yeah, it's a beautiful workshop.

[00:52:22] – **Lydie:** So even remote, your work was continuing to affect the work that I was working. And I'm still, I'm a still great— I'm very lucky to call Tamara Brown, my friend.

[00:52:34] – **d'bi:** You know what would be awesome? You know what would be awesome if Black Theatre Workshop, if Black Theatre Workshop convened a national Black woman symposium, that where practitioners, Black women practitioners got to co-share, co-share our resources. So like, whoever comes to the conference or the symposium teaches the rest of us their decolonial framework or what- however it is that they make theatre, because that's what I'm missing in my life, okay? I am missing learning from other Black women—

[00:53:10] – **Dian:** Right!

[00:53:10] – **d'bi:** How they approach and make theatre. (Lydie snapping in agreement) So I want to go to a conference or a symposium—

[00:53:15] – **Dian:** Listen.

[00:53:15] – **d'bi:** that has Black women peers there, and then I can learn, and then I will offer my, my method as well. Throw it in the circle.

[00:53:24] – **Dian:** Listen, listen.

[00:53:24] – **d'bi:** And we can spend two or three days just learning from each other. Can you do that? Can you apply for funding to do that?

[00:53:31] – **Dian:** We, we already applied for funding, something along the lines, and we're going to be doing something along those lines.

[00:53:36] – **d'bi:** Get out of here!

[00:53:37] – **Dian:** I'm not even joking. So it's coming. It's coming. And I just want to tell you, I, I really believe ideas are in the ether. They float around us, and we just tap into them. So you know that we're

tapping into the same kind of thing, because I've been saying this for years, even before the pandemic, we need to revisit. And AfriCanadian Playwrights Festival, which is where I met the majority of people I know needs a reincarnation.

[00:54:06] – **d'bi**: Yes, absolutely!

[00:54:09] – **Dian**: Right? Yes.

[00:54:09] – **d'bi**: Absolutely.

[00:54:10] – **Dian**: So my, my dear, it's coming.

[00:54:12] – **d'bi**: I'm here for the committee that's starting the stuff. I'm here.

[00:54:18] – **Dian**: Okay!

[00:54:18] – **d'bi**: My PhD will be done in a few months. So by the end of the year, I will be again available to support community initiatives, (laughing) I just need to give in my dissertation!

[00:54:30] – **Lydie**: Dr. young?

[00:54:31] – **Dian**: Dr. young. Listen—

[00:54:34] – **Lydie**: Ooo, we'll be presenting Dr. young?

[00:54:36] – **Dian**: Seriously, seriously. (d'bi laughing) I like, I, it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you, and I know that we could talk for hours. And uh I hope that someday I have enough time and capacity to actually go and hang out with you in the forest for— (laughing)

[00:54:53] – **d'bi**: You got to come, D.

[00:54:53] – **Dian**: I know, I know.

[00:54:54] – **Lydie**: I'm making receipts. I'm making receipts!

[00:54:56] – **d'bi**: (overlapping with Dian) D, you got to take that time. You got to take that time—

[00:54:59] – **Dian**: (overlapping with d'bi) I know.

[00:54:59] – **d'bi**: and come for one week!

[00:55:00] – **Dian**: I know. I've been, I've been looking at it for over a decade. You know this, right? Like, since you started them—

[00:55:05] – **d'bi**: One week, D.

[00:55:06] – **Dian**: (overlapping with d'bi) Yeah, I know.

[00:55:06] – **d'bi**: One week in your life. One week! (laughing)

[00:55:11] – **Lydie**: She gave us homework.

[00:55:12] – **Dian**: I know.

[00:55:13] – **Lydie**: She said three days.

[00:55:15] – **Dian**: Oh, I know! But Lydie, we're talking about, we're talking- she's catching her breath.

[00:55:20] – **Lydie**: I'm already reserving. I'm looking. Okay. It's happening.

[00:55:24] – **Dian**: It's happening. (Lydie laughing)

[00:55:25] – **d'bi**: I think you should have a Black Theatre Workshop week-long retreat with both of you.

[00:55:32] – **Lydie**: It's a week now!

[00:55:33] – **d'bi**: So that you can conceptualize the next season. (laughing)

[00:55:39] – **Dian**: You're not the only one who's asked for that, believe it or not.

[00:55:42] – **d'bi**: You'll get funding for it, you know. You'll get funding! (laughing)

[00:55:45] – **Lydie**: You have two staff who heard.

[00:55:48] – **Dian**: Just in this room. Two staff have talked to me within the last 48 hours. They've been asking. (d'bi laughing) And I'm like, "All right."

[00:55:54] – **d'bi**: And then I'll design your own special residency. It'll just be curated for you! (laughing)

[00:56:00] – **Dian**: Oh, my gosh! (laughing)

[00:56:03] – **Lydie**: I'm taking note of everything! "And then we have to specialize..."

[00:56:09] – **Dian**: She is taking notes.

[00:56:10] – **Lydie**: "...The workshop, which is for us. Just for us."

[00:56:14] – **Dian**: All right, my love, I'm going to say thank you so much for the time you spent with us.

[00:56:18] – **Lydie**: You are so generous. You are so full of all the goods that the universe has to provide. Thank you for existing.

[00:56:28] – **d'bi**: Thank you so much. Thank you to both of you and to your whole team. They've been so beautiful communicating back and forth with your team. Like I love their vibes. Love their vibes. Lots and lots of support. So clear and so, so loving. And so I felt held.

[00:56:42] – **Dian**: Oh!

[00:56:42] – **d'bi**: I felt held the whole time.

[00:56:44] – **Dian**: Aww!

[00:56:45] – **d'bi**: That's the way to go.

[00:56:45] – **Dian**: Thank you, thank you!

[00:56:46] – **d'bi**: That is the way to go. People will always want to be in your presence and share with you because they feel taken care of.

[00:56:54] – **Dian**: Our— Our—

[00:56:55] – **d'bi**: So beautiful work.

[00:56:55] – **Dian**: Thank you.

[00:56:56] – **d'bi**: And I can't wait to hear it! I can't wait to hear it! (laughing)

[00:56:59] – **Dian**: Amazing. I'm just going to put a note out there for the folks who are listening. This is a brand-new podcast series that we've just launched. So the initiative is to engage people on the island of Montreal, in Canada, and around Quebec. And if you followed us today and enjoyed what you heard, please follow us on social media to hear about upcoming episodes. And you can always visit our website as well to hear about upcoming episodes. Again, we're thanking our lovely friend, d'bi.young anitafrika. And I hope you have like the most amazing workshops coming up. And uh when you come to Toronto in the summer, because I know you're doing these workshops with Soulpepper Theatre in Toronto, (music starting) please come down the highway and visit us and hang out with us.

[00:57:48] – **d'bi**: (singing) I will, I will! (speaking normally) I can't wait. I love you all.

[00:57:52] – **Dian**: We love you, my dear.

[00:57:53] – **d'bi**: Take very great care of yourselves. Don't forget to breathe.

[00:57:56] – **Lydie**: We will.

[00:57:57] – **Dian**: Yes. (d'bi laughing)

[00:58:00] – **Lydie**: I love my life. I love my life.

[00:58:05] – **Dian**: Amazing.

[00:58:08] – **Lydie**: Women's retreat!

[00:58:11] – [Theme music: "Cocktail Music" by Francesco Biondi"]