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**Classically Black**

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**Report**

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## **Classically Black**

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This master's report will revisit Saidiya Hartman's account of how to 1) combat violence found in the archives and 2) mitigate silences imposed on marginalized bodies in her essay, "Venus in II Acts." This work contributes to public musicology because it impacts the way scholars interact with musicians who are historically othered. Through attention to the lives and works of Philippa Schuyler, Hazel Scott and Nina Simone, I ask critical questions like how can we view these pianists' lives in a way that does not reinforce canonic violence. I simultaneously weave my personal narrative into this discussion as I find myself occupying the spaces of researcher, performer and all the interstices found within the classical piano tradition. Through the work of Hartman, as well as Julia J. Chybowski, Karen Chilton and Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, I argue that Venus is a pianist like Schuyler, Scott and Simone whose usefulness is often tied to diversity within classical music's canon.

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## **Introduction**

It has been twenty years since I first touched the piano. Today at twenty four, the idea of reflection is no longer charged with fear and debilitating trauma. I began taking lessons in Inglewood, California from a local church's organist. He would come by weekly. My mother and various family members recount that I showed unusual focus and musical aptitude for a four year old. At the time, I had no idea who Philippa Schuyler, Hazel Scott or Nina Simone were, yet I found myself tapping into a stream of pianists who had traversed the same path I was unknowingly traveling. A path that is part diasporic, part trauma, part survival and part triumph.

This master's report will take on an unusual format as I will weave personal narrative, biographical information, race, gender and class together to create a reflection that is rooted in the histories of past black pianists and current performers. In this light, the recounting of narratives serves as a valid theoretical framework. I will heavily reference Saidiya Hartman, a scholar and author from Columbia University's English Department, throughout this thesis; her work, "Lose Your Mother" is a seminal piece in my growth as scholar and child of the diaspora. This work is imperative for personal and academic reasons. Personally, I find myself occupying the spaces of researcher, performer and all the interstices found within a tradition that I only recently discovered I was apart of. Academically, I hope this report can contribute to the field of musicology as it serves as an example as to how this scholarship can be relevant, personal and healing. My goal is to explore the intricate and transformative way time works in recounting stories of the African diaspora.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In Hartman's "Venus in II Acts," she examines "the ubiquitous presence of Venus in the archive of Atlantic Slavery and wrestles with the impossibility of saying anything about her that hasn't already been stated." Venus, as Hartman shares with us, appears throughout the history of enslaved black women; she is Sara, Philippa, Joanna, Rachel, Linda, Sally and the countless other enslaved (African) women whose stories were buried under the Atlantic. She is found within the ledgers of slaves - "the barracoon, the hollow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon's laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the kitchen, the master's bedroom—turn out to be exactly the same place and in all of them she is called Venus." I argue that Venus is a musician - one who is classically trained and excellent. She is the sharecropper's daughter singing hymnals in the field and the Trinidadian child composing melodies across the transatlantic; additionally, she is the classical black pianist whose usefulness is often tied to diversity within classical music's canon.

Hartman beautifully illustrates the ways in which Venus is remembered through acts of violence and preserved in the archives. In her retelling of the story of two enslaved girls who were thrown overboard she cautions:

I want to tell a story about two girls capable of retrieving what remains dormant—the purchase or claim of their lives on the present—without committing further violence in my own act of narration. It is a story predicated upon impossibility—listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives—and intent on achieving an impossible goal: redressing the violence that produced numbers, ciphers,

and fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the captive and the enslaved.

Hartman pushes scholars and readers to challenge how we recount deeply violent and traumatic narratives. These lived experiences do not have to be solely configured within the contours of violence and trauma; instead, we can account for the multiplicity of the human experience by centering this conversation around black pianists.

“Venus In Two Acts” radically changes the way I approach the lives and music of black classical pianists. As we will see in this narrative, many black pianists and musicians alike are described in terms that primarily racialize them. Like them, I can remember several times during my career where I have been harmfully and dangerously othered. To be clear, othering is always harmful. The myth of the model minority is one that has been harnessed and used to subjugate Black and Asian pianists. Statements like “You are unique for a black girl” or “You aren’t like other (racial group)” are pervasive within a culture that is largely defined by white supremacist ideology. By reinforcing these stereotypes, black pianists are divided and isolated further from their peers.

Violence and the archives are inextricably linked and as scholars this can not be ignored. For in the telling of dominant narratives of the white male pianists, black classical ones are disregarded in place of the status quo. And when these groups are mentioned, often times it in passing or through the silence of their absence. On the violence in the archives Hartman brilliantly shares how violence manifests in the



archives and how un-nuanced scholarship risks perpetuating this violence by recounting narratives:

Scandal and excess inundate the archive: the raw numbers of the mortality account, the strategic evasion and indirection of the captain's log, the florid and sentimental letters dispatched from slave ports by homesick merchants, the incantatory stories of shocking violence penned by abolitionists, the fascinated eyewitness reports of mercenary soldiers eager to divulge "what decency forbids [them] to disclose," and the rituals of torture, the beatings, hangings, and amputations enshrined as law. The libidinal investment in violence is apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past. What has been said and what can be said about Venus take for granted the traffic between fact, fantasy, desire, and violence.

In "Venus in II Acts" two important questions are raised: 1) how do we combat violence in the archives while recounting these narratives and 2) is this possible?

Hartman asks:

Is it possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive? By advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling. The conditional temporality of "what could have been," according to Lisa Lowe, "symbolizes aptly the space of a different kind of thinking, a space of productive attention to the scene of loss, a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and

methods of history and social science and the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods.

I argue that musicologists can combat this violence in the archives is by re-evaluating the usefulness and the implicit cultural and racial biases found within the western classical canon.

White supremacy is reinforced in the classical canon through the deification of white cis males and their musical contributions. Additionally, when people outside of this exclusive group are included, they are tokenized and made to seem as the grand exceptions, i.e. William Grant Still, Fanny Hensel, etc. One way this can be rectified is by actively interrogating the power dynamics at play and looking outside this standardized model of knowledge production.

## **Who Are We?**

Philippa Schuyler, Hazel Scott and Nina Simone traverse different times and spaces, but all hold the commonalities of being a black woman and occupying a space within classical piano. Although their lives were different, they all musically and socially contribute to the canon.

## **Philippa Schuyler**

Philippa Schuyler is a Harlem-born piano child prodigy whose parents are George S. Schuyler and Josephine Cogdell. Her father is recognized as a prominent black journalist, author, and social commentator. After being discharged from the U.S. Army, he begins interacting with Black socialist groups and thinkers like Universalist Negro Improvement Association spearheaded by black nationalist Marcus Garvey and the Friends of Negro Freedom. However, by the mid twenties, he becomes deeply distrustful of socialism and its inherent push for the liberation of Black America. In his piece, "The Negro Art-Hokum, he simultaneously denies the existence of Black art and extols the work of white artists. He states, "Negro art made in America is as non-existent as the widely advertised profundity of Cal Coolidge, the seven years of progress of Mayor Hylan, or the reported sophistication of New Yorkers." He contends that negro or black art is not homogeneous enough to represent a culture. For him:

No more expressive or characteristic of the Negro race than the music and dancing of the Appalachian highlanders or the Dalmatian peasantry are expressive or characteristic of the Caucasian race. If one wishes to speak of the musical contributions of the peasantry of the south, very well. Any group under similar circumstances would have produced something similar. It is merely a coincidence that this peasant class happens

to be of a darker hue than the other inhabitants of the land. One recalls the remarkable likeness of the minor strains of the Russian mujiks to those of the Southern Negro.

This is important because his daughter, Philippa, would go on not only to be regarded as a piano prodigy, but it aids in the understanding of her childhood and her being in relation to miscegenation. In his highly controversial pamphlet, "Racial Inter-Marriage," he advocates for the mixing of black and white people as a way to solve racial tension in the United States.

There is little information on Philippa's mother; however she plays a central role in her narrative as well. Much like George, Josephine surmises that the mixing of races could lead to a world-changing social experiment. Cogdell is a White former beauty queen from Texas who assumes that a strict, regimented diet of raw foods helps stimulate true genius. Thus, Philippa eats only raw carrots, peas, yams, steak, lemons and Cod liver oil.

Philippa's story is deeply disturbing. There is very little documented information on her life and the little we do have is riddled with emotional and mental violence. This sort of violence is paramount to understand Philippa and many other black figures in the canons stories. The violence that Hartman finds within the archives of enslaved black women is found again in the story of Philippa because her story is often centered around her prodigious talent coinciding with her upbringing as a child of miscegenation and racial experimentation. Philippa is rarely mentioned by the academy, and the research surrounding her life is surface level and lacking critical analysis. As I sit with the story of Philippa, I begin to push beyond the narrative of violence and ask "well, what if?" - a critical step in combating the violence found in the archives surrounding

Black classical pianists. What if there is more to Philippa's life than just race experimentation and disturbingly abusive and controlling parents? Questions like how did she feel as a child living on a raw food only diet enforced by her mother? permeate my thoughts while processing and reading beyond the archives. How did a child with so much talent and restrictions feel? How did she cope? Did she have friends? Was her beauty and identity ever reinforced at home? Is it even possible to affirm a child like Philippa when her very existence is rooted in the rejection of identities?

As I meditate on these questions, I consciously breathe life into the parts of her narrative that do not continue to inflict pain on Philippa. Much like the memories of enslaved African women, we must be careful about the ways in which we recount their most violent moments and if recounting these violent narratives is necessary. It is important not to reduce Philippa to the most traumatic parts of her life. I think about potential ways Philippa moves through the world as a biracial teen and young woman. When did she gain her independence from her parents? When did she experience love? How did she connect to people of varying races, having a vastly different experience from both white and black Americans? Did the piano act as an agent of solace and comfort for her, or did the intense pressure that accompanies being a child prodigy push her away from music and into journalism like her father?

There is little information regarding Philippa's transition from a prodigious talent to a reporter. While working as a war correspondent in Vietnam, she dies in a helicopter crash in 1967 at 35 years old. It is disappointing that not much can be said about her passing or the reception to her life after; therefore, I am actively looking for ways to tell it that best mitigate the violence while also wondering if this is truly ever possible.

## Hazel Scott

Hazel Scott is a Trinidadian pianist who relocates to New York at the age of 8 to attend The Juilliard School. Like Philippa, Hazel shows a prodigious talent at an early age. After several years in New York, she begins to transition from solely classical to a jazz-infused style, earning performances at The Cotton Club in Harlem. I first encounter her while looking at pictures of Lena Horne. I notice the woman on the piano and immediately began to do research.

Unlike Philippa, we have several recording projects and performances available giving us opportunity to enjoy her music and brilliance. She transitions from live clubs to Hollywood, and performs as herself in films *I Dood It*, *Broadway Rhythm*, *The Heat's On*, and *Rhapsody In Blue*. In *The Heat's On*, she auditions for an upcoming musical. Her performance is fully based on herself - a young talented classical black pianist. In the scene, we see her seated behind one piano wearing a white gown. Immediately, I am struck by her virtuosic playing. Her hands are nimble and quick in the ways we would characterize a classical pianist's hands. Then it is revealed that there is not one but two pianos. Scott then oscillates between the pianos, displaying a level of virtuosity that astounds the two white men who are seemingly auditioning her. The pianos, black and white, are used to create an aesthetic that is both pleasing and intentional and recall the visual elements of the piano. The stark black and white colors contrast can also be viewed through a lens of resistance and can challenge the audience to really think on race and classical music in this moment. It is difficult to ignore the clear racial overtones. At this time, black women are rarely depicted on screen and in the moments that they are, they act as mostly domestic servants. Scott is averse to this type casting

and refuses to play any role that did not meet her qualifications as a classical pianist. It is for this reason that during the forties, Scott is blackballed from Hollywood. This scene with Scott and the two pianos is indicative of a larger trend in her career, particularly, her refusal to play stereotypical roles or caricatures. This refusal to play a stereotype is a clear, intentional form of resistance on Scott's part.

The existence of black classical pianists, like Scott, is, at its very core, resistance. She, as a black woman, is in direct defiance of the ways in which black women's bodies and esthetics are used to further white supremacist agendas. She is feminine, talented, beautiful and educated - qualities often excluded from black womanhood since slavery.

## **Nina Simone**

Nina Simone's biography is largely well known. In the last 5 to 10 years, we see a serious resurgence in interest in her life and music. For example, she is sampled by Kanye West in "Blood On the Leaves" from his 2013 *Yeezus* album and most recently in Jay-Z's "4:44." Her presence in pop music is ubiquitous and larger than life at this point. She is admired as much for her talent as she is for her role as a civil rights leader and musical icon. For the purposes of this project, it is important to focus on Simone's live performances, particularly her Montreux Jazz Festival appearance, as well as her mental illness.

In the documentary "What Happened...Miss Simone?," her mental illness is explored in an unprecedented way. In the late 1980's Simone is diagnosed with bipolar disorder; it is through this lens that the documentary really tells its captivating story. The film does a good job at highlighting how she struggles with her mental health long before this diagnosis as well as creating a sense of her slowly deteriorating mental health.

Hartman's conversation on violence in the archives is a strategic framework for discussing Simone's mental health. The intentional erasure of Simone's mental health by scholars and the general public is a form of violence. For many, there is a danger of speaking on mental health. It can be uncomfortable, foreign and feel extraneous; however, it is important that Simone's life be truthfully recounted. Violence and mental health can not be erased or mitigated just because it is left out of her narrative. Rather, finding responsible ways to tell Simone's story that do not center solely on her mental health but do incorporate it are paramount.



As I reflect on my own mental health journey, I feel the urge to reflect on Simone's as well. Conservatory style training is notoriously grueling, often sacrificing mental, emotional and physical well being for the idea of perfection. A perfection that in classical music, is seen as obtainable. This is a standard that is often dangerous and unrealistic. It promotes unhealthy lifestyles and a sacrificial, religious valuing of music that discourages one from self-care. The needs of the music and piano are placed before the pianist.

As an undergraduate student at The University of Texas at Austin, I was faced with many of the same mental health issues as Simone. I found my mental health slowly but surely deteriorating from the increasing micro-aggressions from my professor and peers. Senior year, I auditioned for several schools in New York where my race was made very apparent to me by the faculty. And when I came back to Austin, I found that my joy and love for piano had diminished and had instead been replaced by a deep seated anger and loathing for the environment I was in. I later found out in my spring semester of my senior year that I had depression. I found myself unable to memorize any piece of music besides a Mozart Sonata, and struggled with finishing my degree and performing my senior recital. During many of my performances during this period, I played relying heavily on muscle memory. I was on auto pilot and my brain, filled with depressive thoughts, could no longer be trusted to guide my music.

Many performances during Simone's life have this quality. She states during her Montreux Jazz Festival performance that, "everybody took a chunk of me." This performance came after Simone had what seems like a mental breakdown, and left the United States for Liberia. She stayed and lived in Liberia for two years, and her mental

state improved, but was not erased. Simone's mental health struggles are important to have in dialogue with black classical pianists because the weight and violence of the canon can directly lead to mental and emotional damage. Much is unknown about Schuyler's mental health, but it is more than possible that the rigidity of the classical piano world had negative effects on her mental health.

## Race

In relation to Black classical pianists, there is a dearth of musicology scholarship. I find it paramount to engage critically with musicologists who are currently engaging with Black classical musicians, particularly Black female singers from the 19th and 20th century. Looking to the scholarship of Julia Chybowski on Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, also known as “The Black Swan,” I interrogate the ways in which this history coincides with the work of Hartman and its impact on how we receive Schuyler, Scott and Simone.

In Julia J. Chybowski’s *Becoming the “Black Swan” in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield’s Early Life and Debut Concert Tour*, she tells the compelling story of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the first in a lineage of African American women vocalists to earn national and international acclaim. She is “Born into slavery in Mississippi, she grew up in Philadelphia and launched her first North American concert tour from upstate New York in 1851. Hailed as the “Black Swan” by newspapermen involved in her debut, the soubriquet prefigured a complicated reception of her musical performances.”

Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield makes her public debut in October 1851, when she launches a two year tour that spanned the Northern United States and Northeastern Canada. She is dubbed “The Black Swan,” a title that brought attention to her musical talent, but more importantly her life as a formerly enslaved woman. Chybowski states that she performed, “Opera arias, sentimental parlor songs, ballads of the British Isles, and the occasional hymn. This was the popular music of her day, common to public and private spaces, both concert stages graced by touring European prima donnas and

domestic parlors where women presided over family pianos.” Greenfield is unique in many ways - one being that there are not many accounts of black performers in the nineteenth century. At a time when slavery was still legal, but collectively moving towards the Civil War in the United States, black performers and musicians are rarely seen on a public stage. When blackness is evoked, it is done so through the tradition of minstrelsy and blackface. Greenfield is a direct representation of blackness who was the complete antithesis to blackface and minstrel performance practices.

Greenfield’s public image and general reception is explored in depth in Chybowski’s work. She shares that Greenfield's reception was, “more complicated than has been previously understood, with Greenfield’s unprecedented performances evoking a variety of responses including adulation, benevolence, paternalism, curiosity, confusion, criticism, and ridicule.” Greenfield is viewed as singing “white” music, and held in contrast to figures of early minstrelsy. Her blackness and lineage as a formerly enslaved African is often the focus with reception, but is overlapped with conversations around class, “mulatto-ness” and gender. Reflecting on the ways Greenfield challenged multiple assumptions about gender, race and womanhood while living in between the interstices of these spaces, Chybowski writes, “When Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield stepped onto public stages in 1851, singing as the “Black Swan,” none of the expectations about black, white, feminine, masculine, popular, or high-class music held by her audiences in the Northern United States would have been wholly satisfied. In short, she embodied and performed contradictions that arose from midcentury interests in and anxieties about crossing perceived racial, gender, and class boundaries.”

Chybowski does an excellent job of being mindful of Greenfield's narrative, and the ways past biographies are harmful or violent to her memory and personhood. This is reminiscent of the way Hartman cautions scholars to be careful with these very present, human subjects. She sifts through the archives, and instead of just using the information as presented, she digs further. This is important because for a woman like Greenfield who was so othered and exoticized, many accounts of her life and work are extremely biased and partial to the writers racial and gendered reception. Chybowski takes caution with this and states that, "In light of continued scholarly interest in Greenfield's performances as the "Black Swan," there is need to revisit the standard story of her life and to interpret, rather than simply repeat, the nineteenth-century accounts of her career." Chybowski uses but does not solely rely on scholarly work. She pulls from, "mid-nineteenth-century biographies originally published to aid the marketing of the "Black Swan", Philadelphia Abolition Society papers, wills and estate records, city directories, census records, concert programs, and playbills. Historical sheet music collections preserve contemporary arrangements of the music she performed and that her audiences likely knew well. Most importantly, extensive nineteenth-century newspaper coverage of her debut tour enables a reconstruction of her first touring route and interpretation of her initial reception. Hundreds of short and unsigned newspaper reviews that repeat the same adjectives may seem at first inconsequential as documentation of a musician's reception, but as newspaper discourse shaped audience expectations and concert experiences, the "Black Swan" persona emerged nationwide." This is important because it speaks to Hartman's earlier points about how scholars acknowledge the ways in which the archive fails our subjects. Greenfield, like many

classical black musicians, are remembered more for the novelty of their existence rather than their musical and social contribution. This othering of them in the canon and archives is a violence that is both musical and personal.

Greenfield's legacy as Chybowski astutely points, went far beyond her music and performance. "More than a decade before Emancipation, Greenfield's musical voice and presence on concert stages forced audiences to consider, and sometimes reconsider, their perceptions of social identities as they intersected with abolition politics. Even though Greenfield's manager steered her clear of any overt political statements during this first tour, the "Black Swan" became a powerful public symbol for Americans on both sides of the slavery question." And while this is unique for the time period musically, black musicians during the nineteenth and twentieth century like pianist like Hazel Scott, Josephine Baker and the Fisk Jubilee singers all challenged white supremacy's musical hold within the United States and abroad.

Greenfield's performances raise important questions around blackness, music and the canon. Class and race intersected in a number of difficult and challenging ways that expanded the way we view and understand blackness. The tradition of classical black pianists is one that directly and clearly challenges the notions of blackness and its relation to music in the nineteenth and twentieth century. For the ideas around blackness during this time were largely constructed by the proximity to whiteness. Blues, an early black art form stemming from the pain of jim crow, segregation, poverty and slavery, was for a large part deemed a "black" art form. It was reserved for impoverished black folk during the end of the nineteenth and first half of twentieth century, and spoke to a specific economic and social class within society. But black

classical pianist raised different questions that black music and society, as well as hegemonic structures of whiteness had to grapple with. Classical black pianists were often immigrants, racially mixed, or privileged economically. They possessed a unique and gifted talent and coupled with the spectacle of their blackness in a white backdrop, where often tokenized and highlighted as credits to their race. They were considered interesting hybrids of both a white and black world. For they had the privileges of middle class black america, and their proximity to whiteness gave them a level of security and “freedom.” But at the same time, the tokenization and othering of black classical pianists illustrated how ideas around the black middle class, were not parallel to ideas around white wealth and socioeconomic status.

## **Pedagogy and Performance**

Within pedagogy and performance, I find that there is a lot of new and exciting work to be done. I had the honor of teaching a little girl named Maggie for about a year, and I will share my methodologies and some of the possible ways to interpret the results below.

Maggie is a nine year old student from Austin, Texas. She attends public school and loves to act, dance and sing. She is a natural extrovert, and is quick and inquisitive. I first met Maggie while running the “East Austin Community Children’s Chorus”, a children's choir I had created at The Carver Museum to provide free music education to black and brown students on the Eastside of Austin. When the choir took a hiatus in 2016, Maggie and I began to work privately together. We started with piano lessons, but it was quickly apparent that Maggie wanted to sing and play during her lessons. So we began to split the lesson between piano and voice, focusing on breathing. Movement, theory basics via the piano and repertoire. When faced with the question of repertoire, I knew that certain choices would automatically not be best suited for Maggie. Maggie, a dark skinned black american girl with natural hair, needed music that reflected her. I feel that this need was paramount as there are very few musical examples that reinforce her image in the canon and also due to the rapidly changing landscape of Austin. Austin is a city with four percent black that is steadily decreasing. This means that Maggie’s friends neighbors and teachers will increasingly if not already not reflect her or her experience as a black girl in America. With all this against us, I knew we had to make sure our lessons were both informative and self-aware.



I choice to begin working on “Feeling Good” by Nina Simone with Maggie. The song, written by Lesley Bricusse and Anthony Newley, is featured on Simone’s “I Put A Spell on You” album. It features a simple, repeating melody, chorus, melody format in  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{12}{8}$  with a heavy triplet rhythm. It is in G minor and is relatively freely sung and performed. I felt like this would be a good song for Maggie to learn because it was not too difficult to learn and the subject matter is one that isn’t too advanced for a nine year old.

Maggie and I met for the next several weeks, learning about the song but also about who Simone was and the social climate at the period. During one lesson I can remember looking at picture of Simone with a short afro and Maggie proudly explaining “her hair is like mine”. In this moment, I was keenly aware of the ways in which my identity had never been affirmed in any of my lessons. As a child, i saw pictures of baby Mozart and Bach. These images of white men with large wigs created another sense of othering that I hadn’t interrogated until I had reached my junior year of college. In college, I began to really look around the Butler School of Music and wonder, “where are the black musicians?” I had always been aware that we were few in number, but I began to think more critically about the reasons why. I started looking at black children's early music education, and reflecting on my own. I was fortunate enough to have a somewhat balanced musical education, where the tenants and theory of Western music governed most of my learning. But rarely did I see or hear music that reflected my experience. And for many low income students of color, music education is a luxury that has been relocated to a thing for those with money and access. Many pedagogy books like Bastien, Alfred, the Music for Little Mozarts series and The Royal Academy of

London series highlight technique, musicianship and artistry. But rarely if ever do you see any musical diversity. From the music selections to the illustrations found in these method books, the message that is sent out to children is a homogeneous cultural reinforcement. It is one that not subtly reinforces that the most important music, music that is worth studying, cultivating and teaching, is created by white people. This message is drilled into students throughout their classical music experience. It creates students that then feel comfortable othering musicians who do not look and come from the same cultural and musical background.

In our lessons, I could see Maggie becoming more musically confident. She became more comfortable with the words and rhythm, and soon began to improvise her own melody. During one lesson, I switched up the rhythm to sound slightly more hip hop, and Maggie responded with “What am I supposed to do with that...rap?” But the next lesson she asked, “can we do the new version” and there our new project was born. Maggie and I started writing her own lyrics to “Feeling Good” and the results were truly incredible. The go as followed:

cutting my hair

nina

popsicles i love to eat you in the summer

ice cube in the sun

eating ice cream in the sun ..you know how i feel

people in the theatre

freedom is not mine

pizza, i love to eat you and you

Tv i like to watch you, and...

Water I like to drink you

earth i like you cause you have an atmosphere that helps us

earth i like you

meteoroids, stuff like that

bed

flowers (beautiful flowers) , i like that you're beautiful and you have different colors

(i'm scared of bees but the also help us)

clothing i like to wear you

movies i like to watch you

i like to dance to the beat

the beat, i like you

food

stairs i like to climb you a lot

heb i like you

Summer i like when you're hot

oxygen i like that you help us breathe

air conditioning i like you when I'm hot

doors i like you

microwave i like when you heat my food

piano i like to play you

These lyrics display a wonderful level of creativity and innovation. They are fun, light hearted and thoughtful. They show a child who both grasped the themes of nature and the yearning that Simone had to be free through these images of running water, or a breeze in the trees. But for Maggie, this freedom looks like ice cream and summer and simple moments like climbing the stairs. It is a testament to the intelligence, softness and warmth that black girls possess but are rarely able to showcase. Because where are the spaces that black girls can just go and decompress? Go and write about nature and the everyday things in their lives that make them smile. Divert their attention from the increasing micro-aggressions and violence targeted at black children? A historical and diasporic violence that has been carried through the canon and inflicted on generations of classical black students. Maggie, like Venus and Philippa, is susceptible to the same gendered and racialized violence that black women across the globe are. Only there violence is often dismissed by ideas around class, privilege and access. For to study music implies a certain level of privilege and elitism. One that public musicology like this is slowly working to undo.

I am thankful for Maggie, Philip, Hazel, Nina and myself. Through these women I have come to better understand my journey, pain and how exactly I want to move through the world. This project is important to the field of musicology as it is one that will push and explore the interstices of public musicology and social justice and freedom work. I believe heavily in the idea that by granting people their rightful space in history, we combat the violence of the archives and begin to grant these people a form of retroactive justice. This is important because the field of musicology has the power to expose and shed light on musicians and people who have been systematically

marginalized. We can see this idea of retroactive justice in the genres of rock 'n' roll and country, where there has been a push by musicologists, other scholars and the public to reclaim the black roots of these art forms. I believe this project can help to continue and bring to the forefront this push, particularly in classical music. The women I have highlighted are all resistance past and present. They have refused to 1) make themselves small, 2) fit into a monolithic view of black women, and 3) make herself more palatable, more easily consumed for white folk. They exist and this is resistance. This is why I do this work. For little black girls who are finding their voice and grappling with how much space they take. It is my hope that my work inspires them to take up space. All of it.

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