



Hit Play Transcription

Episode 83: Afrofuturism

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Show Intro

Play 1: Your Journey with the New York Afro Futurists (2:20)

Play 2: Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future (6:56)

Play 3: Notes on Learning, Uncle Jack, and every other Thursday night at The Evelyn

Hotel (7:20)

Interstellar Interstitial, cont'd (11:13)

Play 4: Chan Imagines the Spaceship Taking Humans to the Nearest Planet in the Year 3022 (11:29)

Interstellar Interstitial, cont'd (15:07)

Play 5: Going to My Spot (15:25)

Interstellar Interstitial, cont'd (17:51)

Play 6: a glance. a pain. an abstraction. (a hope.) (18:14)

Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future, cont'd. (21:39)

Play 7: Two? Steps Forward, One Step Back (21:58)

Show Outro

Show Intro

Drum beat and bass music plays underneath.

Kyra: Episode 83, Afrofuturism. Hi, I'm Kyra, a New York Neo-Futurist. Our live show is back, but we just can't stop making art for your ears. So Hit Play continues!

If you're already a fan of The New York Neo-Futurists, or any of our sibling companies, hello! We can't wait to catch snowflakes on our tongues and wonder if we are eating pollution with you. If this is totally new to you—welcome to it!

We make art by four rules: We are who we are, we're doing what we're doing, we are where we are, and the time is now. Simply put: we tell stories, and those stories are our own. Everything that you hear is actually happening.

Distant conversation and glasses clinking.

So if we tell you that we are recording this section of the intro from a diner in Monticello, New York, we are really recording this section of the intro from a diner in Monticello, New York, like I am doing right now.

Mechanical whirring and distant music.

Got a nice cup of coffee in front of me, they just started blending something, and “The Power of Love” is playing. It’s nice.

Sound of metal sliding and rattling.

Some of the work in this episode may contain sensitive content. For more specific warnings, check the time codes in the show notes.

This episode’s randomly generated theme is: Afrofuturism.

Now, full disclosure, I am the only Black Neo-Futurist in the cast this week, but think of this theme as more of a jumping-off point into countless possibilities. It’ll be fun. I promise.

And now, making his Hit Play debut, Jack will Run the Numbers!

Jack: Hi, I’m Jack, a New York Neo-Futurist.

In this episode we’re bringing you 7 new plays.

This week’s cast is Joey Rizzolo, Chan Lin, Michaela Farrell, Kyra Sims, and me, Jackson Bird.

That brings us to 392 audio experiments on *Hit Play*. Enjoy!

Music fades.

Play 1: Your Journey with the New York Afro Futurists (2:20)

GO!

Sounds of surf.

You’re in Hawai’i, standing on a precipice overlooking the relentless infinity of the Pacific. *Peace*, you think with irony—the water below is nothing but violence. Surrounding the cliff are giant sea turtles, each a literal ton, tossed into the air by the cruelty of the waves against the cliff

face. You watch with trepidation, sure that one of them will shatter once it hits the rocks—remembering the turtle that you once saw explode under the tire of an SUV as you, seconds too late, ran into the street to rescue it—but the sea turtles don't explode on the rocks. Every time one is about to strike the craggy cliff face, it dives, and all at once the most clumsy creature you've ever seen becomes the most graceful creature you've ever seen.

Sound of diving and underwater bubbling.

Nature is savage up close, but ultimately just. As you stare into the ocean, you find it staring back, and through the reconciliation of the water, you remember:

Sound of resurfacing above water.

You were 18. You wanted to work in theater. You didn't care which or where or with whom or for whom, you just wanted the work. You found an internship at The Crossroads Theater in New Brunswick, New Jersey. It was unpaid, sure, but you decided that you were going to work with this particular theater because...well...they were the only ones that returned your calls.

Crossroads was a Black theater. How did you know? The green, yellow, and red tapestry outside the theater was a hint. The Kwanzaa kinara in the lobby was a hint. That you were the only white person in the room on any given day was a hint, but truly, those things were nothing. It was not Black theater until you had a conversation with the its founder, who said to you, "I was an actor, and I just wanted to create a space where Black actors would be able to play roles other than pimp #3 or drug dealer #5."

And you thought, Black theater happens on the stage. And that was wrong, because Black theater happens in the audience.

You realize this on your first opening night in the Crossroads Theater, where Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis have front row seats. Where they and everyone else in the theater are listening to actors as they speak, and Ruby Dee, she's talking *back* to the actors.

Sound of diving.

This was not a presentation. It was a dialogue. Audience responded to performer. Actors adjusted and engaged. Plays evolved over the course of their run because audiences told the artists in real time and with naked honesty what they felt about the events on stage.

And from that day forward, Black Theater had ruined you. You spent years trying and failing to cultivate that dialogue.

Sound of resurfacing above water.

And so that is what you did always. You wanted all theater to be Black theater. You found it in poetry and performance art, and you spend most of your adult life working with an experimental theater company that actively unlearned its audience of polite habits. You work to cultivate a culture whose art invites dialogue. You looked to the future, and you look to the artists whose work did likewise.

In that search, you read Rivers Solomon's *The Deep*, a novel that chronicles the events of an underwater utopian society populated by a race of merpeople, ascendants of human beings who evolved underwater because their forebears were the pregnant women...

Sound of diving.

...who were tossed over the sides of slave ships. An ideal born from horror. Infants that should have drowned or been dashed upon the rocks, but persevered and evolved into the most graceful beings beneath a cruel ocean. Savage up close, but ultimately just.

Sound of resurfacing above water.

You thought it was weird that the Hobbits at the end of the Lord of the Rings make their way to heaven by boat, as though this was a destination that could be reached by traversing the seas. But here you are, in Hawai'i, and you realize, oh yeah, you can totally get to heaven by boat, because Hawai'i is heaven, right? It's 80-degrees and mild year-round. There's a rainbow in the sky every day. The beaches are free. The water is warm. Pineapple and coffee grow out of the damn ground.

But you know what Hawai'i doesn't have? Humor. The locals don't tell jokes. They'll nod in appreciation at *your* jokes, but none of them will laugh. They'll just say "Cool" and "Right on." Without pain or discomfort, there is nothing to decompress, no tension to be broken. And so after a week of standing on those perfect cliffs, you'll think, "Heaven sucks. Let's go."

Surf sounds end.

And you'll return to New York (arguably Hell) where there is struggle.

But also life.

Play 2: Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future
(6:56)

Chan: Hey Google, what will life be like for humans in one thousand years?

Google Assistant: On the website ScienceAlert.com, they say, "In the next one thousand years, the amount of languages spoken on the planet are set to seriously diminish, and all the extra heat and UV radiation could see darker skin become an evolutionary advantage."

Play 3: Notes on Learning, Uncle Jack, and every other Thursday night at The Evelyn Hotel (7:20)

GO!

Sound of airplane engine

I was a 20 year old misfit who decided to travel to Australia for study abroad.
I wanted to go as far as I could.
I left New Jersey in the July heat and showed up in Melbourne in the middle of the winter.
The air was different. I didn't know where I was.

Brass music

I went to my first show.

It was The Foreign Brothers show that happens every other Thursday at the Evelyn Hotel around 10pm.

Sound of "Welcome to Country"

They opened their show with a Welcome to Country.
It was the first Welcome to Country I had ever gotten, I realized suddenly.
My heart was on fire, my body rising, the moment will always stick in my mind as one of the most important gifts I've ever received.

"Annie don't wear no panties" by Erykah Badu plays faintly

Then the show began
With original songs and covers of
ThunderCat, Erykah Badu, Flying Lotus, etc.
Everyone was dancing
I have never felt a crowd hold each other so tightly
While also lifting each other up so high.

I started working at a bar
I had lost most of the friends I had made from my program
And became closer with my coworkers, my neighbors, my bar fellows.
I was alone but thriving, I was traveling, I was eating vegetables, I was learning
I had a roommate
She was from Brisbane
She told me about The Stolen Generation

Music fades.

How between 1910 and 1970 Aboriginal children were forcibly taken from their homes
And their families murdered or incarcerated.
This happened until 1970.

So I went to see a show
or a conversation
or a lesson
With Jack Charles
Or, Uncle Jack Charles, as he was known within the Aboriginal community

"We Won't Cry" by Uncle Jack Charles plays faintly.

A man who had been stolen. Used. Abused.
A man who was forced in to foster homes, thrown out on the streets, cycled in to the opioid crisis, thrown in to jail, and back on the streets more times than he could count
A man who saw institutions as the evils they are.
And how his experience was shared by so many who weren't so lucky to be with us tonight.
He spoke about how later in life he founded the first indigenous theater group in Melbourne
And how he served as an outspoken LGBTQ activist.
He reminded everyone to look towards the future
And the high place indigenous peoples belonged in it

He sang to me and I cried
He spoke to me and I listened

He died this past September 13th.
May he rest in peace and his memory always be cherished.

Uncle Jack sings.

It was that Thursday again
And The Foreign Brothers jumped up and down with us
And they told me they were alive

"I'm Alive" by The Foregin Brothers plays faintly.

Everyone was jumping up and down
Lifting each other up
Holding each other tight
We were all singing the lyrics back to them
I felt that I was alive
And I doubly felt that they were.

Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future, cont'd. (11:13)

Chan: Alexa, how long will humans live in the future?

Alexa: From e.org, the average human being can be expected to live over one thousand years.

Chan: What? What?!

Play 4: Chan Imagines the Spaceship Taking Humans to the Nearest Planet in the Year 3022 (11:29)

GO!

Airplane alert chime.

Yael: Passengers of the S.S. Suncatcher, this is your AI captain speaking. We interrupt your in-flight entertainment to bring you this very momentous update: We have just reached the halfway point on our journey towards the barren exoplanet Proxima Centauri B.

Mechanical whirring.

The service droids are popping the champagne and the onboard drones will be passing out flutes for a ship-wide toast. At our current speed we will land on Proxima B in only another decade, the year 3032.

Congratulations on being either wealthy or famous enough to be on this ship and venture out towards the unknown. What an exciting time to colonize this wasteland of a planet and create a stronghold for humanity's future.

We understand you may have concerns about your friends and acquaintances still on Earth where the remaining people huddle in two latitudinal bands of hospitable lands, the only geographic areas where the climate is still bearable. Urban density is a detriment and the land can only support so much. Resources are limited and it's an all-out war. Only the rural can prosper.

Which is why we are going as far out as we can. But don't worry, the businesses you own on Earth continue to operate without you: industrial manufacturing, robotic farming and bioplastics recycling. And yes, you continue to also receive dividends from your production facilities which are automatically deposited to your accounts onboard.

Remember, you can upgrade to premium-level entertainment and amenities at any time. Your bodies have been slowed to a crawl, but not to sleep. Our full immersion resting pods simulate the pleasures of fine food, physical touch, and natural environments while your material bodies atrophy. You may find it difficult to sit up for the champagne.

Has everyone received their flutes?

Good, now let's raise a toast to the future of humankind—

Notification sound.

Oh it appears that our latest comms package from Earth has just completed transfer. Let's open it up to see how folks on the home planet are doing!

Apparently everything over there is... actually pretty good? Hmm, it says here that in the last ten years, with all you capitalists having left, they're... on path to reversing the effects of climate change, and finding common ground with their fellow humans? Building homes that align with the environment, naturally collecting rainwater, and they're planning out more sustainable cities? Earth is now a solarpunk oasis, and they're achieving an imperfect but passable world peace?

I mean, it kinda seems to me it would be better to return and improve your home planet than starting new? We have enough fuel to either go home or get to Proxima B... but do y'all want to just go back?

Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future, cont'd.
(15:07)

Chan: Alexa, what will humans eat in the future?

Alexa: From bps.org.uk: “In the future, new food technologies such as cultured meat and acellular agriculture, will make it easier for people to enjoy the pleasure of meat without the need for animal slaughter.”

Play 5: Going to My Spot (15:25)

Kyra, Jack, Chan, Michaela, and Joey speak each line in unison but slightly out of sync.

All: I am going to clear my throat.

They clear their throats.

I am going to speak the title of this play.

“Going to My Spot,” Go!

I am going to tear off a piece of tape.

They each tear off a piece of tape.

I am going to stand up now.

I am going to walk to the other side of the room.

Sound of footfalls and floor creaking.

I am going to adhere the tape to the floor.

I am going to return to the microphone.

Sound of footfalls.

I am going to sit down.

Sound of some chairs creaking.

I am going to look at my spot.

(voices slightly off-mic) I am going to turn to the microphone.

I am going to stand up now.

I am going to walk to my spot without looking at my spot.

I'm going to check for accuracy.

Joey: I am going to make an adjustment.

Michaela: I was pretty correct but I'm going to make a small adjustment.

Jack: I am wishing I hadn't used translucent tape.

Kyra: Oh, right on it!

Jack: I am making a slight adjustment.

All: I'm going to return to the microphone.

I'm going to sit down now.

I'm going to say my name.

Jack: Jackson.

Michaela: Michaela.

Joey: Joey.

Kyra: Kyra.

All: I'm going to say goodbye.

Goodbye.

Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future, cont'd.
(17:51)

Chan: Hey Bixby, when will humankind go extinct?

Bixby: Here's what the internet says: "Humanity has a 95% probability of being extinct in 7,800,000 years, according to J. Richard Gott's formulation of the controversial Doomsday Argument, which argues that we have probably already lived through half the duration of human history.

Play 6: a glance. a pain. an abstraction. (a hope.) (18:14)

GO!

Stuttering audio of a fiddle.

Abstract, dissonant sounds play beneath overlapping spoken lines:

The future is not guaranteed
The future is a secret
The future is unknown
The future is love
is fractal
The future is pain
The future is growth
The future will grab you by the throat and pull you forward
The future is Mother Nature reclaiming
The future doesn't care what you want
...clean air...
It gives you what was coming to you
...the ideas that will liberate us all...
The future is and is not
The future is and is not
The future is an inevitability

Mmmhm
Mmmhm
Mmmhm

Faint singing and clapping.

Coolio's "C U When U Get There" plays faintly and grows in volume.

Reverberating, reversed electronic tones.

Interstellar Interstitial: Asking the robots about the future, cont'd. (21:39)

Chan: Hey Google, what happens to my email when I die?

Google Assistant: On the website Bloomberg.com, they say, "In most cases, nothing, unless your family requests access or you set up an online tool." Do you want a little more context?

Chan: No...

Play 7: Two? Steps Forward, One Step Back (21:58)

GO!

Swelling ambient tone beneath crowd cheering.

Crowd: 10! 9! 8! 7! 6! 5! 4! 3! 2! 1!

Electronic music.

Shelton: New Years Eve 2000, I was in Singapore in a hotel with my parents, watching outside the window. There was like a street parade that involved, not Ricky Martin, but someone pretending to be Ricky Martin, singing "She Bangs."

Kyra: I was in Memphis, Tennessee at a church service because my mother is very religious and wanted us to be in church just in case...?

Katharine: So I started bartending in 1999 and turns out I was scheduled to work New Years Eve, and because Y2K was scaring everybody, all the bartenders canceled, and I ended up bartending by myself right when 2000 happened. It was interesting. I cleaned up vomit at the end of the night.

Jake: I believe in 2000 I was a ripe three years old. Knowing my parents, we were probably having some weird party with a lot of people and I was probably running around as a three year old eating cheese like no one's business.

Julia: Also as a kid, I had a New Years Eve tradition, where at 11:59pm, I would put a grape in my mouth, and then right at the stroke of midnight I would chew and eat the grape. This way, I could be the first person in the New Year to eat something, or at the very least, probably, the first person to eat a grape in the New Year.

Hadley: In all likelihood, I spent the night at my grandma's house so my parents could go out with their friends. If I made it to midnight, we'd stand on the front porch with pans and wooden spoons screaming "Happy New Year" to the whole neighborhood.

Lee: I would have been, at midnight, taking a ritual jump into a swimming pool. That was a tradition when I was a kid. Yeah, I was eleven years old.

Anooj: I don't remember too well, but I do remember thinking about all these other people in my neighborhood who'd hoarded all these dried food cans and water in their basements and being really confused. I just remember my family continually being like, "Don't worry about it." And then all of us also waiting on the sofa to see if something was going to happen when midnight struck.

Julia: I was pretty certain that the world was going to end. I was freaked out because none of the adults seemed to be that concerned but I was very concerned.

Jack: I remember listening to the radio that morning and hearing journalists from places like Australia reporting back to the US that midnight had passed and nothing had happened. It was the new millennium over there and all was well.

Anooj: The wild thing about that is time zones exist. Everybody experienced the actual beginning of Y2K at completely different times. So it's also kind of funny that the actual striking of midnight was known as the moment when everything would change or go wrong.

Lee: I was a little disappointed when nothing happened. That's what I remember.

Musical shift.

Jack: But mostly from that time, what I remember was the sense of optimism. There was all the fear around Y2K and the unknown, but it's also the last time I can remember such a huge sense of hope for a new era and an enthusiasm for change. And like many times before, there were some things that we got right about the future when looking ahead from the year 2000, and some things that are better than we might've imagined and a lot of things that are unfortunately worse.

Shelton: When I look back at the past two decades, I'm pretty amazed at how many advancements we've collectively made as a species when it comes to protecting the environment, and also the absolute slowness with which we're trying to deal with that issue means we've made little to no progress at all.

Katharine: I'm surprised at how much people are understanding trans queer people and voting and getting in touch with politics, and something that's gotten so much worse are the people that do *not* believe in democracy.

Kyra: Something that I think got better and then got worse is voting rights in the United States. Not even seeming worse. It got worse after *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court decision. It's a prime example that progress is not a straight line.

Lee: Health insurance has gotten better in some ways. We have the Affordable Care Act. That's fantastic. But Jesus Christ, so many things have gotten so much worse. We pay more for worse healthcare. Healthcare and health coverage has always been politicized in this country, to my understanding, but holy shit has it gotten even more politicized and congressionally gridlocked.

Anooj: I think cleaning products have gotten both so much better and also are still so confusing. There's all of this great stuff that you can use to make your space super clean and still I can't find a dustpan that doesn't leave a long line of dust to configure how to remove after its usage.

Jake: Gymnasts have improved the sport of gymnastics head over heels in the last 20 years, in the last 100 years for sure. I mean Simone Biles changed the game. Let's make that quite clear. Simone Biles came in and said, "Actually, this is what gymnastics is, and you're all going to listen and watch and be amazed." And she's incredible. But I still feel like we're going backwards or stuck still in this way of how we treat athletes, how they're supposed to be these robots who just compete compete compete at full, top speed and performance at all times.

Hadley: I'm so grateful for how our understanding of mental illness and neurodivergence has evolved, and also terrified of how our institutions continually find new ways to leverage that knowledge to cause us harm.

Jack: Awareness and representation for trans people has progressed so much further than I ever thought I would see in my entire lifetime. But also, I never thought I would see such organized, targeted attacks happening against us trans people in so many different ways.

Lee: I'm holding one of my medical bills which lists the balance that I owe after my health insurance in addition to the cost for the various services I've received and let's see... yeah, that routine visit with my PCP... without insurance, that would have run me \$462. Great. Love it.

"Auld Lang Syne" plays.

Show Outro

A beat and electronic melody plays underneath.

Kyra: Thanks for Hitting Play and then listening to *Hit Play*. If you liked what you heard, subscribe to the show, tell a friend, leave a review on your listening app of choice! It really does help us out. If you want to support the New York Neo-Futurists in other ways, consider making a

donation at nynf.org, or by joining our Patreon—Patreon.com/NYNF. We just started a Sticker-of-the-Month club, and our Patreon subscribers at \$30 automatically get that sent to their mailbox every month.

Want to suggest a theme for a future episode? It's fun! For the rest of season 3, we will be selecting themes randomly from a pool supplied by our patrons!

This episode featured work by: Joey Rizzolo, Chan Lin, Michaela Farrell, me (Kyra Sims), and Jackson Bird, with contributions by Yael Haskal, Kris Hill, Cole Murphy, Nicole Hill, Jake Banasiewicz, Anooj Bhandari, Katharine Heller, Lee LeBreton, Shelton Lindsay, Julia Melfi, and Hadley Todoran.

Our logo was designed by Gabriel Drozdov. Our sound is designed by Anthony Sertel Dean. *Hit Play* is produced by Anthony Sertel Dean, Lee LeBreton, and me, Kyra Sims. Take care!

Music fades out.

Silence.

Reverberating, reversed electronic tones.

Child's Voice: Why can't we see her face?

Adult: They're about to show it, keep watching.

Child: Oh! She's Black!

Another Child: She's Black! Yes yes yes yes!

Sounds of children cheering.