Welcome.
I am Michael Mwenso, an artist, social commentator, and very happy to be your host for this evening.

During tonight's episode, we're gonna deep-dive into the tragic end of the life of a man called George Floyd on the one-year anniversary of his death.
May 25th -- where were you?

Because on a South Minneapolis street corner shortly after 8:00 p.m. George Floyd encountered police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on his neck for about 9 1/2 minutes. He was handcuffed and lying facedown. This resulted in the death of George Floyd and spawned so much attention.
in the world,

but in the spirit of Black artistic expression through music and conversation --

you know how we can do as Black people --

I'm gonna explore a few of my favorite Black artists to examine how the death of this man has impacted all of us.

We have to ask ourselves the question, what has shifted since his death,
and how has the justice system
and racial injustice
been impacted?
Has anything changed?
Because they say his death
has launched a movement
that has shifted
the consciousness of the world,
but I want to see it.
And, for me, I'm from Africa,
which was colonized
by the French -- Sierra Leone.
My mother, a Nigerian woman, took me to England,

which was a whole 'nother dynamic,

and then to come into America and see how this country treats Black people, it has been a big paradigm shift.

So tonight, we have some incredible artists for you, who are gonna speak through all different disciplines.

We have the great Larry Ossei-Mensah,
who is doing all kinds of things in the contemporary art world.

We also have the great poet Harold Green,

who's been captivating audiences all over the world with his storytelling.

Also incredible Black female artist Destinee Ross-Sutton,

who is dealing with activism at a great brilliance.

We'll also be speaking to two of my favorite voices,

Vuyo Sotashe from South Africa, Brianna Thomas,
one of my favorites, from Peoria, Illinois,

and last but not least, of course, Mwenso and the Shakes,

who are weaving some deep sounds of a hybrid of Black music and honoring and complimenting the life of George Floyd.

You know, some people say they're looking for Jesus, and like Jesus, this innocent man who the world has come to know was crucified publicly,
not unlike the sacrificial lamb.

My life has never been the same,

and actually,
as a matter of fact,

it's the only reason
 I'm in front of you

and feel compelled
to host this show.

I want to show that Black art
can heal the world,

and it will,
and it will continue to.

[ Piano playing ]
♪♪

[01:03:18.09]
♫

[01:03:18.09]
♫
Supper time ♫

[01:03:30.03]
♫ I should set the table ♫

[01:03:33.06]
♫ 'Cause it's supper time ♫

[01:03:39.08]
♫ Somehow I'm not able ♫

[01:03:44.06]
♫ 'Cause that man of mine ♫

[01:03:50.04]
♫ Ain't coming home no more ♫

[01:03:55.08]
♫ Ain't coming home no more ♫

[01:04:03.07]
Supper time

Kids will soon be yelling

For their supper time

How I keep from telling them

That man of mine

Ain't coming home no more

Ain't coming home no more

How will I keep explaining

When they ask me

where he's gone?
How will I keep from crying

When I bring today's supper on?

How can I remind them

To pray at their humble board?

How can I be thankful

When they start to thank the Lord?

Dear Lord
♪ Ooh, ooh, ooh ♪

[01:05:57.01]
♪ Supper time ♪

[01:06:01.04]
♪ I should set the table ♪

[01:06:04.08]
♪ 'Cause it's supper time ♪

[01:06:09.07]
♪ Somehow I'm not able ♪

[01:06:18.00]
♪ 'Cause that man of mine ♪

[01:06:27.03]
♪ Ain't coming home ♪

[01:06:33.09]
♪ No more ♪

[01:06:40.01]
♪ No more, no more ♪

[01:06:46.00]
♪ Mm, that man of mine ♪
♪ He ain't coming home ♪

♪ No more ♪

♪♪

♪♪

Larry, to center the conversation and to bring this man into now, the present, the future, we talk about trauma.

Black people have a whole ledger of that, but when we talk about healing, and you're in the world
and seeing what's happening
in the arts world,

where is the healing
coming from?

And do you see as the healing
from this man's death?

Most artists and creators,

I think they looked
within themselves

and tried to think about,
"What can I do?

How can I use
my God-given talents to heal,
push the conversation,
but then also, you know,

[01:07:49.03]
coerce this moment
of reckoning?"

[01:07:51.08]
So I think what we saw,
particularly with institutions,

[01:07:55.01]
you know, you had a lot of
people calling institutions out,

[01:07:58.01]
you know, for their lack
of diversity and inclusion.

[01:08:01.07]
This man’s transitioning
was a catalyst

[01:08:04.06]
for a lot of the energy
you saw around

[01:08:06.07]
the elections, right,
a lot of the election--
not only on a national

but on a state level...
Local level, yeah.

..local level.
Yeah.

Right.
Yeah.

And I think you just
see the power

of collective action,
right,

and at the end of the day,
that oppression of anyone
is oppression of all.
Yes.

Right? And so I think for me as a curator,
you know, when this event occurred,

I had to ask myself, "What can I do utilizing platforms like Instagram and Zoom and creating conversation and space for conversation?"

ARTNOIR -- we launched a micro-grant program
that was specifically supporting Black and Brown creatives,

[01:08:49.09] curators,
cultural workers, right,

[01:08:53.09] who are not only impacted by the pandemic

[01:08:56.01] but impacted by the ripple effects of this event.

[01:09:00.04] And how do we now use it as an opportunity

to create the world we want to see, right?

[01:09:06.06] And that's what we do as folks from the diaspora, you know.

[01:09:11.00] We take something that could be
detrimental to someone else,

and we transform it

and alchemize it

into something that is,
you know, beautiful and amazing.

I sit with this energy, right,
in his spirit,
you know, as a constant reminder
that I need to make sure

that everything that I do
is for the betterment

of not only Black and Brown
folks but humanity.

Well, Larry Ossei-Mensah,
we are gonna be all right
with you being
in this world.

We thank you for your love
and your commitment

and how you are thinking
and giving us the clarity
to be able to see ourselves better. Yeah.

And thank you for all you do
and will continue to do.

- I appreciate it.
- Thank you.

Thank you for letting me
be here.
Green:

If this be the hill I die on,

[01:09:54.06]

why can't it be a mountain top?

[01:09:56.09]

Like, let them
hang from rooftops

[01:09:58.04]

and pop bottle tops
in memory of me.

[01:10:00.05]

Let it be grand,
not plain or Sandra Bland,

[01:10:02.09]

not Black or Mike Brown,
not white or Freddie Gray.

[01:10:06.00]

I'm still ashamed that we wasn't
saved by the Sean Bell.

[01:10:09.00]

May the fruits of my labor
not be stopped
at Fruitvale Station.

The fact that Trayvon Martin didn't get to meet his Gina is a crime within itself.

I don't want to be a martyr or a mirror.

One should have been enough, but the multiplicity of the plural is plentiful and pitiful.

The fact that you've probably got 10 more names ready to roll off the tip
of your tongue is despicable,

[01:10:29.01]
but despicable me, to think that
I couldn't concern or commerce

[01:10:35.01]
or consume myself
with Black trauma,

[01:10:37.07]
to be told that I can't cry if
some wounds are self-inflicted,

[01:10:41.04]
as if you can't be
predator and victim,

[01:10:43.09]
as if you can't talk
and listen, man, listen.

[01:10:46.09]
If this be the hill I die on,
it should be a mountain top.

[01:10:50.08]
No more molehills
from being pigeonholed.
No more sightseeing
from bullet holes.

The scope is too small.

No more paranoia
from your peepholes.

My vision's too big.

You're too scared
in your plush homes.

You don't know what it feels
like for your face
to be pushed against the floor.

When your knees
hit the concrete,
what are you praying for?

It must be nice to not have to ask for your baby back

or just another day,

only to be worried about surplus and necessities,

to not have to worry about being the designated prayer warrior

'cause you're the only one left.

I write 'cause I'm still looking for the right words,

and sometimes these words are the only thing I have left,
so we rage, and we write,
and we scream,

and we holler
until nothing's left.

They scared, and they shooting
till nothing's left,

so then they empty the clip,
tears on our lip,

slaps on the wrist,
newspaper clips.

Replay the list.
Replay the cycle all over again.

I'll say it again --
"If this is the hill I die on,
it better be a mountain top."

Let me see peaks.
I don't want to die

in the
Valley of the Shadow of Death

because in the shadows, that's
where monsters are created,

and I refuse to become
an American horror story

when others get
to live the dream,

to fail and have the chance
to fail again,

to make mistakes and live
to tell your side of the story,

[01:12:05.02]
to be served Burger King
if you're Dylann Roof

[01:12:07.03]
but only served 16 shots
if you're Laquan McDonald.

[01:12:10.09]
I don't want to be a martyr,
and, honestly,

[01:12:14.02]
if no change comes from it,
you're not a martyr.

[01:12:16.09]
You're murdered.

[01:12:18.03]
Language is important,
isn't it?

[01:12:20.08]
See, corrupt souls
have deaf ears,
so what a paradox when
protests don’t make a sound.

So if this be the hill
I die on,

I swear to God it better
be a mountain top

before I hit the ground.

Mwenso: If we’re talking about
a maker of Black art,

we have to talk about Chicago.

This man comes from there --
a poet, a lyricist, wordsmith.

Such a pleasure to have
Harold Green with us today.
How are you?
I'm wonderful.

I'm wonderful, brother.
A pleasure to be here.

You know,
it's interesting.

In your development and growth,
we have to talk --

when we talk about
Black art,

the church is very important
in that whole journey.

For you, where does that
come in, the Black church?
For me, it was one of...

kind of one of the springboards for my performance.

Once it started doing spoken word,

the church is where I started performing at.

Prior to that, I was writing raps,

and we would, you know, battle and record and whatever,

but, like, my spoken word career --

it really started there.
And there was a special moment because we actually had a spoken word ministry, which isn't necessarily normal in, you know, every church, so it seemed like serendipity. It seemed like that's where I was supposed to be. And I know, for me, the open mic set was -- that was a different beast all in of itself,
you know,
but I think church,

and especially the Black church,
is so cultivating and comforting

and motivating,
you know what I'm saying,

and affirming,
and they kept pushing me,

like, "Harold, you're doing
something great.

You're doing something great.
You should keep going."

And it made me feel warm,
you know?
It made me feel like my art was welcomed in a space,

and it also made me feel like my art could touch people in a spiritual way that connected in a different type of --

on a different wavelength. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And also, Chicago -- again, it's very deep because it still remains to have intact one of the great Black
kind of poet scenes.


[01:14:22.09] And if we're talking about us as Black artists

[01:14:25.02] having to always be in white spaces... Yeah.

[01:14:27.08] ...that's one of the few places left in the world

[01:14:29.08] where you can actually be in a Black space.

[01:14:32.00] For you, again, now coming from the church,

[01:14:34.03] now to another Black space, what was that like for you?
And how can you see that had an effect on just your journey?

It was comfortable, you know,

and I think I kind of keep coming back to that word

because, like, my whole life has been just really Black, you know what I'm saying?

Like, my educational process -- I mean, I started out in a, you know, Afro-centered Montessori,
and I went from there
to Chicago Public Schools,

and I went to an HBCU,
you know,

so it's just like
all of my life's, like,

foundational cornerstones
have been Black,

so being in that open mic set,
it just really felt comfortable.

I felt like I was at home,
you know?

I was with my people,

and I think one of the things
about that that makes you --
it makes you confident,
you know,

so your message
doesn't get diluted.

Like, when you go out
into the world

and what you have on your heart
and what you want to say,

your people made you feel like,
"That is right. We with you,"

so if anybody else got something
to say, it don't matter.

You know what I'm saying?
Like, your people feel you.
You know?

[01:15:38.00]
So, and Chicago was a very
hard place to win over,

[01:15:42.04]
so if I win over my people
with the message

[01:15:44.07]
and also feel comfortable
with my people,

[01:15:47.03]
you can't say nothing to me
out here in the world.

[01:15:49.04]
You know? [Chuckles]

[01:15:51.04]
To bring us back to focus...
Yeah.

[01:15:54.00]
...and to honor this man...
Absolutely.
...and why we're here today doing this,

it's important to ask ourselves

the impact and paradigm shift in what,

you know, this man's death has done.

For you as a Black man with two children, too,

even separate from an artist,

what impact have you seen in not so much the trauma
but the healing
that is happening

and needs to happen
from this man's death?

You know, I think one of
the most eye-opening effects,

you know,
because us as Black folk,

we've been seeing this
forever,

and I don't mean just,
like, in this century.

I mean ever since
we got here,
our death has been something
that has been publicized

and commerced
and just turned into

a commodity
in such a weird way that,

unfortunately,
it makes some people numb.

You know what I'm saying?
It makes this country numb.

And I think one of the things
that was really shocking

was how much worldly solidarity
we received in that moment,

and I think it was
a culmination of things.

People were sick and tired,

but they were sick and tired
of a lot of things,

and I think that they were
also sick and tired of being

in the house, too, you know,
so we can't always attribute

everything to people
being up in arms

and we thinking that
everybody is with us.

But we did see the largest
amount of solidarity,
and I think that
that was one of those --

we have to take momentum
and ride with it, you know?

You can't just have those
droves, those numbers,

and then not do
anything with it.

And I believe that the role
that art has to play in that

is that one of the most
special parts of art

is that
it's a one-way conversation
in a lot of situations,
you know?

When you have plays,
when you have TV shows,

when you have paintings,

when you have spoken word performances,

when you have songs, you can't
say nothing back to that.

You got to listen, so now,
you got to listen to us,

because now the space
is being called out
‘cause everybody want to give
diversity and inclusion.
Everybody want to give
a Black artist

a space to say something,

so now you got to listen
'cause you can't talk back

when we talking
in that space, you know?

So I think that's one of
the most important parts

of the healing is,
in so many ways,

we've been silenced.

A lot of times,
when we get to, you know,

saying what we want to say,

we get, you know,

in our legislature and all

kind of different things,

but now the artists

get to have a voice,

and now you got to listen.

And a lot of times,

the artist speaks

from the heart

of the people.

As a Black man, you know,
I've been lucky to be in your presence.

You've been with us also, you know,

and done things with us in the past.

It's such an honor to bring you into this space today and to hear and also be inspired by you as a man who brings up his kids and is out here as a poet and a Renaissance man of many styles and genres.

We thank you
for your journey,

and you continue to be who you are.

I'm honored to be here with you, brother.

Thank you. Thank you. Yes, sir.

♪♪

♪♪

♪

♫ Old pirates, ♪

yes, they rob I ♪

♫ Stole I from ♪

the merchant ships ♪
Minutes after they took I

From the bottomless pit

But my hand was made strong

By the hand of the Almighty

Wherefore in this generation

Triumphanty

So won't you help me sing

These songs of freedom?

'Cause all I ever have


Is redemption song

[01:19:40.02]
These songs of freedom

[01:19:45.00]
Emancipate yourself
from mental slavery

[01:19:48.07]
None but ourselves
can free our minds

[01:19:52.06]
Don't be afraid
of atomic energy

[01:19:56.06]
'Cause none of that
can stop the time

[01:20:00.08]
Well, how long shall
they kill our prophets

[01:20:04.08]
While we stand aside
and look?
♪ Some say it's just ♫
♫ a part of it and ♫

♪ We've got to fulfill ♫
♫ the book ♫

♪ So won't you help me sing ♫

♪ These songs of freedom? ♫

♪ 'Cause all I ever have ♫

♪ Is redemption song ♫

♪ Won't you help me sing ♫

♪ These songs of freedom? ♫

♪
'Cause all I ever have

[01:20:45.07] Is redemption song

[01:20:48.06] These songs of freedom

[01:20:52.06] Redemption song

[01:20:56.04] These songs of freedom

[01:21:02.05] Senzeni na

[01:21:05.04] Senzeni na

[01:21:10.04] Senzeni na

[01:21:13.05] Senzeni na

[01:21:18.06] Senzeni na
I'm so glad to have Destinee Ross-Sutton with us.

How are you today?
Ross-Sutton: I am well.

Thank you so much for having me.

Through me researching you and reading things you're saying,
something you say which I love is, "Art reminds us of our humanity."

And what -- could you expound on that a little bit in a sense of how you express that?

And what do you mean when you say that?

Yeah. I mean, for example, of course, we've had this tumultuous past year,
and we're shut
in our home.

Some of us can't work.

Some of us are worried
about family members.

Some of us have
lost loved ones.

and, really, when things
like this happen,

we turn to different
forms of art.

We turn to music.
We turn to movies.

Whether it's, you know,
even interior decoration, visual art.

That's why we see so much more of a focus. It reminds us that life isn't just about surviving. It should be about, you know, doing what you love and learning the best way for us to thrive.

And when we look at Black art, we know that one of the functions of it
is that it has
the deepest amount to heal.

[01:22:56.05]
It's something
you speak about, too.

[01:22:58.05]
For you, when we talk
about healing

[01:22:59.09]
and the power
within the art,

[01:23:02.05]
how do we deal
with healing?

[01:23:04.04]
How do we approach that
in this transitional period?

[01:23:08.05]
Well, of course, to heal,
we have to realize

[01:23:11.09]
that there's a wound there
in the first place.

[01:23:16.04]
We haven't really
acknowledged

[01:23:18.00]
the psychological effect
this year has had.

[01:23:20.05]
We haven't acknowledged it
as a whole.

[01:23:23.01]
We haven't acknowledged, you know, the protests

[01:23:27.02]
and everything happening
as the Black community.

[01:23:31.05]
But you have to realize, like, these things take a toll on us.

[01:23:34.05]
Waking up the next day, we might feel the same,
but there is something different, and it always manifests itself sometime.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

And you were born and raised in Harlem, right?

It's also interesting that, for you,

I know you want to see.

You want to be in the community.

You want to be able to
inspire other Black kids.

How can we even be deeper with that as Black artists now

so that our people see us

and that we're inspiring who comes after us?

I think it's, you know,

simple as going back to your community.

And, you know, I try to do it

with my nieces and nephews,

teaching them about
the art that I see.

[01:24:18.06]
Sometimes I take them
to a fair or to a show.

[01:24:22.09]
And sometimes it really
is that simple.

[01:24:25.04]
Just bring them along.

[01:24:26.08]
Even if you think,
you know,

[01:24:28.07]
they might not be as entertained
as they want to be,

[01:24:32.05]
they're always gonna learn
something from it,

[01:24:35.06]
and at the very least,
they're going to realize
that there's something beyond what they see every day.

There is culture out there.

There are possibilities for different careers, you know,
different ways to impact their own lives,
their families' lives,
you know, the world,
and it's really just about opening people's eyes.

On behalf of me, who's been watching you,
and as an artist, we first honor
and just say thank you

[01:25:03.04]
for all that you're doing
and the sacrifice

[01:25:05.09]
and the level of commitment that
you're putting into the world,

[01:25:08.02]
and we just pray and continue
that your work changes

[01:25:12.06]
and gives focus to where
we should be heading.

[01:25:15.09]
And thank you so much.

[01:25:17.02]
Thank you.
I really appreciate it.

[01:25:19.05]
- ♫ You know what? ♫
- What?
- ♪ You know what? ♪
- What?

- ♪ You know what? ♪
- What?

♫ Prepare yourself for things ♫
that you may like ♫

♫ The things you like ♫
may not be so precise ♫

♫ The truth will guide you ♫
and set your soul free ♫

♫ The world will stop you ♫
right dead on your feet ♫

♫ Deepen yourself ♫
and your true soul ♫
Right and don't resist your true self.

Carry on, don't waste your time.

Stop playing.

Stop playing them games, stop playing them games.

Stop playing.

Love will provide a substance which has meaning.

I survive.
We have it all

But we are blind to a fault

Ahhh

Angels watch us cry

in mourning

And breaking heart

Don't you know what,

what you think it is

Who you say you are,

if you think it's strange

Don't you tell a lie
What you think it is, who you say you are

If you think it's strange, don't you tell a lie

Carry on now

Carry on, don't waste your time

Stop, stop

Stop playing them games, stop playing them games

Stop playing games

I said it! Yeah!
You said it.

We said it.

♫ Prepare yourself for things ♫
that you may like ♫

♫ The things you like ♫
may not be so precise ♫

♫ The truth will guide you ♫
and set your soul free ♫

♫ Let your up down ♫

♫ The world will stop you ♫
right dead on your feet ♫
Listen

Stop playing them games

I said it

Stop playing them games

You said it

Stop playing them games

We said it

Don't you, don't you
Don't you tell a lie

[01:27:52.05]

Don't you, don't you, don't you

[01:27:54.03]

Don't you, don't you

[01:27:56.00]

Don't you tell a lie

[01:27:58.02]

What you think it is

[01:28:00.03]

What you think it is, who you say you are

[01:28:01.08]

If you think it's strange, don't you tell a lie

[01:28:06.02]

What you think it is, who you say you are

[01:28:07.08]
If you think it's strange, don't you tell a lie

[01:28:09.04]
Yeah!
Horns.

[01:28:12.04]
Carry on, don't waste your time

[01:28:18.05]
Carry on, don't waste your time

[01:28:21.09]
Ha!
Stop playing them games.

[01:28:24.06]
Stop playing them games, stop playing them games

[01:28:27.05]
Stop playing them games

[01:28:30.05]
Stop playing them games
Last time!

[01:28:33.00]
♫ Stop playing them games, ♫
stop playing them games ♫

[01:28:35.08]
Game show!

[01:28:37.04]
♫♫

[01:28:41.02]
♫ Carry on, ♫
don't waste your time ♫

[01:28:45.04]
Stop playing!

[01:28:47.00]
♫ Stop playing them games, ♫
stop playing them ♫

[01:28:49.04]
[ Scats ]
Last time!

[01:28:52.00]
One more!

[01:28:53.04]
♪ Stop playing them games, ♪
stop playing them ♪

[01:28:55.05]
Last time!

[01:29:00.04]
We must reclaim.

[01:29:02.05]
We are so consistently forced
to relive the pain of death
and killings of our Black men,

[01:29:05.05]
disappointment
after disappointment,

[01:29:11.05]
murder after murder.

[01:29:12.08]
We witnessed the live execution
of George Floyd,
calling for his mother,
begging for his life,

and begging for his last breath,

and yet, like the cries of
all of our brothers and sisters

that we see all over the world,
why are we continually targeted,
hunted down, and marginalized
and demonized?

We heard his cries
go unanswered.

We can't accept this today,
yesterday, or tomorrow.
We must be here, and are here,
to keep the revolution going.

[01:29:44.00]
I'm Michael Mwenso, and thank
you for joining us tonight.

[01:29:49.02]
[ "Stop Playing Them Games"
plays ]

[01:29:50.09]
♫ Stop playing them games ♫
Mwenso: Last time!

[01:29:53.04]
♪ Stop playing them games ♪
stop playing them games ♪

[01:29:56.01]
Game show!

[01:29:57.06]
♫♫

[01:30:01.02]
♫ Carry on, ♫
don't waste your time ♫
[01:30:05.05]
Stop playing!

[01:30:07.00]
♪ Stop playing them games, ♪
stop playing them ♪

[01:30:09.04]
[ Skats ]
Last time!

[01:30:12.01]
One more!

[01:30:13.04]
♪ Stop playing them games, ♪
stop playing them ♪

[01:30:15.05]
Last time!

[01:30:16.09]
♪♪

[01:30:18.04]