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The Real Accent App: USA

By Catherine Weate and Gavin Howard

Developer: Howard Weate productions, Version 1.1.0
Currently available from iTunes Stores. Or visit www.realaccentapp.com

Some years ago, I purchased a book on how to approach the learning of accents. It was, and still is, an extremely detailed and useful book, with the added advantage of an accompanying CD containing clear examples of the various accents under discussion. I used the book extensively when working on an accent at home, but often wished I had easier access to it in rehearsal or in the classroom.

It was with some interest, therefore, that I tried out 'The Real Accent App:USA' created by Catherine Weate and Gavin Howard. Most of my friends and relatives now own a Smartphone of some description, and I must confess to having downloaded quite a number of apps onto mine. The 'Real Accent App' focuses on ten different American accents, as varied and diverse as any to be found in the UK. It seems to me that, to be useful, an app of this kind needs to give enough information and practical guidance without becoming over-complicated. It needs to be user-friendly, and it most certainly is.

The app opens with a short and concise introduction, which leads to the list of accents available for study. Touch the one you are interested in, and you find ten steps to creating the required accent, beginning with a brief but informative account of the historical and geographical factors that shaped it.

Subsequent steps include points of tension, sound placement and rhythmic energy, and a handy 'help' button explains any technical terms that may be unfamiliar. Moving back and forth through the app is easy, and allows the user to skip between steps when necessary.

But it is in the use of the interactive possibilities of the format that this app really scores. The 'tune' of each accent is demonstrated by short phrases spoken by native speakers, and after hearing them, the user can record his or her own voice reproducing them, and then play all of them back again. This facility also covers key consonants, words, vowels and full sentences, and I found the ability to hear my own voice alongside them extremely instructive. There is even a little quiz that allows you to test your ear.

To round off the course, there are the 'real stories'. These are quite lengthy monologues spoken by native speakers which are spontaneous and relaxed rather than "performed", and which give a real flavour of the accent in its everyday use.

I found this app extremely informative and convenient to use, and there is perhaps another element to it that is worth a mention. It's fun!

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Chasing Light

by Patricia Ginton-Meicholas

Proverse Hong Kong, 2013
ISBN: 978-988-8227-18-1

Chasing Light shows a poet of great vigour writing about issues of the twentieth century, and in particular the situation of women in Africa and the Caribbean. She uses some striking images, often drawn from the natural world to underline her message.

There is a sense of urgency in these poems, especially those which deal with problems faced by women such as arranged marriage which features in the short but bitter "Inevitability", but the author also acknowledges the strengths of women, with "Woman Unconquerable" being a powerful tribute to female resilience. The energy behind the words is evident also in those poems which tackle wider issues such as war ("Hawk and Dove Dialogue") and cultural conflict ("Script Change").

Patricia Ginton-Meicholas is a committed Christian and there are times when Christian beliefs and images are a little too obtrusive. However, there are also poems with a lighter note, which certainly made me smile. "Conversation with God" is a plea for a woman's independence in which God responds very bluntly in Bahamian dialect. And my favourite was "Poetic Licence" which defends the right of poets to use poetic language. Indeed, the whole anthology is an example of the power of language in the hands of a talented writer.

Mia Ball