

Transcript for Episode 131 of the Artist Soapbox podcast. Recorded on October 26, 2020.

Interviewer: Tamara Kissane

Guest: Jaki Shelton Green

*[Please note that the transcript below may have errors that occurred during the transcription process. The timestamps correspond to the interview that begins after the ASBX introduction, around the 2 minute mark.]*

Tamara Kissane (00:00):

Hello, Jackie, thank you so much for making time to talk this morning.

Jaki Shelton Green (00:05):

Oh, Tamara. Thank you for the invitation. I've been really looking forward to talking to you

Tamara Kissane (00:10):

Before we begin, I would just like to open with some gratitude. I feel so much gratitude for your poetry, your artistry, and voice, your activism, your advocacy, your attention to North Carolina and the education and wisdom that you offer. So thank you so much for all of that.

Jaki Shelton Green (00:32):

Thank you for, for such a beautiful, beautiful, Oh wow. It's such a beautiful gift of gratitude. It's always wonderful to, to be seen and to be heard and to be affirmed and especially in the season where we're very uncertain about our voices and how they're heard, how they're perceived, how they're translated or re-imagined. So thank you for offering that in this space. You are welcome.

Tamara Kissane (01:00):

I'd like to talk a little bit about what you just mentioned. This has been a difficult year for many people, and of course there are difficult times throughout all of our lives, but it seems like this is a difficulty were experiencing globally, nationally as a community. And I think that has had a different kind of an effect on different writers. Some people have lost their words. They seem to have lost the urge to write. And some people have been like greed of firehoses where they're just pouring words onto the page. And then some folks toggle back and forth. So they have a writing desert where they have nothing. And then they have a writing monsoon where they have everything in terms of their output. So I'm wondering about your experience of writing through difficult times and any words you can offer to writers who are trying to find their words right now?

Jaki Shelton Green (01:53):

Well, for me, I guess I would be in that third category, the one is just back and forth. The power of witness matters to me. I have allowed myself to learn what it really means to be still and be quiet in times like these and to realize that the writer is always scribing, even when we're not putting that to paper or inside of the computer, we're always writing. And this is one of those times where I feel like I need to give myself as much permission to stand still looking from one side to the other, up and down, looking at my neighbors. And I mean that in a very global sense, experiencing what people are going through, asking myself, is there a place for me to be a kindred support to them right now? I'm asking

myself, what does it mean to be human inside of this season where we are just all, all of us are facing tremendous trepidation.

Jaki Shelton Green ([03:06](#)):

So having said that, writing always has always been available to me as that place of solace. I encourage everyone to lean more and more into their creative sides. Right now, take more photographs document this time at home with your family. You know, your kids will be looking back saying, Oh, those are pictures from that time when we couldn't go next door and play in the backyard with our friends, you know, what does it mean to preserve, to document, to name this time? So I think it's essential for those of us who are creative makers to be seeped in witness. I hope everyone is seeped in witness. As a matter of fact, I think if people were more mindfully seeped in witness, perhaps we would hear more compassionate listening happening. We would see more compassionate acts. We would see a need to be still instead of perhaps harming each other right now, but the writer or the artist has always had a place inside of every revolution.

Jaki Shelton Green ([04:21](#)):

And I truly believe this too is a revolution of some type. So my advice is to stand up in our creativity right now, more than ever, perhaps it's not the world, the greater world, but the world of our families, our children, our neighbors, our parents, our grandparents, our close, close friends right now. They need may need the word from us. If that makes sense, because we do offer a language to the unknown. That's what we do. We offer a language shitty, unknown. We offer a music to it. We offer dance to it. You know, I know dancers who are choreographing very mindful pieces during this time. So the advice I have is to think about what it means to be a critical thinker as a writing artists and how we use our writing as a medicine, how the creativity becomes a medicine that we, that we need right now.

Jaki Shelton Green ([05:22](#)):

And I think I offer that in the way I offered it because for each person, for each writer, it's very different. My writing experience right now is all about predominantly I'm. Blurbing a lot of people's new manuscripts that are forthcoming publications, providing interviews like this. I'm keynoting, literary festivals and literary conferences online all over the country and outside of the country. So that right now has been the mode. You know, that requiring my voice. I am writing, but I'm not the writer who's been able to just go deep into hibernation and use this place this time we're in to use it as a writing time for myself for myself, I wish I could, but it's not happening. I appreciate I receive, I understand, I honor my role right now, pretty much as public servant, as one who holds the space, right?

Tamara Kissane ([06:28](#)):

I like very much this idea of expanding the idea of what it means to write beyond just putting words into the computer or putting words down on the paper, but to write is also to notice, to question, to hold space, to, to offer up a single word so that it's not just about output, like producing products for people to consume, you know, that this idea of what it means to be a writer and a creative can expand to be whatever we need for it to be in that moment, whatever our community needs for that to be in that moment. And it just, I think it gives us permission to be more fully our creative selves. I really enjoy that.

Jaki Shelton Green ([07:16](#)):

I mean, we've been doing social distancing on our porch. We have a screened in porch. That's, that's actually large enough to have a very small dinner party on me, like a four that we've been out there with

family, you know, we have on our mask and, and we sit on the porch and we may have tea or, or just talk you know, chatting. So I've been reading about how creative people are across the country and continuing to create a sensibility of community. And one of the things I've been fascinated by as a woman who created this movement called the turquoise tables and people across the country, paint these picnic tables and put them in their front yard. And the whole neighborhood knows that the turquoise table is an invitation to come sit and that someone else can join you. But I've been thinking about this for writers.

Jaki Shelton Green ([08:14](#)):

What if writers had a turquoise table in their yard with a journal. And in this time of rain, perhaps a journal that would be inside of a plastic sleeve and people could just come and write in the journal and communicate with each other in the journal, it could be someone leaving a recipe. It could be someone saying yesterday was, was my daughter's birthday. We had cupcakes dadadadada, but how do we record our communal living experiences right now? Like, you know, what's happening at 2:26 is not the same thing that's happening at 2:24. I may be baking cookies with my two and a half year old granddaughter. And you know, it's a young couple next door. They may be playing games on their computer, but how cool would it be to have community record of how we're showing up in community right now?

Jaki Shelton Green ([09:14](#)):

My husband and I have this daily ritual, I just, I came across a journal, I think at TJ Maxx. And it was a white marble speckled journal. That's identical to the countertop in our bathroom. As a matter of fact, when it's laying there, you know, you barely see it. And I thought I'm going to buy this journal and we're going to leave notes for each other every day. So we started it, it's dated and daily, you know, whoever records and in it then puts it on your side. So back and forth daily, we're writing these notes about the day to each other. So we will have these moments of this time because it is truly a different time. Yeah. Writing is everywhere and all the experiences that we can have right now, you know, as a documentarian, especially with photography, especially, especially with our telephones that are so sophisticated that we could be making videos every day.

Jaki Shelton Green ([10:20](#)):

So, yeah, I'm doing some of these as writing exercises. They're almost ekphrastic, you know, photographing what's on top of your, your kitchen counter. That's your writing assignment today. Tomorrow's writing assignment is write about the first kitchen. You can remember, you know, what's your favorite pair of shoes and where have they been? So just giving realistic sort of assignments, where we find the art in the everyday-ness and the ordinariness of living, you know, writing for me is, is not a lofty creative act. I celebrate it in the everydayness and the ordinariness of life every day. That's the sacredness of art. It's, it's everywhere in everything.

Tamara Kissane ([11:08](#)):

I love those examples that you've just given, because I think it emphasizes writing as connection. And also going back to the beginning of our conversation about affirming people and validating them and being seen it's it's saying to people just what you said, that these moments in your life matter, every moment matters and has magic to it, and can be just a deep, well that you can dive into with meaning. So the shoes that you don't really pay attention to by the door, they mean so much look at how far they've traveled. You know, in the moment you have with your granddaughter, it means everything. She

might remember that for the rest of her life. So I feel like, as you just said, so many people think that in order to write something that has quote, I'm putting this at air quotes, meaning it has to be some grand idea or a string of multi-syllabic words, when actually it is the stuff of daily living that we all can relate to. And that really has that potency.

Jaki Shelton Green ([12:12](#)):

Yeah. And I think right now we have to see, this is very fertile ground, but I'm not the artist that pushes it. You know, I'm not the writer that has told myself, Oh, you should be writing about this right now. It is happening organically for me. And I'm not intellectually controlling what that looks like. Yeah.

Tamara Kissane ([12:34](#)):

This year has been interesting to me personally, for a lot of reasons. And one of the big changes that I've experienced is a turn to embracing kind of an internal rhythm for my writing, as opposed to an external rhythm. I was always somebody who was so motivated by deadlines that other people imposed on me. It's like, you have to have this done by this date for this person. And this year I've been questioning more my own, you know what, Tamara, what do you want to do? What, when do you want to do it? Are you tired? Do you need to rest? Or do you feel like you can be productive and just giving myself permission to follow kind of the rise and fall of my own energy level and interest in a way that I've never done before. And that has been a revelation to me. I think it's helped my writing, but I think it's also just made me like an easier person to be around.

Jaki Shelton Green ([13:31](#)):

Yeah. I think in our culture, we are programmed to do just what you're talking about to always be on in 2004, when I decided it was time to be the writer not working at being the writer, meaning that I had a full-time job and was writing in those liminal spaces, but to be the writer to come home and be the writer, I realized a lot about what you just said, that I was so programmed to be, you know, it's like producing, producing, producing inside of, of this artificial cage of Western culture is just so limiting. We have forgotten how to be, how to just be still and people are not comfortable with being still. We've seen that evidenced with this pandemic. I think our numbers would be so more controllable perhaps, right? If some people who were - okay, don't get me started politically, but we don't know how to be with ourselves.

Jaki Shelton Green ([14:34](#)):

"We Need to be outside. We need to go to the mall. We need the sports we need." And you know, the universe just said, I'm tired. I need a breath myself. I've been asking all of you for a, you've taken my breath and she's taken our breath so she can breathe. And that's been the metaphor that showed up in my spirit and March one morning, I actually, I remember one morning, it was probably late March, early April. I was standing outside with my husband and our yard. And I said, do you hear that? And he was like, what? I was like, listen. And he said, what are you listening to? I said, I can hear the earth breathing as I, I don't know if I've ever heard her breathe before I said, but she's breathing. I said, there are no cars. We don't hear an airplane overhead.

Jaki Shelton Green ([15:33](#)):

We, you know, we heard the first airplane just recently where we live is like a pathway, I guess an arial highway. Raleigh Durham and the air traffic has just tremendously slowed down. It totally was stopped at one time, but to just hear the earth breathe. So that taught me to learn how to listen to my own

breathing. Because for me, that's where a lot of poetry, that's where a lot of story resides is inside of, of inhalation and exhalation of those liminal spaces. I think if we can train ourselves to, to be okay with being alone, only with our breath, it's an invitation for the muse to really show up.

Tamara Kissane ([16:27](#)):

Yes. that gives me chills. It also makes me think about how difficult it is for me to be still and how much fear there is in me. And I've seen in other people as well. If I'm still, if I open up to the muse, what might be there, it's frightening for me personally. I think, I think it's a, it's an exercise of faith and trust that I can handle. What's on the other side of that silence and that breathing. And that for me again, the page can contain it. You talk a lot about containers in the conversations that you've had with other people and that's always resonated really well with me that I can, I can find a container to put this in and that can hold. Yeah.

Jaki Shelton Green ([17:16](#)):

And right now we need, we need those containers. We need to build them, you know, not just for ourselves, but we need to, to build them for others. I was thinking about, I'm thinking about the sixties and seventies during the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war and the Cambodian occupation. And I was thinking about how art was such a powerful container for what was going on, you know, the freedom riders, singers, and all of the, it was like a second Harlem Renaissance, just a resurgence of African-American poets and poets of color that, that really seize that moment, you know, and, and an art, you know, and I see these exhibits, there are a lot of retrospectives now happening, and I've been looking online at a couple of African-American curators who are kind of collecting all of this memorabilia from the sixties and seventies. And I just, you know, narrative is such a powerful container and seeing how narratives beget narratives, and it's just mindfully, you know, it's just mindfully encouraging for me knowing that this too shall pass.

Jaki Shelton Green ([18:33](#)):

You know, we've been here before in similar times of disharmony, racism, sexism, all the isms we've been here before, and this too shall pass. But I believe that it is up to artists to tell the truth about this time, because there's so much rhetoric and there's so much, I think about what our children will be waiting through in history books about this time. So it's just so important that the truth tellers that their voices are active right now. You know, I may not be engaged in, in writing about this this very moment, but I feel like I'm in this gathering mode. If that makes sense. My, my psyche, my heart, my intellect, you know, it's just gathering right from this wellspring. And it's not always a wellspring that's running clear nourishing fruitful. It's not necessarily cool water, but it's flowing, it's flowing, right? Some of it is a blood bath and that too must be remembered. So, you know, what, what do we tell the children that that's always my question about who we are as creative makers? What do we tell the children? Right? They will ask and, you know, children who are three, four, five when they're 15, they'll be reading about this time. What will we help them to remember better yet? How will we help them to experience what was happening during this time? There's so many different pandemics going on.

Tamara Kissane ([20:22](#)):

Yes, exactly. How do we, how do we separate out the strands, but also realize that they're all braided together. They are distinct, and yet they are interwoven. And how do you, how do you make sense of that to, to yourself, to the children, to your community? That feels like an artist's job?

Jaki Shelton Green ([20:41](#)):

Well, it's, it's definitely, you know, I always tell people, art is that one place where you can create that bridge and all of our difference in all of our otherness, it's that one place where we can stand together. You know, I remind people that when you're on a dance floor, getting your boogie on really don't care who the drummer voted for, but nobody's like looking at the drummer side-eye. Like wonder who he voted for. No, we're all enjoying his beat. If we can recognize that we have this connected heartbeat, that the heartbeats are connected in art, a total stranger standing in front of a piece of art has turned to each other and start talking. And that single heart beat, they're experiencing the art together, even though separate, even though differently, they have different perspectives about what they're looking at, but they're doing it together. And not just art that happens in sports, but it happens in art when we're singing together. When we're dancing, when we are witnessing a phenomenal piece of art, be it dance or sculpture or whatever, or an installation, we are experiencing it together at once. And that's, you know, to me, art is not safe, but it creates a bridge that's safe. Yeah.

Tamara Kissane ([22:09](#)):

I would like to connect that to some other work that you do through SistaWRITE. You are the owner and founder of SistaWRITE, . And that is an organization that provides writing retreats and travel excursions for women. So this idea of taking a breath, having some space apart, also in community, and combining that with some travel and retreat, it sounds so amazing to me right now. It sounds like a fantasy

Jaki Shelton Green ([22:39](#)):

Sistawrite has been my fantasy forever to provide writing retreats for women writers. And the thing is you don't really have to be a writer. You just have to be a creative maker who is looking for the narrative inside of your work. So I've had sculptors come. I've had women who work with metal and iron come. I've had quilters come and other textile artists I've had singers come it's people who are looking for the narrative inside their stitches or inside of the fire in their welding system, right. It's phenomenal. It's pretty fabulous. Not because I founded it, but because the magic that happens at SistaWRITE, and SistaWRITE, is not for everyone, SistaWRITE is not, I've never said, and it never will be a conference or a workshop or a how to, write. The foundation of it is not about craft craft inherently.

Jaki Shelton Green ([23:41](#)):

You know what I'm saying is, but it's more about given women say beautiful, intentional spaces where they can come one and be treated like queens. I am very intentional about where we are, the spaces we inhabit and how you're cared for. I wanted a space where women could be totally nurtured. I know myself as a divorced mother, raising three children, what it was like to find the space to write. It was very difficult. And even now, you know, I'm, I'm 67 years old, my 104 year old mom lives with us. And in this time of the coronavirus, we're also helping with our granddaughter. So here I am, again, you know what I'm saying, inside of this, looking for my own space. Well, I know women are doing this all the time. So SistaWRITE was birthed out of that intention. So I want to invite you publicly to come be a writer in residence at SistaWRITE

Jaki Shelton Green ([24:53](#)):

Because one of the things I said I wanted to do was not always be the talking head of SistaWRITE. That I would provide these opportunities where I would invite other writers of different genres to come be in residence and they could create whatever they want inside of the residence space. That's worked. That's worked well. We are headquartered. If I can say headquartered. Our first sister, right, was an Ocracoke

at a bed and breakfast. That's owned by a friend of mine and we've been going there for about seven years. Now. We go twice a year in November, and then again in March or April, but of course, 2020, our Ocracoke SistaWRITE Retreat was canceled. I was to be in Ireland for a month. That was canceled. I was flying from Ireland to Morocco to curate another SistaWRITE retreat for two weeks, that was canceled. And then I had a second Moroccan retreat. Technically I would be just getting back from Morocco. So Morocco,

Speaker 3 ([26:04](#)):

Ireland, Sedona, Arizona, Tulamore Ireland,

Jaki Shelton Green ([26:08](#)):

Martha's Vineyard, New Jersey, Virginia. We go to a bed and breakfast in Lynchburg, Virginia. So anyway, we have these fabulous times women come and they really, really enjoy the sisterhood. The first question is, tell us about your, you know, like, what is your creativity? What is your creative path? And there's even a writing exercise that I require called writing the journey where I ask them once they get on the ferry, or once they get on the airplane, there's a list of questions, but it's about what does it mean to journey? And what is this particular journey metaphorical for you? Because I need people to know why they're getting on a plane for seven hours, right? Or they're driving. So, so what's interesting the drive to get to Ocracoke. The drive from the Triangle. Plus the ferry is seven hours. It's a seven hour flight to Morocco.

Jaki Shelton Green ([27:09](#)):

You know, there's a lot to think about, right? Of just the word journey. And people tell me like, Oh, I saw these questions. And I thought, all this is going to be, I can, you know, women have told me, they found themselves standing leaning over the ferry, just like wailing some of these questions when they really ask themselves -- because I will ask, what are you dropping in the Atlantic ocean? As you're coming to this retreat? What are you leaving behind? What might be weighing you down? So you can't show up in your own truths, right? For us, but for yourself, your own authenticity for yourself, that becomes a powerful exercise and kind of a, a cleansing exercise where people can show, show up fully. There've been some amazing retreats. It's not for every one. A lot of people need what I call more structure. And I don't understand that. Not having structures, also a structure it's maybe helping you understand how you might think, how you carve out time for yourself. And that's your responsibility. Yeah. I mean, there are women who come to the retreat and they're still doing business. And I'm like, I think I'm going to make her telephone disappear. People's cell phones.

Tamara Kissane ([28:30](#)):

That's what they lose over the Atlantic.

Jaki Shelton Green ([28:33](#)):

Can't show up. And then it's like, Oh, it's this whose phone is this? I found this like, you're in a business meeting. Nope. You're at a retreat, sweetie.

Tamara Kissane ([28:42](#)):

That sounds incredible. That sounds amazing. I can't wait until things can safely resume. That sounds, I don't know.

Jaki Shelton Green ([28:50](#)):

Part of the retreating is if you show up and your body and spirit says, I need to sleep for two days, then we as SistaWRITE embrace that and support that. And there is no judgment or you come to SistaWRITE. I've had women come to SistaWRITE and like, Jaki, thank you for the space. I have to get the story done. I have to have it done by Monday. And this is why I'm here. And I need, y'all the whole space for me. I'm coming to you all just to be in this space, in this room by myself to write. They're like, we got you. You don't have to come to the sessions. So we're bringing people hot tea. We're taking up a basket of, of cheese and crackers and fruit, you know, or taking cookies and tea up at three. O'clock just to check on you. But not to say, you need to come play with us. No, it's what you need and how we can support you. I wanted the retreats to be different than any other retreat that people had been to. And it has become just that. I love that.

Tamara Kissane ([29:57](#)):

The heart of that and the generosity. That sounds incredible. Jaki, I want to make sure that we have some time to talk about your newest album, because this is by jam. I am so excited about this.

Jaki Shelton Green ([30:16](#)):

You have a copy?

Tamara Kissane ([30:17](#)):

I absolutely have a copy. I've been listening to it because I am a person who loves to hear language spoken. I'm an audio person. I love performance of language. And sometimes things don't sink in for me the first time. And so I need to revisit work. And so having something that I can listen to as I walk, and I can listen to it again as I'm doing the dishes or just staring out the window and let the language and the music kind of sink into me is just exactly what I, as an audience member, as a listener appreciate. So I would like to know, why did you decide to make an album it's titled the river speaks of thirst for people who haven't already experienced it, but why this collection, why now tell me all about that.

Jaki Shelton Green ([31:11](#)):

Well, for years, people have been asking me, do you have a CD? Are your poems on audio? And I'm like, no. And people, I mean, for years, your poem should be audio books. And I didn't resist it. It was about time and about, I don't know how to do that. And then these lovely people fell in my life. Shannon Jackson, who's a poet, introduced me to her husband Phil Venable. And you know, like one day we were hanging out and he was like, you need a record, you need an album, you know, you need a classic vinyl album. And I was like, okay. I was like, how does one do that? And he says, I got this. So he and another friend, Alec Ferrell, they were like, the next thing I know, I'm in a studio. And what was fabulous about the studio?

Jaki Shelton Green ([32:08](#)):

It was Alec's living room. We didn't want to be an, a formal conventional studio. And Alec is amazing. And we engineered this entire album at his house with a lot of laughing and jabbing at each other. So it was time I had the poetry, there was this, Oh, but I need another book. Should I do the album before I do the book? You know and I'm like, let's just do it. I'm very grateful and very happy that I did it. Also, I want to make a, make a point about working across generations, the value of intergenerational mingling and an intergenerational working together collaborations because these young men are not, are not my peers, but the knowledge between the two of them knowing the industry from A to Z. I mean, knowing



every facet of it, sometimes I would listen. And I just felt like they were speaking a foreign language in terms of, of a lot of the business side of it and the formalities, you know, the album being registered and all of that stuff. So it was just the coolest learning curve for me. They're talking second album. Oh, wow. Yeah. They're already like, well for the second album and I'm like second album they're, like, did you think we're stopping there? And I was like, okay. And they're making videos, I think you may have seen the video of Oh My Brother.

Tamara Kissane ([33:49](#)):

I did. I did see that. So,

Jaki Shelton Green ([33:52](#)):

You know, it's just, it's a new way. And I'm, I'm open right now for new ways for my work to be in the world. And I know that music taking my voice out there is very important. Knowing how far the reach of that album is just feels so good. So of course, you know, the big launch party didn't happen. Right. And all of the travel engagements of promoting the album didn't happen. But hopefully after COVID, we can have a, a decent christening of the album.

Tamara Kissane ([34:26](#)):

Do you hear your poetry with soundscape and sound effects and other voices? Do you experience it like that? Or did you come with ideas about how that sound would be built out or did other people give suggestions? How did that part work

Jaki Shelton Green ([34:43](#)):

When I'm writing? I hear it. I know what it sounds like. And maybe I have a dance background for many, many years. I was a dancer. So writing for me is a lot like choreography. It's also a lot like being an interior decorator. No, that lamp doesn't go over there and lamp goes over here. Oh, I need more yellow in the room. Oh no, no. That rug would never go with that sofa. I'm very visual when I'm writing. And I'm also, I hear the cadence. I hear the choreography in it. So when we're making the album, I would read and what was phenomenal is Alec could really hear my voice and he could hear the appropriate tone. I mean, it was eerie almost when I was reading one day and he just like, got up his computer and he went to the piano and just started striking these chords. And I was like, that's it, that's what I hear. So, you know, I'm just blessed to be able to work with a genuine artist who can hear what I'm hearing inside of the language, the pauses, you know, like there's a sound for a pause. Yeah. He understood that there was a sound for Oh my, he heard that, but yes, when I am creating, I definitely hear the physicality of my language. If that makes sense,

Tamara Kissane ([36:19](#)):

Trying to put this on you as a writer, I'll just put this on me as a, someone who experiences your writing as multi-sensory. So whether I'm reading it or I'm hearing it, it sort of travels through all of my senses. I feel like I do feel the physicality. There's so much texture there. And so having that music just helped to build out the dimension of what I'm already experiencing. It's been very gratifying.

Jaki Shelton Green ([36:48](#)):

Thank you. Because then that helps us be validated that we, that our mark was right. You know, we were very careful, there was like, I would hear a piece of music and Alec would say, Nope, it's going to drown out your voice. Letter to the Other Daughter of the Confederacy, I wanted it to be like a battle

cry. I want it we'd found a lot of our archival audio, civil war battle, but it was too much, you know, it was just too many, too much sensory going on

Tamara Kissane ([37:21](#)):

Too many things.

Jaki Shelton Green ([37:23](#)):

I think what he did really works because it's unexpected, but music for that is totally unexpected. We didn't want there to be an expectation. We want it for each piece for there to be a surprise. Also, I think the sounds should be the, from whence, I enter for the listener and you had to, you know what I mean, there had to be a door. So Alec and Phil the three of us, the three of us, we really did work together. And sometimes they would come up with something like that and that feeling that at all. Nope. And that was rare. That was very rare. The piece that Shirlette does on the album Litany for the Possessed, I've always heard that in my brain as a rap song or kind of a spoken word. And I remember I wrote a spoken word piece many years ago and I, I was so excited about it and I performed it for my daughters and they both said, no, mom don't ever do that in public, not a rapper.

Jaki Shelton Green ([38:33](#)):

And you'd look really silly. You're not a rapper. You do not have the whole spoken word thing down like girlfriend. That is not your thing. So don't, don't try to some public mom please. So I heard that and, but I, I always heard it as, not my voice that poem. So, you know, I call Shirlette and I just said, I want to give you this poem and you can do whatever you want to do. So she laid the beats for that point. That's all her, they're my words. But everything is hers. She engineered the whole piece. So that was fun. And then I, you know, CJ Suitt the Chapel Hill Poet Laureate is on the album because No Poetry, I heard in a male voice, I heard it in a different voice, again, not my voice. And The River Speaks of Thirst. I heard as a call and response.

Jaki Shelton Green ([39:31](#)):

And again, all of these amazing human beings were dear friends of mine. When I called Nnenna, she was like, let's do it. We never rehearsed. She came in in the studio when Sunday morning, she's like, you guys got an hour because I'm getting ready to go on, on tour. You have an hour. And we knocked it out in an hour. Wow. Oh my God. I mean, there were like no retakes. It was just, it was just perfect. I mean, there were times that she would stop in the middle and she would like, she would say, damn, that's a good line. Can I, can we, like, I want to say that again. You know, I wanna sing that line again,

Jaki Shelton Green ([40:10](#)):

It was just beautiful to have the collaboration. And for me, this is what community looks like. You know, they all, I mean, there were all my midwives, it was truly a birthing of a beautiful thing with so many hands in the mix. Oh. And then there's my fabulous gospel, singing friend, Jennifer Evans, who in the very first piece the Juneteenth poem This I Know For Sure. I was just so honored that she would give us her voice on that, on that. So yeah. It feels like the right album for the right, for this time.

Tamara Kissane ([40:50](#)):

Yes. Is there anything that you would like to talk about that we haven't touched on before we close?

Jaki Shelton Green ([40:57](#)):

We talked about a lot sweet woman.

Tamara Kissane ([41:02](#)):

We can talk forever. I just want to make sure that we don't gloss over anything that is super important.

Jaki Shelton Green ([41:09](#)):

Well, I think you've covered everything. I will just say that it is my just immense honor and, and pleasure to serve the state of North Carolina as a North Carolina poet Laureate to, to be able to, to be in so many different communities and to witness the power of story inside of communities, how communities are telling their stories with each other, to each other documentary and their stories being encouraged to write. I'm just so honored for all of these invitations. And I'm on it now to be in this other space that we're all in this virtual universe, doing the work that I'm doing. And I'm grateful to people like you, who, who keep me accountable, you know, keep me accountable and who helped me take, carry out my responsibilities of making sure that even in this time, the people of North Carolina know that the Poet Laureate is still working and still trying to serve and still trying to be very, very present to all of us. So I think I can end there. I'm very grateful for your invitation. And I certainly look forward to any possibilities of collaboration between you and I.

Tamara Kissane ([42:27](#)):

Oh, thank you, Jackie. That means so much to me. I appreciate you so much.