

Chioke I'Anson



If you have listened to WCVB FM (or any other National Public Radio station in the USA) while pouring an early morning cup of coffee or being stuck in rush hour traffic, you've heard the velveteen voice of Chioke I'Anson - he's the guy telling you who is sponsoring the programming. He's a nation-wide voice of NPR.

But Chioke is much more than this disembodied voice. An instructor in the Department of African American Studies in the College of Humanities and Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University, Chioke has a PhD in philosophy from the University of South Florida, and is interested in global humanitarianism and development. Focused on the humanitarian ideologies that westerners often carry into the global south, his research draws on perspectives of Black existentialism, African philosophy, and German idealism.

He is also an avid motorcyclist and radio producer. He is one of the co-creators of the forthcoming podcast "Do Over," which was one of only three shows in the country to win funding from the NPR Story Lab, NPR's idea hub that creates pilots for radio programs, launches new podcasts and introduces new voices to the public radio network. In addition to his work for NPR and the "Do Over" podcast, I'Anson served as community producer for the Richmond-based public radio project "UnMonumental" which launched in 2016.

Excited to have Mr. l'Anson on our 2017-18 roster, we invited him to answer several questions we are posing to all this season's artists.

CMSCVA: What have been the inspirations in your life that have led you to where you are now?

Cl: Given our forum, I will take this as a question about musical influences, which gives me a chance to finally say that the music of Wu-Tang Clan has legit played a role in shaping my life. The first CD I ever bought was Enter the 36 Chambers and I had never heard anything like it before. It and subsequent Wu-Tang records contained a kind of strange mythology about the nature of knowledge. Early reflections on that music are what got me into philosophy.

CMSCVA: What is the most memorable chamber music experience you've ever had, and why?

Cl: I am ashamed to say it, but I have never actually had a chamber music experience. (Wu-Tang has a song called Chamber Music, but they mean something else entirely). Ummm. I saw Amadeus once. Really good movie. Does that count?

CMSCVA: What is the most striking thing a student has ever said after a class? Cl: Yo, teaching is strange. Some days students are sleeping in class and some days they come up to you and tell you that this one class meeting changed their lives. Or, as happened one time, they come up and ask you: "what is racism?"



CMSCVA: What music are you listening to right now?

CI: Oh, right this second I'm listening to a new track by Big K.R.I.T. called Aux Cord. But also, thinking about the chamber music question reminded me of this song that DJ Premiere and Nas did with Berklee Symphony. Pretty sure this song had a conductor, though.

CMSCVA: What can you do as an educator to truly reach a student?

CI: If you want to reach a student, or anyone, I think, you have to present them with a question or mystery that they feel motivated to investigate. There has to be a kind of gulf, however small, between knowledge and the desire to have it. Many students don't actually know why many of the things they are taught are valuable and worth hanging on to. But if you say "Google Maps is lying to you about the size of Africa" or "half the things that you take to be biblical ideas aren't in the Bible at all", they will perk up. For a moment, they will be like, *what is this dude talking about?* It's enough to start the journey. Sometimes that's all you need.

CMSCVA: What do you think your role is as an educator, and has it changed over the years?

CI: I used to think my whole gig was about teaching students things they didn't know. But that's balderdash. It's really about teaching students how to carry out the never-ending project of coming-to-know-things. These days that mostly involves convincing them that not everything that shows up on a social media feed is authoritative. Millennials, amirite?

CMSCVA: What's the biggest challenge you face right now in your life or career?

CI: I am at a super fortunate place in my career where I'm doing so many awesome things that I don't have space for all the other awesome things I want to do, like ride motorcycles and doing the voiceover narration for late night paranormal tv shows.



"It's really about teaching students how to carry out the never-ending project of coming-to-know-things."