

2012

Learning How to Listen': Analyzing Style and Meaning in the Music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson

LaShonda Katrice Barnett

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Music Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barnett, LaShonda Katrice, "Learning How to Listen': Analyzing Style and Meaning in the Music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson" (2012). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1539623358.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-fqh4-zq06>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

'Learning How To Listen': Analyzing Style and Meaning
in the Music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson

LaShonda Katrice Barnett

Park Forest, Illinois, U.S.A.

Master of Arts, Sarah Lawrence College, 1998
Bachelor of Arts, University of Missouri, 1995

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary
August, 2012

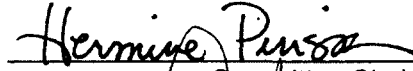
APPROVAL PAGE

This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy


LaShonda Katrice Barnett

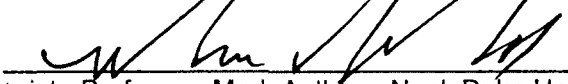
Approved by the Committee, April, 2012

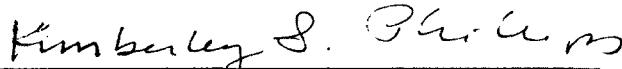


Committee Chair

Associate Professor, Hermine Pinson, College of William and Mary


Associate Professor, Arthur Knight, College of William and Mary


~~Associate~~ Professor, Mark Anthony Neal, Duke University



~~Associate~~ Professor, Kimberley Phillips, Brooklyn College/CUNY

Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences

ABSTRACT PAGE

'Learning How To Listen': Analyzing Style and Meaning in the Music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson examines the similarities of singing styles and core narrative traits in the original songs of three African American women vocalist-composers celebrated within the jazz idiom. Drawing on years of ethnographic research, including over 150 hours of personal interviews with musicians, attendance of jazz concerts and festivals both domestic and abroad, and a three-year listening journal (based on live performances and recordings), *'Learning How to Listen'* is an Africana cultural studies product informed by vibrant multidisciplinary scholarship that bridges Jazz studies, Linguistics and African American history and literary studies. The latter especially extends the project's close relationship to twentieth-century black literary traditions found in poetry, prose, and as witnessed here, also song lyrics. The introduction highlights the significance of Lincoln (1930-2010), Simone (1933-2003) and Wilson (b. 1955) to the American music canon, and articulates the dissertation's distinctive contribution to the field of black music studies, addressing the work's methodology and the scope of primary chapters which provide an analysis of the: a) singing voice; b) philosophical authorial voice and c) performance style specifically in relation to 'Re-memory' songs which bear witness to an African heritage. Chapter Two engages two distinct modes of discourse generated on Lincoln, Simone and Wilson by jazz critics and jazz musicians. Chapter Three proves the applicability and efficacy of linguistics to the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson by examining the collective approach to melorhythm and tonal semantics and the phonological style markers employed by each: Lincoln's phonosemantics; Simone's microtonality; and Wilson's polytonality. Since a significant portion of the original songs by these artists engage a plethora of black women's socio-political issues, Chapter Four analyzes lyrics that demonstrate a gendered philosophical outlook I refer to as womanist autoethno-graphy. Chapters Five and Six examines the creative impulse shared by these artists to bear witness to their African heritage in 'Re-memory' (a term coined by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison) songs that both invoke and re-imagine an African past and celebrate an African present and future. It is my contention that the cultural study of black music is uniquely positioned to delineate the principles and mechanisms by which African diasporic music is connected by similar aesthetic philosophies. Thus, in the seventh and final chapter my project ultimately suggests a model for expanding discourses about black women's music. My term *Afrodiasporic 'Voicing,'* introduced in the conclusion, is shorthand for the aural and authorial cultural elements that uniquely characterize black women's music across genres and nations. It implies that black American women singer-songwriters and their musical sisters in the African diaspora share conceptual approaches to music-making processes in spite of geographic or linguistic differences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
EPIGRAPH	xiv
Chapter One	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two	38
‘Please Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’: The Challenge of Defining Jazz Singing	
Jazz Critics and Music Writers On Lincoln, Simone & Wilson.....	41
Musicians Sound Off On Lincoln, Simone & Wilson.....	52
The Relevance of Linguistics to Singing.....	64
Chapter Three	70
‘Learning How to Listen’: Of Language And Of The Singing Voice	
Melorhythm & Stylistic Phonological Markers in the Vocality of Lincoln, Simone & Wilson.....	74
Abbey Lincoln’s Phonosemantics.....	85
Nina Simone’s Blues Muse, Microtonality.....	101
Cassandra Wilson’s Sleights of Time & Polytonality.....	117
Chapter Four	137
‘My Name Is Peaches!’: Reading Lyrics As Womanist Autoethnography	
Why Nina Simone, Abbey Lincoln and Cassandra Wilson Aren’t Feminists.....	143
‘Please Read Me’: Womanist Autoethnography.....	150
Redemption Song: Black Women In Praise of the Black Family.....	156
‘First Came A Woman’: Womanism, Children & The Subtext of Black Nationalism.....	167
Singing Truth to Power: Social Protest Songs.....	174

Chapter Five	188
‘Rekindle The Spirit’: On The Aural Site of Re-Memory	
What Is Africa To Me?.....	191
Journeys to Africa.....	195
‘Back to Yesterday’s Moon’: Re-Memory.....	210
‘Dance to the Drums Again’: On the Aural Site of Re-Memory.....	223
‘Who Used to Dance’: Mytho-History Songs.....	236
Ancestor Songs.....	246
 Chapter Six	 259
‘The Circle Is Never Broken’: To/Ward Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’	
Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’.....	261
Sounds of Blackness: An Ethnomemoir	269
Conclusion.....	273
 APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A	275
Subject Biographies	
APPENDIX B	288
Selected Sound Recordings	
APPENDIX C	290
Glossary of Basic Musical Terms	
APPENDIX D	292
Selected Lyrics for Songs Written by Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson	
REFERENCES	375
VITA	388

For love of Abbey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The spring I turned twenty-one I boarded the #6 Jeffrey express to Hyde Park. Ear buds fitted just right—if blaring a little too loud, as the bus winded along Lake Shore Drive I listened rapturously to marvelous, swift vocalizing, delighted by how the singer piqued my interest, changing time and meter in a Cole Porter song I knew well but that in her hands had become completely new. The last minute of playful, staccato phrasing swept me up in bittersweet joy: who was this singer? I determined to acquire everything she had ever recorded as soon as the disc jockey named her. But he never did. My stop came, a different singer sang now and I had someplace to be. After my appointment, I headed to a music store that specialized in jazz; surely someone could identify who had swung Cole Porter’s lyrics faster than a hummingbird’s wings. ‘Would you happen to know a female jazz singer with a scratchy, husky voice? She breaks up words and phrases in a time that’s all her own? She recorded some Cole Porter.’ The store owner smiled, vanished without a word and reappeared in a flash, handing me an album whose cover showed a brunette in a silver dirndl skirt and white parade gloves, sitting on a swing pushed by a balding man. How to tell the obviously proud store owner that the hunt continued? For certain, *Anita O’Day Swings Cole Porter & Rodgers & Hart With Billy May* was not the album I sought. I explained why O’Day could not be the singer in question. ‘The woman I heard on the radio sounded like a black woman.’ By now he had turned smug, gingerly

removing the album from the sleeve, placing it on the turntable. ‘What does it mean to sound like a black woman anyway?’ He asked as the little shop on East 53rd Street rollicked to the right rhythm and voice.

Long before rumination about a dissertation topic began I became curious about what it means to sound (and sing) like a black woman. It has taken years of observation and study of African American culture to understand that rooted in my initial query were ideas and traits that have little to do with sound per se. Certainly challenges like that put forth by the man at the long-gone independent Chicago music store—‘What does it mean to sound like a black woman anyway?’—helped lead me to a path of complex inquiry. For serendipity in small and large doses I am grateful.

My intellectual journey bequeaths me with a maddening understanding that one must question almost everything, including the notion to save the best for last. Outstanding among the many people and institutions who deserve my deep gratitude are: my family, led by a devoted grandmother, Helen Jean Williams, who passed away the year I passed comps and whose death unraveled me even as the legacy of her life gave me something to strive for, and my mothers—biological and spiritual—Brenda Jean Long, Blanche White and Victoria Zeritis. That I made it to graduate school (and through it) is nothing but a miracle explained by the

unwavering faith, unstinting support and devotion of these women. *Thank you* for teaching me through your love that ‘stars’ are made at home, not in the world. The interviewing, traveling, befriending, and, ultimately, care-giving that I experienced with Abbey Lincoln will remain one of my life’s greatest treasures. Abbey not only modeled the ways of an artist with fierce intelligence, dignity, humility, grace, and no shortage of courage, she taught me to honor above all else (–even whilst trying to honor her with my scholarship) my own creative force, and in so doing changed my life along the way, the mark of a true education. Ruth Heit maintained belief in this project and remains the dearest friend I have known. Her unbelievable generosity and encouraging words are golden. It is because of Ruth and the extraordinary community I gave up (when moving to Williamsburg) in order to return to—April Reynolds-Mosolino, Rachelle Sussman-Rumph, Malinda Walford, Suzanne Gardinier, Mary Porter, Nazirah Mickey, Nyala Wright, Ellen Eisenman, E. Fran White—that I found my way in New York City along with many, many wonderful opportunities.

All projects are labors; through the people this project led me to intellectually, socially, emotionally, this dissertation became a labor of love. For the thirty musicians—current or former bandmates and recording session participants of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson—who talked with me before and after concerts, and responded to every email I sent thus expanding my

knowledge of the music, I list your name here as a token of my eternal gratitude for your time and for the music you bring to the stage, our homes, our hearts: Thank you Nina!, Lonnie Plaxico, Rodney Kendrick, Aaron Walker, Al Shackman, Alvester Garnett, Brandon McCune, Brandon Ross, Jaz Sawyer, Jon Ormond, Herlin Riley, Daniel Morreno, Jason Moran, John Ormond, Jonathan Baptiste, Julien Lourau, Brandon McCune, Michael Bowie, Mulgrew Miller, Reginald Veal, Marc Cary, Joe Lavano, Nicholas Payton, Steve Coleman, Marvin Sewell, Jeffrey Haynes, James Weidman, Mark Johnson, Tomás Doncker. Conversations with Odetta, Miriam Makeba, Angélique Kidjo, Tokunbo Akinro, Rosa Passos, Gal Costa, Maucha Adnet, and the over forty black American and Brazilian women vocalists I interviewed for separate book projects on musical creative process helped to shape my thinking about performance in general and the styles of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in particular.¹ I am especially grateful to the late, legendary Anita O'Day, Annie Ross, Cleo Laine, Lenora Zenzalai Helm and Dianne Reeves (who could have been featured in this dissertation) for their generosity and insight during our interviews. Very special thanks to Jean-Philippe Allard for his 1988 phonecall to Abbey, which led to her signing with Verve and launched the second, most fruitful era of her recording career, and to Cassandra Wilson whose work and friendship continue to inspire, and for

¹ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters On Their Craft* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007); and *Off The Record: Conversations with African-American & Brazilian Women Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Scarecrow Press, forth).

providing me with a silver pony to ride out the last leg of this journey.

Important teachers and mentors, formal and informal, have lighted up the way for me:

Patricia Allen Davis (Central State University), Patricia Brodsky (University of Missouri), Noliwe Rooks (Princeton University), Mary A. Porter (Sarah Lawrence College), Farah Jasmine Griffin (Columbia University) Robert O'Meally (Columbia University), Mark Anthony Neal (Duke University), Kyra Gaunt (Baruch College), and New York City vocal coaches Pat Holley and Marjorie Eliot. The graduate program in American Studies at the College of William & Mary and my dissertation committee chided me with great patience into respecting my decision to embark on this journey and helped me reconnect time and time again. Special thanks to my advisor and mentor, Hermine Pinson—for understanding, faith and willingness, words can never express (!). And to Arthur Knight and Kimberley L. Phillips for not giving up on me or the project and for not bending, insisting these thoughts receive their due both in my head and on the page. My sense of the intellectual generosity of my outside reader, Mark Anthony Neal, was first gleaned during the reading of his work, *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (1998), one of the first books on black music I read upon entering grad school. Neal's subsequent books and consistently rigorous engagement with black music on his blog *NewBlackMan* have been a continual nod that my impulse to write about black women's

music from a non-musicological vantage point is a worthy endeavor. In sum, the members of my committee have shaped my scholarship and creative work in significant ways. I am grateful that while at William & Mary my path crossed with those of Dana Boswell-Williams, Dr. Enith E. Hickman, Dr. Jacquelynne Modeste, and Dr. Corey D.B. Walker, supportive comrades during my 'Burg years who remain dear friends.

Many opportunities arose to share aspects of this research with informed audiences. I would further like to acknowledge the feedback I received presenting parts of this work to audiences at Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College, the University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana), the Université Tours (France), Universität für Darstellende Kunst (Austria), Freie Universität (Germany), the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora biennial conference (Brazil), the University of Cape Town (South Africa), the African American Museum in Philadelphia and the Museum of the African Diaspora (San Francisco).

When there were materials needed to advance the project—food, rent, clothes and money to pay tuition I benefited from the support of the Southern Regional Educational Board's doctoral scholars program as well as monies from the Graduate Studies Department at the College of William and Mary and an Educational Advancement Fund grant from my sorors of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. Institutions that sustained the project in non-pecuniary though

no less significant ways are Rutgers University's Institute of Jazz Studies—especially Joseph Petterson and archivists Tad Hershorn and Vinnie Pelote, whose encyclopedic knowledge of jazz and infectious laughter made each visit fun and Columbia University's Center for Jazz Studies and the Institute for Research in African American Studies. I must mention the meetings I attended at the Jazz Study Group at Columbia, founded by Robert G. O'Meally to explore new methods of studying jazz, and which have contributed greatly to our on-going understanding of the music's social, historical, political, and emotional impact the world over. It was the late musicologist Mark Tucker, whose seminal works on Duke Ellington set new standards for historical and musicological research into Ellington's music and jazz studies overall, who secured me an invitation to the Jazz Study Group in 1999, where I first met Abbey Lincoln. Unfazed when I shared my plan to write a dissertation about her music, Lincoln gave me her telephone number only when I added that I was also an artist, a creative writer. "Then we truly have something to talk about," she said, a special light flashing in her eyes. Three autumns later, I was an invited scholar at Columbia's IRAAS, teaching the self-designed course *Mapping Jazz: the Geography & Ethnography of an African American Music*, a seminar which proved critical in shaping my thinking about some of the issues this project presents. I'd also like to thank the House of Swing, also known as Jazz at Lincoln Center, where I taught Women in Jazz History,

and where trumpeter extraordinaire/Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis and other members of the J@LC orchestra both challenged and inspired my thinking on many occasions. However, as far as institutions go the greatest thanks are reserved for my former colleagues and students at Sarah Lawrence College, who, for better or for worse, offered me some idea of life in the academy long before the finish line was ever in sight.

In the difficult course of completing this work, I often returned to Walter Mosley's *RL'S Dream*. Near the end of the story, Gerry, a graduate student at Hunter College explains why he is in pursuit of a Ph.D. in History. "Black people have built the culture of America with their play, and nobody knows it really because it's not written down in books. You see, books make things seem real, and even if you've got something else just as real, if it's not in a book then nobody cares." By now the academy is aware of just how 'real, real'—to borrow from a Nina Simone original—this music is. For as scholar Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. observes: "Growing numbers of music scholars now argue quite profitably that music is a dynamic social text, a meaningful cultural practice, a cultural transaction, and a politically charged, gendered, signifying discourse."² Nevertheless, Fred Moten reminds us that black history remains a real problem and a real chance for the philosophy of history. Too little intellectual thought in the

² Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17.

form of books pertain to black women's lives, specifically their creative traditions and legacies, a truism, which along with the music itself enabled me to cross the finish line.

Ki Olodumare gba a o. Olodumare a ran rere si o.

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
2.1	JAZZ CRITICS ON LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON	45
2.2	JAZZ MUSICIANS ON LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON	55
3.1	PHONOLOGICAL STYLE MARKERS IN THE SINGING OF LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON	85
5.1	BIRD SONGS	217
5.2	RE-MEMORY SONGS	253
6.1	AFRO-DIASPORIC 'VOICE-ING' (ADV) MODEL	268
6.2	ADV SONG MATRIX: QUANTITY OF ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES DEMONSTRATED IN ORIGINAL SONGS BY ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO, CESÁRIA ÉVORA, DIANNE REEVES, SOMI, SUSANA BACA, AND TOKUNBO AKINRO	272

Critical thinking disavows its own inventiveness as much as possible. Because it sees itself as uncovering something it claims was hidden or as debunking something it desires to subtract from the world, it clings to a basically descriptive and justificatory *modus operandi*. . . . The balance has to shift to affirmative methods: techniques which embrace their own inventiveness and are not afraid to own up to the fact that they add (if so meagerly) to reality.

—BRIAN MASSUMI, *PARABLES FOR THE VIRTUAL*

* * *

I'm learning how to listen
for the songs I name and sign
And claim as a possession
And say that they are mine
'Cause everybody knows
that songs come from out of the blue
And I'm learning how to hear the changes too

I'm learning how to listen
to the rhythm of the night
How to keep it simple,
how to make it sweet and light.
Smooth and free and easy
Or slammin in a jam
And know for just a moment
the music that I am.

—ABBEY LINCOLN, "LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN"

1

INTRODUCTION

Noted scholar of the African diaspora Paul Gilroy observes that “working on the contemporary forms of black expressive culture involves struggling with one problem in particular, and that is the puzzle of what analytic status should be given to variation within black communities and between black cultures.”¹ *‘Learning How to Listen’: Analyzing Style and Meaning in the Music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson* explores the relationship between three African American women’s vocal expressiveness and creative sensibilities within the context of singing, lyric-writing and jazz performance. In this discussion I propose ways of thinking critically about the aesthetic codes of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson; codes distinct from those embraced by other female giants in the jazz pantheon such as Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Ernestine Anderson, Shirley Horn, Nancy Wilson, Nnenna Freelon and Vanessa Rubin to name a few. My research objective is doubly aimed: 1.) to establish a multiplicity of voicing in the ways Lincoln, Simone and Wilson communicate meaning both sonically and lyrically; and 2.) to show aesthetic commonalities between these artists’ vocality and original compositions. Because Gilroy’s call to arms “to compare and evaluate *differing* black cultural formations” remains a critical one if we are to arrive at a fuller understanding of “black particularity,”² I conclude by suggesting an analytic model that promotes understanding of African cultural transformation and continuity found in black music created in the diaspora by women artists who embrace an Afrocentric worldview.

¹ Paul Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a ‘Changing’ Same,” in *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1991): 111. [italics mine]

² Ibid.

Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson are a representative trio for study because their musical performances and original songs are similar in the ways they each reveal a remarkable eclecticism, philosophize on the experiences of black women, and negotiate creative identity with Africa and the African diaspora, yet each artist is different enough to give requisite breadth and variety to the study. While Lincoln and Simone were contemporaries, appearing on the music scene in the mid 1950s during the “organized political protest movements” Angela Davis (1998) understands as essential if art is “to challenge social conditions,” Wilson, who signed her first record deal in the early 1980s, represents a younger jazz performance generation. She is a natural choice for inclusion here because her vocal style and original music reflects continuity of themes and aesthetic concepts found in the music of Lincoln and Simone while simultaneously charting new musical terrain, highlighting the dynamic force of black music.

ABBEY LINCOLN

The career of vocalist-composer Abbey Lincoln (1930-2010) is without precedent in the world of jazz. More than any singer before her, Lincoln composed music and wrote the lyrics for most of the songs she recorded, creating her own songbook of standards. For this feat alone, Lincoln warrants celebration and rigorous study.³ Born in Chicago, Illinois, Lincoln recalled “picking out melodies” on the family piano at their farm in Calvin Center, Michigan, at age five. But it was during her fourteenth year that the music purchases of her older siblings introduced her to jazz. Upon hearing the recordings of Coleman Hawkins, whom she would work with a decade later, and Billie Holiday (who was a life-long influence acknowledged by Lincoln’s

³ For more detailed biographies of the subjects see Appendix A.

1987 double-album tribute, *Abbey Sings Billie*), a singer was born. Lincoln began singing in her Kalamazoo, Michigan, high school's band follies. Having resisted singing in the choir at her family's A.M.E. church, her first paying music gig earned her \$5.00 "to sing for the youngsters in the basement of the church."⁴ In 1949, at age 19, Lincoln's repertoire consisted of only three songs: "Don't Blame Me," "Stormy Weather," and "Sunday Kind of Love."

NINA SIMONE

Of the three artists presented here, Nina Simone (1933-2003) is the only virtuoso instrumentalist.⁵ Simone wrote far fewer lyrics than Abbey Lincoln or Cassandra Wilson. However, the classically trained pianist composed numerous instrumental (piano) pieces, and her songs from the 1960s—"Mississippi Goddam," "Ole Jim Crow," "Backlash Blues," "Revolution," "Why? (The King of Love Is Dead)"—are long celebrated for their capacity to soundtrack the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Lyrically, Simone favored songs with clear and formal thematic structures. Her song lines are usually brief and consciously crafted in relation to her piano. In the artist's own words: "I want the words to ride the piano, just ride it—not attempt to do anything musical. Mine is a plain, tell-it-like-it-is approach. But the accompanying music, that's another story, one that I often tell with much more embellishment."⁶ As a child Simone enjoyed the gospel music at her mother-the-preacher's A.M.E. church, but equally strong were her classical leanings, developed around age six during tutorials with "Miz Mazzy," the teacher who introduced her to the European classical tradition, which Simone initially found strange but came to love: "Once I understood Bach's music I never wanted to be

⁴ Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. 3 March, 2002.

⁵ In numerous interviews Lincoln and Wilson regard the piano and guitar (respectively) primarily as composing tools. However, Wilson is a fluid guitar player and has been accompanying herself in recent live engagements.

anything other than a concert pianist; Bach made me dedicate my life to music, and it was Mrs. Massinovitch who introduced me to his world.”⁷

In the early fifties Lincoln performed (under the names of Gaby Wooldridge and Gaby Lee, respectively) in supper clubs in Los Angeles and Honolulu. After meeting lyricist Bob Russell, who would become her manager, she recorded her first album, *Affair—A Story of a Girl in Love* (Liberty, 1956). Soon thereafter she appeared in her first film, a vehicle for Jayne Mansfield, *The Girl Can't Help It*. A string of recordings followed on the Riverside label—*That's Him* (1957), *It's Magic* (1958), *Abbey Is Blue* (1959)—where Lincoln garnered the musical support of all-star players like Sonny Rollins, Kenny Dorham, Wynton Kelly, Philly Joe Jones, and Max Roach. However, on these recordings her approach to the music is not greatly distinguishable from other singers of the era such as Rosemary Clooney, Peggy Lee, Sheila Jordan—to name a few.

Embittered by her rejection from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, 1952 saw Simone's move to New York City where she undertook a year of study at Juilliard before returning to Philadelphia. To fund private lessons, Simone played at the Atlantic City Midtown Bar & Grill. Coerced into singing by the venue's manager, who threatened that unless she gave the patrons what they wanted—“songs with words”—she would be out of a job, Simone entered the jazz world. Because she had never imagined herself a singer, Simone's repertoire was naturally eclectic, representing songs from church and songs learned from the radio but with a

⁶ Nina Simone. Personal Interview. 20 June 2001.

⁷ Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1993), 23.

decidedly classical approach. This description sums up her debut album, *Little Girl Blue* (also released as *Jazz as Played at an Exclusive Side Street Bar*, Colpix, 1958). Between 1959 and 1963, Simone released ten more albums on the Colpix label; including the stand-outs *Nina Simone at Town Hall* (1959); *Forbidden Fruit* (1960); *Nina Simone Sings Ellington* (1962); and *Folksy Nina* (1963).

Although performing on different U.S. coasts and under different circumstances, the media connected Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone to the bus boycott in Montgomery (1957), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s efforts to establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1957) and desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas (1957). As such, Lincoln's and Simone's budding experiences as musicians grew in tandem with their evolving socio-political awareness. Underscoring the role of musical performance as a crosspollinating mechanism for black cultural and political practices, both artists made decisions early in their careers to leave the plush Hollywood supper club and dingy Atlantic City nightclub performances behind, and to give themselves wholly to the black struggle for civil rights. And both artists paid a price.

Under the influence of Max Roach, Lincoln turned her back on the supper club chanteuse persona, casting herself as a Civil Rights activist and making music with a political tone, including the landmark 1960 collaboration with Roach and Oscar Brown Jr., *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, banned by South Africa's apartheid government. A year later, Lincoln penned protest lyrics to "In the Red" and "Retribution" from her album, *Straight Ahead* (Candid, 1961), for which critic Ira Gitler dismissed her as being a "professional negro." For the remainder of that decade Lincoln's activism was less musically expressive, but no less political. She joined Maya Angelou and Trinidadian activist Rosa Guy to form the Cultural Association

for Women of African Heritage. With this group, Lincoln disrupted a United Nations meeting after hearing of Congo president Patrice Lumumba's murder by Belgian imperialists. Lincoln also had two pathbreaking film roles, starring in *Nothing But a Man* with Ivan Dixon (a story about a southern black railroad worker who falls in love with a preacher's daughter), and opposite Sydney Poitier in the 1968 *For Love of Ivy* (about a black maid who decides to leave the white family she works for to pursue secretarial school and romance).

While Lincoln retreated from the music scene, Simone had found a distinct usage for her voice. In 1964, she left the American Colpix for the Dutch-owned Philips label. Her first album for Philips, a live performance, *Nina Simone In A Concert*, featured "Mississippi Goddam," and "Old Jim Crow," both musical points of entrance into civil rights activism, and both boycotted by Southern radio stations. During the late fifties, Lincoln and Simone had both participated in fundraisers and benefit concerts for various civil rights organizations. However, performing in the South during some of the most dangerous campaigns, Simone drew clear connections between her music and the black struggle for equality during the entire decade of the sixties, often punctuating her performances by advocating for violent strategies to secure human rights. She also formed friendships with more militant activists, including Stokely Carmichael and Huey Newton, and artists Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin.

The careers of Lincoln and Simone fell quiet in the 1970s and 80s. Although talent and her 1962 marriage to Max Roach gave Lincoln access to enviable musical opportunity, her civil rights activism coupled with her 1970 divorce from Roach halted both acting and musical careers for over a decade.⁸

⁸ With the exception of 1973's *People In Me* album recorded in Japan, Lincoln did not record in the seventies.

The democratic processes and liberation of African nations and black Americans in the decades surrounding the Vietnam War set in motion a trend of immigration to and from countries within the African diaspora—especially the West Indies. Outraged by the U.S.A.’s racial politics, Nina Simone emigrated to Barbados in 1970. In fact, for the next thirty-three years Simone would live outside of the U.S.A. and her music abroad played a significant role in the articulation of an on-going international black freedom struggle, a fact recent Simone scholars have missed. While the artist’s original songs after 1975 no longer took civil rights as a central theme, her concerts continued to feature the protest material of the 1960s until the end of her life.

Remarkably, the 1990s signaled a late flowering in the musical career of Abbey Lincoln, signaled by the chart-topping albums primarily comprised of original songs and boasting rosters of such jazz luminaries as trumpeters Clark Terry, Nicholas Payton and Roy Hargrove, trombonist J.J. Johnson, saxophonists Stan Getz, Stanley Turrentine and Steve Coleman, guitarist Pat Metheny, and pianists Hank Jones, Kenny Barron, Rodney Kendrick and Marc Cary. Lincoln’s ten albums on the Verve label (*The World Is Falling Down*, *You Gotta Pay the Band*, *Devil’s Got Your Tongue*, *When There is Love*, *A Turtle’s Dream*, *Who Used to Dance*, *Wholly Earth*, *Over the Years*, *It’s Me*, *Abbey Sings Abbey*), recorded between 1990 and 2007, showcase original songs. Will Friedwald reminds us about the Lincoln Songbook, that virtually none of the artist’s songs are about romantic love.⁹ Lincoln eschewed love songs because in her words “[she] liked to sing about subjects other than a man and woman.”¹⁰

⁹ Will Friedwald, *A Biographical Guide to the Great Jazz and Pop Singers* (New York: Random House, 2010), 298.

CASSANDRA WILSON

Politically speaking, musically speaking, Lincoln and Simone paved the way for today's most prominent jazz singer, Cassandra Wilson. Cassandra Wilson (b. 1955) came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, the era of Black Power, the pill, and feminism. Not surprisingly, early musical influences for Wilson were as eclectic as the vocalist's repertoire. Wilson's earliest memory of music includes listening to her father's jazz records and feeling especially drawn to Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. Though a native of Jackson, Mississippi, the blues would come much later for Wilson because neither her bassist father nor her Motown-loving schoolteacher mother embraced the form. Like Simone, Wilson began the study of classical piano at age six. When she turned ten, her first musical purchase was the eponymously titled album by the Monkees. By age thirteen she abandoned the piano for the clarinet, playing in the middle school marching band. Around this time, she also began to teach herself guitar and compose songs. In high school and college, Wilson explored folk music, especially Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan. Following graduation from Jackson State University, where she received a degree in mass communications, Wilson moved to New Orleans where, during the day, she served as assistant public affairs director for the local television station. But by night Wilson was cutting her teeth on the jazz scene, learning from Earl Turbington, Ellis Marsalis and others. A fortuitous move to New Jersey in the early 1980s brought Wilson into contact with saxophonist/composer Steve Coleman, founder of Macro Basic Array of Structured Extemporizations, a jazz collective, which fused funk, rock and hip-hop. Like Lincoln, whose foray into the avant-garde jazz scene came at the behest of Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, and Sonny Rollins, Wilson's involvement

¹⁰ Ibid.

with early M-Base artists (saxophonists Steve Coleman and Greg Osby, trombonist Robin Eubanks and bassist Lonnie Plaxico) during its initial development from 1985-1992 grounded her firmly in the living-historical constantly evolving jazz tradition.

Like Abbey Lincoln with whom Wilson formed a close relationship during the early 1980s and whom she credits as a significant influence on her art¹¹, Wilson's albums reflect a commitment to songwriting, averaging no less than three original lyrics per album since 1985 (the exceptions being her standards albums *Blue Skies* 1988, *Cassandra Wilson Sings Standards* 2003, and *Loverly* 2008). Influenced by her M-Base involvement, Wilson's early lyrics for songs on the JMT label were premised on opacity through abstraction. (Hear songs like "Square Roots," "Whirlwind Soldier" and "Woman on the Edge.") In the artist's own words, much of her early songbook was "ethereal, not many stories were being told. It was more about developing a sound and a style."¹² Wilson's lyrics became more narrative-driven in the vein of her predecessor Abbey Lincoln when she moved to the Blue Note label in 1993. However, distinct from Lincoln's lyric style, Wilson's original songs place a premium on courtship, love and romance: "All of my songs have to do with relationships I have with men—Black men, specifically. And I like to look at that because I think that we as a people are always going through changes; it's very important for us to look at the reasons that we may be having difficulties in dealing with one another. So a lot of that comes out in the music that I do."¹³

¹¹ Hear Lincoln's 1984 performance at Orange, New Jersey's Peppermint Lounge, featuring backup singer Cassandra Wilson, recorded by WBGO and aired on NPR's *Jazzset*: <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/13/132886932/abbey-lincoln-on-jazzset>

¹² John Ephland, "Beyond the Dawn: Cassandra Wilson and Life After Blue Light 'Til Dawn," *Downbeat*, January 1995, 25.

¹³ Myoshi Smith, "Cassandra Wilson: The New Faces," *Coda* 227, August-September 1989, 36-37.

Recent Wilson originals showcase bold jazz leanings—meter shifts several times with a song, and unlike Lincoln, Wilson’s melodies rarely repeat. However, her lyrics continue to demonstrate a commitment articulated early in her career: “In terms of the things that are behind the music, I deal a lot with being a woman, a black woman...and the kinds of struggles that we have in dealing with our men, or dealing with our families, or dealing with our lives. That’s very important to me, as far as messages I’m trying to get out. I also in some ways attack the system—for lack of a better word—the system that controls our lives to a great extent. I’m trying to create music that is about alternatives to that way of being.”¹⁴ Through three decades of composition, Wilson has succeeded in providing an alternative route to jazz stardom, eschewing the sole performance of jazz standards, choosing instead to plumb folk and popular music of the 1970s and 80s, much in the way of her predecessor, Nina Simone. Wilson has offered boldly innovative covers of music by The Band, Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Sting, Cyndi Lauper, Stevie Wonder, The Monkees and more with equal verve.

Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson are unusual in the world of vocalists performing in the jazz tradition in that they each produced a substantial body of original music, yet *‘Learning How to Listen’* is the first study devoted entirely to their music. The dissertation builds its argument through musical examples and by way of drawing attention to common singing and songwriting aesthetics prevalent in these vocalist-composers’ music rather than attempting an overview of these artists’ repertoires. Though Lincoln and Simone were

¹⁴ Gene Santoror, “Ella of the 90’s” *Downbeat*, November 1988.

contemporaries, this project focuses on distinctly different periods¹⁵ in the singers' lives. Since this work is most concerned with the vocalists' original songs, I focus on the ten recordings Lincoln released on the Verve label from 1990 until 2007, albums consisting primarily of Lincoln's own songbook; and I highlight Simone's mid-career recordings between 1962 and 1982, when the Civil Rights and Black Power eras and her subsequent nomadic international lifestyle witnessed her most lyrically creative outpouring. Having recorded twenty albums, as a leader since her debut on the JMT label in 1986, at age fifty-six, Cassandra Wilson shows no signs of slowing down. (She is currently in the studio working on the tentatively titled *Chitarra* album.) However, this project primarily considers Wilson's original songs, dating back to 1993, the start of her Blue Note label association, which has seen nine albums—among them two Grammy-award winners.

The music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson comprises a major contribution to American and Afrodiasporic music. Their repertoires and original songbooks are centered on the twin axes of strong musicianship and the ability to tell through singing the stories that promote black cultural understanding. Thus, this dissertation will focus on the ways these artists' music reveals what Steven Feld calls an "iconicity of style," where music functions as a "cross-modal homology" linking modes of cultural expressions from Africa and the African diaspora.¹⁶ Commenting on this distinctive manifestation of cultural expressions in the tradition of African American music, Olly Wilson observed:

¹⁵ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 16

The musical tradition has many branches, which reflect variations in basic cultural patterns over time, as well as diversity within a specific time frame. However, all of these branches share, to a greater or lesser extent, a group of qualities which taken together comprise the essence of the black musical tradition. The branches of this tradition, though influenced in different ways and degrees by other musical traditions, share a critical mass of these common qualities. It is the common sharing of qualities which define the tradition.¹⁷

It is precisely the aim of this work to highlight the “critical mass” of common qualities that inform the sound, vocality and original lyrics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, which reveal an adherence to three distinct aesthetic practices: 1) singing informed by linguistic practices, melorhythm and certain phonological style markers such as Lincoln’s phonosemantics, Simone’s microtonality, and Wilson’s polytonality; 2) womanist autoethnography and 3) re-memory—the impulse to bear witness to their African heritage in original songs that re-imagine and invoke an African past.

In addition to their original songbooks, a brief overview of the repertoires of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson reveals the artists engagement with multiple musical genres, beginning with the blues. In the tradition of Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, all those Smith women—Bessie, Clara, Mamie and Trixie—and Billie Holiday, the blues has been a significant vehicle of vocal expression for Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. Of the three artists featured here, Lincoln recorded the fewest, the original “Blue Monk,” significantly the first lyric she penned,¹⁸ “Gimme A

¹⁶ Steven Feld, “Aesthetics As Iconicity of Style (Uptown Title); or, (Downtown Title) ‘Lift-Up-Over Sounding’: Getting into the Kaluli Groove,” in Charles Kiel and Steven Feld, eds., *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 109-150.

¹⁷ Olly Wilson, “Black Music As An Art Form,” in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 83.

¹⁸ Recorded on the 1961 *Straight Ahead* (Candid), and appearing again as the first track on her final album, *Abbey Sings Abbey* (Verve, 2007).

Pigfoot” and “T’aint Nobody’s Bizness If I Do”¹⁹ the original, co-written with Nina Simone, “Hey Lordy Mama” and “Can You Dig It?” written by Lincoln’s brother, Robert Wooldridge. Nina Simone recorded a wealth of blues ranging from classic blues like—“Gimme A Pigfoot” and “Gin House Blues” and Huddie (Lead Belly) Ledbetter’s “Silver City Bound” to what is considered by many the anthem of the classic blues genre “Trouble in Mind,” composed by Richard Jones; traditional blues—“Blues On Purpose” and “Nobody’s Fault But Mine”; sexual blues: “Gimme Some,” “Take Care of Business,” “Don’t Take All Night” and “I Want A Little Sugar in My Bowl”; and desertion blues: “My Man’s Gone Now,” “I’m Gonna Leave You,” and “Aint No Use”²⁰. Simone also composed her own blues: “Nina’s Blues” and “Central Park Blues.” Greatly inspired by the delta bluesmen, Cassandra Wilson has recorded Charlie Patton’s “Saddle Up My Pony”; Muddy Waters’ “Forty Days and Forty Nights” and “Honey Bee”; Son House’s “Death Letter”; Mississippi Fred McDowell’s “You Gotta Move”; B.B. King’s “Rock Me Baby”; and Robert Johnson’s “32-20,” “Come On In My Kitchen,” “Dust My Broom,” “Hellhound On My Trail,” and “Hot Tamales”; and traditional blues, “Easy Rider” and “St. James Infirmary.” Like Lincoln and Simone, Wilson has also penned a few of her own blues, “New African Blues” from the *She Who Weeps* album (JMT, 1990) and “On That Train” (*Glamoured*, Blue Note, 2003).

From the outset I have asserted that a primary distinguishing factor between the artists under study here and other jazz vocalists is the fact that Lincoln, Simone and Wilson are also songwriters. From a scholarly perspective, as songwriters, these vocalists more naturally fit the

²⁰ Simone’s first recording with RCA label was entirely devoted to the blues, *Nina Simone Sings The Blues* (1967).

blues tradition since there exists a plethora of works that address writing the blues²¹ (Baker 1984; Baraka 1964; Bolden 2004; Bratcher 2007; Brown 1997; Caruth 1993, 1997; Davis 1998; Oliver 1960; Palmer 1982; Plumpp 1999), and no tradition (and therefore no discourse) exists pertaining to writing jazz lyrics. In part this is due to the androcentric nature of jazz literature primarily focused on male jazz instrumentalists' compositions that are sometimes analyzed in the context of signifying, but are otherwise not theorized using a vernacular framework. This trend continues even in scholarship on women in jazz, which has also tended to focus on instrumentalists (Dahl 1982, 1992; Gourse 1995; Leder 1985; Placksin 1982; Tucker 1997, 2000; Unterbrink, 1983). However, to limit Lincoln, Simone and Wilson to a blues categorization because they are lyricists, when the artists clearly evince a global approach to *musicking* informed by an Afrodiasporic consciousness²², gives short shrift to a significant portion of these artists' repertoires even beyond their original songbooks. Consider Lincoln's jazz standards recordings, Simone's lullabies, folk songs and covers of popular songs by the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Hall & Oates, Leonard Cohen and Randy Newman. A hallmark of Wilson's repertoire has been a unique command of jazz standards alongside fearless re-imaginings of popular music by James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, Cyndi Lauper, Sting, The Monkees, Stevie Wonder and Van Morrison, to name a few.

²¹ Robert Palmer's *Deep Blues* (1982) demonstrates the ways blues lyrics negotiate between Africa and America.

²² *Learning How to Listen* utilizes as a foundational pillar musicologist Christopher Small's definition of "musicking" for it rejects the idea of black music as "a collection of sound-objects, or a repertory of pieces, or even a group of musical styles narrowly considered," opting instead to understand black music as "an act of music making, a way of playing and of responding to music, which derives from those two great ways [African and European] of making music which came together in the Americas." Thus, Small's process of "musicking" means "to music." Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: John Calder, 1987), 5, 14-5.

While the “protest music” of Lincoln and Simone has garnered important scholarly attention, it has tended to be narrowly focused on race when Lincoln, Simone and Wilson have consistently performed original songs best understood in the context of social justice, allowing for the inclusion of songs that address economic disparity (hear Lincoln’s “In the Red,” Simone’s “Backlash Blues” and Wilson’s “Desperate Move” and “Justice”) and homelessness (hear Lincoln’s “People On the Street,” Simone’s “It’s Cold Out There,” and Wilson’s “Domination Switch”). These artists are also in negotiation with global music cultures as heard in multilingual recordings: Simone’s famous rendition of Jacques Brel’s “Ne Me Quitte Pas,” “Il N’y a Pas D’Amour Heureux,” “Le Peuple En Suisse,” and “Vous Etes Seuls, Mais Je Desire Etre Avec Vous,”; Lincoln’s “Avec Le Temps,” “C’est Si Bon,” and “La Lune Est Grise, Mon Coeur Aussie (How High the Moon)” and her heartrending “Somos Novos.” Wilson nods to Brazil with English interpretations of Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “Águas de Março (Waters of March)” and Caetano Veloso’s “O Leozinho (Little Lion),” and invokes Yoruba phrasings in the songs “Run The Voodoo Down,” and “Voodoo Reprise.” For this reason, it is perhaps more useful to think of these artists in terms of who they are—vocalists-songwriters approaching a variety of music with a jazz sensibility, rather than stamp their creative work ‘jazz,’ a term—to borrow from Amiri Baraka—representing “a loose straightjacket of commerce and cultural patronization.”²³

²³ In *The Duke Ellington Reader*, musicologist Mark Tucker observes that Ellington, along with many of his musical contemporaries rejected the “jazz” label as delimiting. And in a 1947 interview with *Etude* magazine, Ellington “argued for a broad interpretation of the term” (Tucker, 255). In the same tradition, Lincoln, Simone and Wilson have gone on record countless times discussing the problematics and/or need for a more nuanced definition of the ‘jazz singer’ label. For example, in an interview with this author, Lincoln stated, “There was no such thing as jazz,” that in fact “the music they call jazz involves many approaches...and it’s all black music” (Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. Aug. 8, 2003). Similarly, in her autobiography, *I Put A Spell on You*, Simone observed, “Calling me a jazz singer was a way of ignoring my musical background, because I didn’t fit into white ideas of what a black performer should be. It was a racist thing. ‘If she’s black she must be a jazz singer.’ It diminished me” (Simone with Cleary, 69). And in the November 2011 issue of *Chicago Jazz Magazine*, Wilson

'YOU GOTTA PAY THE BAND': INSTRUMENTATION

The live performances of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson featured a rhythm section, though Simone always accompanied herself on piano, which gave the artist ultimate freedom not only in choice of repertoire but also in song arrangement. For example, Simone often approached songs beginning in a soft, child-like singing voice or mumbling through to a quaver, transitioning smoothly into breathy declaration or swelling to a shout that sometimes burst into rhythm and blues or gospel excitement. In recent years, Wilson has begun to accompany herself on guitar during original songs, but it is generally understood that when hearing a Wilson arrangement, you've entered a harmonic domain of bebop melodies "that move between fluid and rhythmically disjunctive passages with a sonic field featuring an advanced harmonic language."²⁴ Musical accompaniment both live and on recordings by Simone and Wilson generally features percussion in addition to drums, and relies heavily on multiple guitars, from acoustic to resophonic and steel. As a result, the recordings of Simone and Wilson are more akin to the acoustic, open, earthy feel of traditional blues and modern folk than jazz. However, Lincoln's arrangements typically follow standard jazz macrostructure: theme-solos-theme.²⁵ Of the artists, only Lincoln consistently relied on the traditional jazz trio of piano, drums and bass for live performance, though her recordings often featured horns—saxophones, trombones—thus her categorization of jazz singer is rarely challenged.

opined: "I really look at jazz as being more of a discipline than a style. It's broader than just a genre. It's an approach to music, and the discipline really involves a lifelong dedication to exploring the form, the possibilities, and learning that much of that is tradition." (accessed 11/2/2011 <http://www.chicagojazz.com/magazine/in-her-own-words...cassandra-wilson-777.html>)

²⁴ Ibid 129.

²⁵ Ibid.

In contrast to jazz vocalists whose repertoires hinge solely on “standards”—songs from the American songbook originally composed for Broadway musicals and Hollywood films—Lincoln, Simone and Wilson have recorded a preponderance of original compositions and songs representing multiple musical styles—blues, folk, country, gospel, rhythm and blues and soul. In addition to their multifaceted repertoires, distinctly embedded in the performances of these artists is the creative negotiation with the musical genre’s gamut, an approach Guthrie P. Ramsey has termed the “bricolage effect,” so that certain aspects of their songs seem to dialogue with other musical styles.²⁶ In her liner notes for Simone’s final album, *A Single Woman* (Elektra, 1993), Ntozake Shange observes the jaunty, show tune feel of the Simone original “Marry Me,” which can be traced back thirty years to a hearing of Simone’s 1963 performance of “Mississippi Goddam,” and also “Go Limp.” Lincoln often stamps her interpretation of a standard with a waltz (3/4) time signature as in “Can’t Help Singing,” “How High the Moon,” “Ten Cents A Dance,” and “Up Jumped Spring.” March time (think Second Line, New Orleans) infuses Lincoln originals such as “The World Is Falling Down,” and “I Got Thunder (And It Rings).” Lincoln and Simone offer gospel or gospel-tinged recordings in Lincoln’s “It’s Me” (an adaptation of the spiritual “Standing in the Need of Prayer”), “When I’m Called Home,” “Down Here Below,” “Caged Bird,” “Story of My Father,” and Simone’s “My Sweet Lord,” “Heaven Belongs To You,” “Balm In Gilead,” “I’m Going Back Home,” “One More Sunday in Savannah,” “Take Me to the Water,” “Children Go Where I Send You,” and “Take My Hand Precious Lord.” All three artists negotiate musically with the Caribbean. In both live and studio

²⁶ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 128.

recorded versions of Randy Newman's popular "Baltimore," Simone's band slips a reggae beat behind the chorus. Simone's original "I Sing Just to Know That I'm Alive" features a combination of soukous music and Jamaican dancehall—a distinct style apart from reggae, which you can also hear in Simone's rendition of Hall & Oates' "Rich Girl"—in its up-tempo, instrumental big-band sound; featuring antiphonal sectional arrangements for horns it is also reminiscent of mambo. Marimbas, steel drum and the tumpa provide the incongruously buoyant calypso rhythms enticing you into the harrowing Lincoln original about domestic violence, "And It's Supposed to Be Love." Caribbean vamps propel Wilson's original "Electromagnolia" and her version of Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay." In its romantic, slow quadratic meter Wilson's own "Until," off the Grammy-winning *New Moon Daughter* album (Blue Note, 1996), is reminiscent of bolero, while Middle Eastern instruments and inflections shape half of the songs on the vocalist's tribute to Miles Davis, *Traveling Miles* (Blue Note, 1999), including the songs "Never Broken," "Piper," and "Someday My Prince Will Come." Wilson looks to the Antillean Afrodiaspora incorporating rumba sounds, an Afro-Cuban genre dominated by congas, palitos and clave, in her covers of Duke Ellington's "Caravan," The Band's "The Weight," and James Taylor's "Only A Dream In Rio." And her album *Thunderbird* (Blue Note, 2006) pays tribute to the Native American spirit in originals like "Go To Mexico," where embedded in the song are chant-like sounds of the Tcoupitoulas Mardi Gras Indians.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decade the academy has generated several important studies on Abbey Lincoln. Farah Jasmine Griffin (2001) was first to give scholarly attention to Lincoln as a renaissance artist—actress, author, social critic, and especially singer-songwriter, establishing

her musical significance and articulating a complex relationship to Billie Holiday's legacy in the beautiful chapter, "Abbey Lincoln: The Dawn of A New Day" found in *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*. In *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* (2002), Eric Porter's chapter, "'Straight Ahead': Abbey Lincoln and the Challenge of Jazz Singing" explores the ways in which Lincoln expanded the 1950s jazz singer's role by singing socially conscious lyrics. Tracing Lincoln's development in three Riverside recordings, *That's Him* (1957), *It's Magic* (1958) and *Abbey Is Blue* (1959), Porter analyzes her adoption of Holiday-esque phrasing, experimentation with timbre and an instrumental approach to singing derived from her association with jazz giants of the time—Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, and Charles Mingus. Fred Moten groups Lincoln with the black avant-garde in music and literature who gave rise to the emergence of a distinct form of black cultural nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s in his book, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003). Ingrid Tolia Monson's "Abbey Lincoln's *Straight Ahead*: Jazz in the Era of the Civil Rights Movement" (1997) and her book *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (2007), which offers discussions of Lincoln in two chapters, "Activism and Fund-Raising from Freedom Now to the Freedom Rides" and "Activism and Fund-Raising from Birmingham to Black Power," frame Lincoln in the context of jazz musicians as activists and fundraisers in "the mundane genre of the benefit concert," concluding that "there appears to have been something of a consensus that jazz performers, whatever their internal differences, had a duty to support civil rights."²⁷ Monson is careful to chart the ways in which Lincoln cultivated a new Afrocentric identity spawned by her sense of nationalism. To date, no book-length project exists on Lincoln.

²⁷ Ingrid Tolia Monson, "Abbey Lincoln's *Straight Ahead*: Jazz In the Era of the Civil Rights Movement," in eds.

Brian Ward (1998) and Dorothy Randall Tsuruta (1999) were the first to provide scholarly studies of Simone. In his discussion of soul musicians' non-participation in social activism of the early sixties, Ward observes: "Prior to the politicization of soul in the second half of the decade, the most constantly engaged star from anywhere near that musical universe was Nina Simone."²⁸ Tsuruta's article "'I Ain't About to Be Non-Violent, Honey'" explores the gendered as well as racial aspects of Simone's early songs and stresses through her analysis of songs like "Four Women" the self-affirmation black women in particular derived from Simone's music. Historian Ruth Feldstein's "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture and Black Activism in the 1960s" (2005) shows the extent to which the Civil Rights movement shaped Simone's first original compositions and her socio-political image. The broad objectives of Feldstein's important article explore "the political work a song could do and the multiple ways in which cultural production mattered to black activism."²⁹ In writing songs that revealed a perspective on black freedom and gender, Feldstein underscores Simone's position as an early feminist, linking her to other culture workers of the time—Abbey Lincoln, Odetta, and Lorraine Hansberry. In a Howard University doctoral thesis entitled "Rhythm and Blues: 1968-1972: An African-Centered Rhetorical Analysis," (2000) Sharnine Herbert draws connections between Simone's lyrics and those by James Brown, Marvin Gay, Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets to articulate an African-centered Black Power musical rhetoric. Herbert's discussion on Simone

Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn, *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 184.

²⁸ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 300.

²⁹ Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, And Black Activism in the 1960s," in *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (1995): 3.

focuses primarily on her original compositions—“To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” and “Revolution (Part II).” The list of Nina Simone biographers grows steadily, including Nadine Cohodas’s *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (2010), David Brun Lambert’s *Nina Simone* (2010), and Sylvia Hampton and David Nathan’s *Nina Simone: Break Down And Let It All Out* (2004). The publication *Black Is The Color* (2005), by Simone’s ex-husband, Andy Stroud, provides a collection of rare photographs and quotes.

For many years, the story of Civil Rights and Black Power in the United States was peopled by iconic male figures: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Ralph Abernathy, Medgar Evers, Bayard Rustin, Fred Hampton, the Greensboro Four. Penial E. Joseph (2010) observes that Black Power remains the most misunderstood social movement of the postwar era. Demonized as the Civil Rights Movement’s “evil twin” and stereotyped as a politics of rage practiced by gun-toting Black Panthers, the movement’s supple intellectual provocations, pragmatic local character, and domestic-and foreign-policy critiques remain on the fringes of America’s memory of the 1960s.³⁰ One advantage (among many) of the emergence of jazz studies in the academy has been the extent to which it offers a corrective to the omission of black women’s critical roles in the movement. Consequently, the early careers of Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone are now much a part of any scholarly discussion of Civil Rights in America. (The April 22, 2003 *New York Times* obituary of Simone bore the headline: “Nina Simone, 70, Soulful Diva and Voice of Civil Rights, Is Dead.”) Scholars Ruth Feldstein, Ingrid Monson, and Eric Porter correctly surmise that mid-twentieth century black nationalism, both domestically and abroad, greatly informed the early performances of Lincoln and Simone, who

were compelled to compose original music and as such their music soundtracked the Civil Rights.

But what of the artists beyond these movements, artists who continued to create and hone their crafts beyond the call for black power? Shifting the analytical gaze beyond Lincoln and Simone's musical contributions of the 1950s-70s raises questions (and implications) about what it means for black women performers to create a body of work over time. How did these artists negotiate gendered and racialized identity in their music post Civil Rights? What themes emerge(d) in the artists' repertoires with consistency and persistence? With mastery born of years of performance experience and craft development, how did articulations of 'self' change? Which aesthetic practices prevailed over time? Many answers to these questions are set up in the following chapters. However, they are also embodied—that is, heard—in the generation after Lincoln and Simone's and made manifest in the music of Cassandra Wilson.

Numerous articles in national and international jazz periodicals have focused on America's most prominent jazz singer, Cassandra Wilson, yet no biography or book-length scholarly discussion has emerged on Wilson. April Grier's Rutgers University Masters thesis (2006), "Cassandra Wilson: Her Music, Her Words," portends the development of a body of work on the artist. Analyzing Wilson's original compositions, Grier asserts a musical ideology premised on black feminism. In his article "Sleights of Time in the Music of Cassandra Wilson," musicologist Charles Hiroshi Garrett (2008) tracks Wilson's distinct approach to temporality in her songs. Garrett's article represents a new trend in black music scholarship on jazz women vocalists, in part because it rejects framing the artist's music in a social-history context, in part

³⁰ Penial E. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*. (New York: Basic Civitas,

because it does not rely on biography.³¹ Instead Garrett focuses on Wilson's unique vocal style, highlighting the musical techniques Wilson employs to lend her phrasing multiple, creative time signatures. '*Learning How to Listen*' operates from the premise that any discussion of the music by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson necessitates proper socio-historical context. However, rigorous analysis of the aesthetic principles that drive each artist's creative process is also necessary to arrive at a fuller understanding and appreciation of how this music *means* culturally, globally.

Previous scholarship on Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone has fallen into two camps: feminism and civil rights. While these paradigms have proven useful for contextualizing critical creative junctures for the vocalist-songwriters and their activism, they don't allow the kind of far-reaching analysis African American expressive culture demands. In other words, the discussion of the creative-intellectual trajectories of these artists, including the significance of their original compositions and the philosophical tenets therein (informed by Africana feminisms and black social movements but in no way limited to these categories) must be expanded to include the original songs that address personal experience, love, romance and spirituality and, to a lesser extent, each artist's commitment to re-envisioning popular music; in other words, the music that drives the foundational arguments of this dissertation.³²

2010), 4.

³¹ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. (2003) reminds us that musicology generally pays more attention to the facts of musical contexts than to broader cultural and social factors. Significant here is that Garrett adopts Wilson's musical performances for analysis when typically musicologists working in jazz choose the compositions of male instrumentalists.

³² Simone's physical absence from the United States did not impede her awareness of and creative interest in American popular music as evidenced by her covers of 1970s and 80s popular music by the Bee Gees, Bob Dylan, Randy Newman, and Hall and Oates.

As vocalists, lyricists, and composers, Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson have contributed extraordinary original songbooks to American music, songs documenting cultural representation, racial and gendered politics and individual artistic development. Drawing on both African and African American musical tradition, folklore, history, memory, and vernacular to bring unique voice, intensity and cultural import to their music, their singing styles and original lyrics, situate Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in the vanguard of jazz, America's classical music.³³ However, *Learning How to Listen* is the first work to acknowledge and define some of the governing aesthetic traits of these artists' vocalicity and original compositions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGY: AFRODIASPORIC 'VOICING'

Music, more than any other cultural discourse, has been taken as the ultimate embodiment of African and African American diasporic cultural values and as prima facie evidence of deep cultural connections among all peoples of African descent.³⁴ Learning How to listen to the distinct vocal qualities of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson necessitates an interdisciplinary methodology and framework in which to analyze the ways their music embodies "diasporic cultural values." Mining three scholarly fields—linguistics, womanist theory and black history and memory studies, Chapters two through five of this dissertation build to a larger concept in which the analysis of the prevalent musical

³³ The first concerts at New York City's Lincoln Center in 1987 were framed under the rubric 'Classical Jazz.' In the 1990s, Artistic Director at Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wynton Marsalis, became inextricably linked with the notion of jazz as an indigenous classical music. He sometimes characterized jazz as the 'ultimate 20th century music,' but it was the 'America's classical music' moniker that stuck. Discussions of this fashionable-sounding theme even

characteristics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson are extended to the vocal performances of black women globally. The dissertation gains its purchase as each chapter reveals the extent to which a significant portion of the black female diaspora articulates its past, present and future drawing on the same cultural-philosophic ideas Lincoln, Simone and Wilson negotiate musically. I locate these selected thematic commonalities and practices in an original aesthetic framework called Afrodiasporic 'Voicing.' What the Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' framework allows the listener of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson is a way to interpret and integrate the dynamic mutability of their original songs and the music of a vast portion of the Afrodiasporic women performers.

My project owes much—in a structural sense—to two pathbreaking works on black women's vocal and lyrical musicking in blues and jazz traditions: Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday* and Melanie Bratcher's *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone*. In her seminal work, Angela Davis posits the musical legacies of Rainey, Smith and Holiday within the broader black feminist tradition. Her analysis of these singers' lyrics through a feminist lens reveals their social and creative consciousness by emphasizing the subjects they address, ranging from physical abuse and economic abuse to race relations and sexual power. Similar to Davis, I posit three African American female singer/songwriters in the context of a musical tradition informed by diaspora consciousness. And, too, like Davis, the largest portion of my dissertation is spent on the interpretation of these artists' original lyrics. However, I expand on Davis's work by highlighting specific vernacular practices (instead of themes) applicable to all music genres

reached the floor of the U.S. Senate. Lee B. Brown, "Marsalis and Baraka: An Essay in Comparative Cultural Discourse," in *Popular Music* 23 no. 3 (2004): 241-255.

³⁴Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

but informed by an Afrodiasporic consciousness. My dissertation focuses on the original compositions of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, and I include recordings of jazz standards, popular music, spirituals and blues only when these performances illuminate aesthetic principles shared between the artists.

Melanie Bratcher's *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone: Sound Motion, Blues Spirit and African Memory* (2007) is the first book to draw specifically on Afrocentric and Pan African Aesthetic theory—the “Nzuri theory/model”—to provide meta-criteria for analyzing African American women's music. Creative modes in African dance-art-music traditions launch Bratcher into an exploration of the relationship between Smith, Holiday and Simone's vocal expressiveness and original compositions to codify, examine and evaluate their song performances employing the Welsh Asante “Nzuri model.” Following principles of Afrocentricity, she explores the ways in which this music promotes cultural transformation and continuity and connects their performances to an African artistic and cultural value system. Bratcher's work is the first to adopt a purely Afrocentric methodological structure to locate relevant African dynamics in black American women's songs. Much in the way that her work addresses aesthetic behaviors that Smith, Holiday, and Simone express in terms of sound motion or sound effects ‘*Learning How to Listen*’ teases out aesthetic similarities in the vocality (singing voices) of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson and in their lyrics, pointing to numerous African artistic sensibilities that reveal a plethora of culturally relevant values. Furthermore, Bratcher's creative usage of visual aids (graphs, charts) goes a long way toward demonstrating the aesthetic commonalities shared between her subjects for lay audiences, a practice that encourages and inspires the development of notation systems that document characteristics and

aesthetic sensibilities found in black music culture by those of us without formal musicological training.

Like Bratcher and Davis, my dissertation belongs to what musicologist Richard Crawford (1986) identified as a literary approach to black music research, which is to say although this work evolved outside the realm of formal musical scholarship, I derive authority from my participant-observer position and ability to make a reader understand and *feel* the special qualities of black experience as it is reflected in black music.³⁵ Where Davis and Bratcher read black women's music literally, works like that by Lindon Barrett (1998) hear black voices "as pure sonorousness."³⁶ This project aims to strike a balance between both strategies, highlighting salient features of original lyrics by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson and also contributing ideas about the specific ways these artists' vocality codifies cultural meaning and cultural memory.

In writing this dissertation, I resisted a structure of devoting a chapter to each singer in order to show overlapping themes and offer the reader some of the dynamic qualities we appreciate about each artist's music. Furthermore, any examination that aims to establish the multiplicity of voicing—that is the ways these artists create music vocally, lyrically and as a matter of performance style—demands a multi-disciplinary effort. Consequently, *'Learning How To Listen'* mines multiple fields for secondary sources. Primary sources played a crucial role in the development of this study. In addition to song lyrics, I drew on the over 150 hours of personal interviews conducted with musicians, album and CD liner notes, and ethnographic observation field notes from my attendance at performances by these artists, both domestically

³⁵ Richard Crawford, "On Two Traditions of Black Music Research," *Black Music Research Journal* (1986): 5.

and abroad.³⁷ Like the multiplicity of voices Lincoln, Simone and Wilson employ, my study finds multiple scholarly homes in jazz studies, black music studies more broadly defined and Africana cultural studies.

Chapter Two, ‘Please Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood’: The Challenge of Defining Jazz Singing opens with a brief discussion on the ambiguity surrounding jazz singing then turns to jazz critics and jazz musicians sounding off on the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. Rigorous jazz criticism on the singing voices for the artists under discussion here remains scant. Rather, what is gleaned from the thick folders of magazine and newsprint review clippings about Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in jazz archives evince the criteria of all popular music reviews: a.) information about the venue and some context on the nature of the event (tribute, festival, retrospective); b.) band personnel; c.) set list highlighting particular songs—generally the crowd pleasers—and d.) short descriptions of the singer’s voice on these particular tunes. Such descriptions are helpful in offering a snapshot of a performance, but what cultural aesthetics inform these singers sound quality and singing styles? What are the specific sonic practices

³⁶ Weheliye, *Phonicgrooves*, 38

³⁷ I attended the following performances and am grateful to audience members who entertained my questions about the shows: **Abbey Lincoln Shows:** December 10, 1999, (Orchestra Hall, Chicago, IL), February 13, 2000 (Scullers Jazz Club, Boston, MA), May 27, 2000 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), August 11, 2001 (Columbia University), March 7,8,9, 2002 (Lincoln Center, NY), November 12, 15, 16, 2002 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY); October 16, 17, 18, 2003 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), March 11, 2005 (Aaron Davis Hall, NY), June 25, 2005 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), July 2, 2008, (Montreal Jazz Festival); **Nina Simone Shows:** June 2000 (DAR Constitution Hall, Washington D.C.), June 19, 2001 (Carnegie Hall, NY); **Cassandra Wilson Shows:** December 19, 2000, February 14, 2002 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), June 25, 2002, (Carnegie Hall, NY), September 2, 2002 (Battery Park, NY), February 13, 14, 2003 (The Jazz Standard, NY), December 28, 2004 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), December 27, 2005 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), January 27, 2007, (The Stone, NY), May 3, 2007 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), November 16, 2007 (Blue Note Jazz Club, NY), January 31, 2008 (Yoshi’s Jazz Club, San Francisco), July 11, 2008 (Northsea Jazz Festival, The Netherlands), February 11-12, 2009, (Blue Note Jazz Club), November 16, 2010 (Blue Note Jazz Club), September 30-October 1, 2011 (Rose Theater, NY).

adopted in the service of a song? To learn how to listen for the answers presented in **Chapter Two** I interviewed musicians, masters in the act of listening. With the exception of Nina Simone, who did not tour regularly with a band after 1990, my interviews were conducted with members of the vocalists' bands or session players from throughout the years. The thirty interviews with instrumentalists who performed alongside Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, and who are all familiar with the repertoires of the other singers featured here, fill a lacuna left by jazz criticism. A brief (re)reading of Roland Barthes' canonical essay, "The Grain of the Voice," lays the groundwork for the following chapter's framework: Black English Vernacular (BEV) discourse and linguistics. Feld and Fox (1994) predicted that the relationship between musical and linguistic approaches to culture would be crucial to a future of more rigorously contextualized ethnographic descriptions of musical behavior.³⁸ Various theories have been advanced and conclusions drawn in regard to rap music and black linguistics (Alim 2000, 2003; Edwards 1999; Ibrahim 1999; Keyes 1996; Remes 1991; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1997, 2000; Yasin 1999). To a large extent these studies share a focus on slang as a feature in hip hop language; to a lesser degree, these works consider the role of syntax in rap lyrics.

Chapter Three, 'Learning How To Listen': On Language and On the Singing Voice, begins with a reminiscence on Abbey Lincoln's final public performance at the thirtieth annual Montreal Jazz Festival, summer of 2008, in which the singer's voice revealed the ravages of age and declining health and yet moved the crowd to encore applause. Such performances underscore for this writer the question of how voices make meaning. My engagement with

³⁸Steven Feld and Aaron A. Fox, "Music and Language," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23, no.1 (1994): 25.

linguistics charts new territory in examining conscious stylistic variation in jazz singing and provides occasion through which to think and hear vocality (lyrically and critically) the three phonological areas that form this chapter's core: phonosemantics, microtonality and polytonality. To obtain data, I maintained a listening journal, which housed ethnographic observation notes on live performances and recorded song transcription notes.³⁹ Additionally, I transcribed four full length CDs for each artist spanning the course of their careers.⁴⁰ Following the assemblage of equal amounts of lyrical data for each artist (approximately 500 minutes' worth), I drew conclusions on vocal register, phrasing, and timbral quality. The songs that qualified for selection were original songs because they were written with personal attention to pitch, time signature, embellishment and so forth. However, I did examine some interpretations (or covers) of non-original songs in order to corroborate analytic descriptions. In other words, the same vocal stylistic traits appear in both song groups—originals and covers—underscoring Albert Murray's theory of stylizations as conventionalizing or creating a pattern which becomes a way of seeing things and doing things.⁴¹ Much in the way that Ingrid Monson's *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (1996) directs attention to the ways musicians employ improvisational voices to construct cultural meanings through sound alone, a secondary

³⁹ Because the voice is a dynamic instrument, and out of the necessity to establish the stylistic variations these artists have developed over time, I took notes on a 50-song samples per artist, beginning with the start of their recording careers to most recent albums.

⁴⁰ Abbey Lincoln albums used for analysis: *Devil's Got Your Tongue* (1993), *A Turtle's Dream* (1995), *Wholly Earth* (1999), *It's Me* (2003), *Abbey Sings Abbey* (2007); Nina Simone albums used for analysis: *Wild Is The Wind* (1966), *Black Gold* (1970), *Baltimore* (1978), *Fodder On My Wings* (1982), *Live at Ronnie Scott's* (1987), *A Single Woman* (1993); Cassandra Wilson albums used for analysis: *She Who Weeps* (1990), *New Moon Daughter* (1995), *Traveling Miles* (1999), *Belly of the Sun* (2000), *Glamoured* (2003).

⁴¹ Albert Murray, "Improvisation and the Creative Process" in ed. Robert G. O'Meally, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 111.

aim of this chapter is to postulate a cultural approach to musicking by connecting the voices of these singers to a Black English vernacular (BEV) tradition (Baugh, 1999; Heine, 2000; Mitchell-Kernan, 1972; Mufwene, 1998; Rickford and Rickford, 2000; Smitherman, 1986, 2000; Spears 1982, 1999; Williams, 1975).

Chapter Four, “‘My Name is Peaches!’: Reading Lyrics as Womanist

Autoethnography” draws on literary critic Françoise Lionnet’s notion of autoethnography, as writing that emphasizes ethnicity mediated through ethnographic analysis. I interpret autoethnographic songs through the lens of Africana womanist ideology, distinguishable from the philosophy of feminism by its focus on race empowerment within the entire family, men included (Amadiume, 1987; Brown, 1989; Cannon, 1985; Dove, 1998; Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2003; Ogunyemi, 1985; Riggs, 1994; Sanders, 1992; Walker, 1983). The combinative terms of autoethnography and African womanism offer the grounds for an examination of the first constituent of the Afro-diasporic authorial voice. Distinguishable by their predilection for first person presentation, womanist autoethnography songs function not only as self-representation but also as a collaboration of ideas and values from both the singer’s community and dominant culture. Although the language with which she describes autoethnographic processes in the lyrics of African American women is different, Tricia Rose covers similar territory in her book *Black Noise: Rap and Black Culture in Contemporary Culture* (1994). Rose highlights central themes in the lyrics of black female rappers, including courtship, the importance of the female voice, and black female public displays of physical freedom; and in the tradition of Africana womanism, Rose resists positioning women rappers in opposition to male rappers but argues they are part of a dialogic process with male rappers (and others). Drawing on autobiographical

songs such as Lincoln's "Being Me," "You Made Me Funny," "Learning How To Listen," "Caged Bird," "Painted Lady"; Simone's "I Sing Just To Know That I'm Alive," "Fodder On Her Wings," and "Four Women"; and Wilson's "My Corner of The Sky," "Woman on The Edge," "Electromagnolia," and "Just Another Parade" I, too, highlight themes that symbolize general experiences for the African American community as well as open up a space of resistance between the individual (auto-) and the collective (-ethno-) where the writing (-graphy) of singularity cannot be foreclosed.⁴²

Arguably the most salient feature of lyrics written by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, and many other black singer/songwriters is both an implicit and explicit negotiation with Africa as ancestral home. In the **fifth chapter, "Rekindle The Spirit: Aural Sites of Re-Memory,"** I focus on songs that demonstrate re-memory, a practice that serves a function similar to history in its capacity to recount socio-historical processes, yet has implications beyond traditional history. Originally employed by author and cultural critic Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved*, re-memory invokes the past, yet also explicitly bridges the memory to the present. Re-memory, as I employ it here, functions on three levels: first, to replace negative readings of African images with positive meanings; secondly, to form a shield from oppression in the way that any history serves its population; and thirdly, to involve the participant in the direct recreation of that which happened in the past. Re-memory songs invite listeners to participate in ritualizing the recreation of the past (if only for the duration of the song). Here, I suggest we understand the re-memory songs of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in terms of assumed agreements or "contracts" between the performer and the listener and the reader and the text, which are based on a dialogue

⁴² Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 108.

between them. Contributing to the discussion of black music as ritual (Brown, 1990; Erlmann, 1991, 1995; Hurston, 1928; Jackson, 1998, 2000; Juneja, 1989; McAlister, 2002; Small, 1997, 1998), I examine the specific discursive mechanics of kinetic orality these songwriters employ to call community into being. Taking a cue from Samuel Floyd, who in his study *The Power of Black Music* (1996) links the aesthetics of black music to African cultural traditions, namely myths and rituals, I group re-memory songs, many of which incorporate Africanisms—elements, symbols, and practices of African origin found in the expressive culture of the African diaspora—into three subcategories: 1.) Aural Sites of Memory; 2.) Mytho-History Songs; and 3.) Ancestor Songs (or songs for the living-dead).⁴³ Songs from the first group create for the listener (participant) a particular ‘site’ of historical juncture or, in the words of Pierre Nora create “a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn.”⁴⁴ Such is the case in Lincoln’s “When I’m Called Home,” which is often interpreted as a song about the Middle Passage. My discussion of mytho-history songs is premised on the fact that myths about deities and legends are considered factual accounts and imbued with historical significance in many African tribes. Interpreting, through the lens of mytho-history, songs such as Lincoln’s “I Got Thunder (And It Rings!),” Simone’s “Dambala,” and “Obeah Woman,” and Wilson’s “Broken Drum” illustrates the ways in which this music empowers diasporic African communities in its capacity to cultivate a collective memory. Finally, my discussion of Ancestor songs includes a brief reading of those lyrics which acknowledge and pay homage to the lives of relatives who have died, a fundamental aspect of

⁴³ Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), ix.

African ontology according to scholars John Mbiti (1990), Paulin Houtondji (1996) and V.Y. Mudimbe (1988, 1994), and illustrated in Lincoln's "Evalina Coffey" and "The Story of My Father," Simone's "Alone. Again. Naturally" and Wilson's "Out Loud" and "Just Another Parade." Re-memory songs represent a critical component of the creative consciousness of these artists, the performances of which allow for the development of the self within a collective.⁴⁵ In other words, more than each artist's sense of melorhythm, tonal semantics and negotiation of distinct phonological style markers (discussed in Chapter Three), or the womanist philosophical leanings evinced in original lyrics (examined in Chapter Four), the performance of re-memory songs distinguish these artists from most jazz vocalists. In the same way that these songs distinguish the repertoires of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson from singers representing other musical genres, such as stellar R&B voices Aretha Franklin, Roberta Flack, and Anita Baker, they nevertheless connect them aesthetically to singer-songwriters like Angélique Kidjo, Cesária Évora, Dianne Reeves, Tokunbo Akinro, Somi, and Suzanna Baca, artists for whom creative negotiation with Africa remains an imperative of the imagination.

When Adorno observed "that music, constantly poses a riddle, and yet, as non-signifying language, never answers it," he warned against "erasing that element as mere illusion," stating that this quality of being a riddle, of saying something that the listener understands and yet does not understand, is something it shares with all art.⁴⁶ The questions and answers about what

⁴⁴ E. Nellie Y. McKay. "The Journals of Charlotte L. Forten-Grinké: Les Lieux de Mémoire in African American Women's Autobiography," in eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert G. O'Meally, *History and Memory in African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262.

⁴⁵ Simon Frith, "Music and Identity," in eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 110.

⁴⁶ Theodor W. Adorno and Susan Gillespie (trans.), "Music Language, and Composition" in *Music Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1993): 410.

constitutes a particular black female voice are borne out by the fact that despite geographical and linguistic separation much of black music exhibits commonalities of musical elements (Floyd 1995; Gilroy 1991, 1993, 1997; Maultsby 1990; McAlister 1996; Monson 2000; Moore 1997; Neal 1999; Toop 1991, 1999; Wilson 1970).⁴⁷ To return then to Gilroy's challenge to evaluate the formation and reproduction of "the unity and differentiation of the creative black self," this dissertation culminates with a solution to one of the great riddles of black women's music—the degree to which philosophic similarities *unite* original compositions and performance across the African diaspora. Further listening beyond Lincoln, Simone and Wilson reveals black women singer-songwriters engaged in musicking informed by the linguistic model mapped in Chapter Three and rooted in everyday speakerly practices (albeit in different languages—German, Portuguese, Spanish), and lyrical compositions that address gender and race in the context of womanist autoethnography (Chapter Four), and which also bear witness to an African heritage (Chapter Five). Put another way, **Chapter Six: 'Let the Circle Be Unbroken': Sounds Of Blackness: An Ethnomemoir To/Ward African Diasporic 'Voicing'** makes the most of a conclusion, providing one solution to the problem of "analytic status" by introducing a theoretical framework that specifies the sonic and narrative aesthetic interrelationships of black women's music. Conceptually, the final chapter shares much in common with the first chapter of Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr.'s *Race Music* (2004), a musical ethnomemoir, and the last chapter of Alexander G. Weheliye's *Phonographies* (2005), "Sounding Diaspora Citizenship," in which the

⁴⁷ Throughout the dissertation I use the term "black" to refer to all African-based transnational communities. Invoking "black" as an umbrella term is especially useful when discussing multiple forms of music created by all people of African descent, thus emphasizing that the Afrodiasporic 'voice' represents but one aesthetic approach in a tradition of very many.

author expands his thesis to include black communities from a global perspective, showing how the circulation of black American music impacts other diasporic cultural productions.

Recalling specific performances and interview sessions with women vocalists-songwriters, Angélique Kidjo, Césaria Évora, Dianne Reeves, Somi, Susana Baca and Tokunbo and Akinro, the final chapter suggests how the creative impulses and aesthetics grounded in the previous three chapters can be traced across musical genres and across nations.⁴⁸ The term I use to situate these philosophical similarities and aesthetic traditions is Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing.’⁴⁹ The original music and performances of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson illuminate the core features of the Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ (ADV). However, the Afrodiasporic ‘Voice’ construct is applicable to the entire musical gamut, from early country blues to hip hop and neo soul, reggae and samba.⁵⁰ I should emphasize that Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ is not offered as a theoretical paradigm in which to flatten and minimize the scope and impact of these artists’ work (much like the label ‘jazz singer’ does), but rather I see the ADV model attending to the mission of

⁴⁸ Ethnomemoir has long been the domain of anthropologists. However, in his *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop* (2005), Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. shows the utility of ethnomemoir in black music research, especially given the great subjective power of music and the “specific web of culture” from which black music derives. Thus, “despite scholars’ reluctance to recognize and explore this dialectic,” Ramsey makes a call for the adoption of ethnomemoir in more musical studies.

⁴⁹ It is convention in certain disciplines such as linguistics and philosophy to highlight words with special meaning by using single quotation marks instead of double quotation marks. I employ single quotes to frame the word voicing to acknowledge the myriad usages of the term and to underscore my intention to invoke all of these usages simultaneously when using the phrase Afrodiasporic ‘voicing.’ The most common definition of voice involves the quality of the human voice while speaking and the musical value of the voice while singing. A particular arrangement of pitches in a particular harmony, e.g. one could voice a D minor seventh chord, from lowest to highest pitch, in the following two ways: D-C-F-A or D-A-C-F; numerous other voicings are also possible. In narrative prose, voice is the author’s style in which a story is presented, including diction, syntax, dialogue. Because the reader’s experience of literature is closely tied to the author’s voice its significance is paramount.

⁵⁰ Implied usages for the Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ model are not limited to the music created by women. However, in place of Africana womanism as a lens for analyzing autoethnography in song lyrics written by black men one must consult gender studies that grapple with issues and politics relevant to the condition and societal processes of black men (see, for example, Awkward 1995; Hunber and Davis 1995; Staples 1982; Wallace 2002).

explication by facilitating exploration of the traits that emerge from the conscious listening to and comparison of these singers' original lyrics and performances. In highlighting music as a bridge between different black cultures, I invite readers and listeners to question: By what means does "blackness" achieve a particular vocal style? What are the specific traits that link black women's song lyrics despite national and idiomatic differences or particularities? And, how do these traits function? And I offer as a tool for analysis the ADV model premised on black linguistics (phonological style markers), womanist autoethnography and re-memory.

Music has been and continues to be crucial to the way African America articulates the past, present and future. However, recognition of the music as discursive historical-cultural phenomenon necessitates an understanding of the consciousness that informs the music, for it is only with this knowledge that any form of critical speculation about the music can be formed.⁵¹ This dissertation seeks to guide those who would learn how to listen to the music of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson for deeper understanding of the aesthetic practices employed with regard to the negotiation of identity for self, for other black women artists, for art, the community, the world.

⁵¹ LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), "Jazz and the White Critic" in ed. Robert G. O'Meally, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 137.

2

‘PLEASE DON’T LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD’:
THE CHALLENGE OF DEFINING JAZZ SINGING

Defining jazz singing has long been difficult because of its close relationships to popular song, the blues, folk music, and concert music.⁵²—Will Freidwahl

The basics of good jazz singing is swing plus feeling plus unmistakable sound which comes out of the preceding elements and a willingness to share your story exactly as it moves you then and there.⁵³—Nat Hentoff, Jazz Critic and producer

The qualities necessary for jazz singing are musical sense, style and beat.⁵⁴—Norman Granz, Founder of Verve Records

This brings us to interpretation. Both music and language require it in the same degree, and entirely differently. To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music....But to play music properly means, above all, to speak its language properly. This language demands that it be imitated not decoded.

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Music, Language, and Composition* (Translated by Susan Gillespie)

Jazz Writer Peter Richmond asserts that as our nation’s invention, our “absolutely original music,” it is popular jazz singing whose lyrics and melodic sentiments reach us all and embody America’s dreams.⁵⁵ However jazz criticism and scholarship—with few exceptions—has generally paid more attention to instrumentalists than to jazz singing, a trend born out by the

⁵² Will Friedwahl, *Jazz Singing: American’s Great Voices from Bessie Smith to bebop and Beyond*. (New York: Columbia U P), 154.

⁵³ Nat Hentoff, “Are Krall and Monheit Jazz Singers?” in *Jazziz* (2001): 170.

⁵⁴ Norman Granz, liner notes to *Cool Heat*, Anita O’Day, Verve 8312, album, 1959.

⁵⁵ Peter Richmond. *Fever: The Life & Music of Miss Peggy Lee* (NY: Henry Holt, 2006), 8.

traditional dismissive insider perspective regarding singers and the voice.⁵⁶ When “jazz” singers are the central subjects of your inquiry, issues of defining jazz singing arise. However, the definitions of jazz singing in three of the epigraphs above point to the ambiguity that continues to surround jazz singing; an ambiguity that has made its study difficult, yet has also offered latitude in thinking about useful frameworks to reveal the distinct ways jazz vocal performance makes meaning for audience members. Consider the quotes of Freidwahl, Hentoff and Granz. These definitions are revealing in a few important ways; they show that like defining jazz, defining jazz singing—a perpetually scrutinized term—is problematic on multiple levels.⁵⁷ They acknowledge that no formal definition of jazz singing exist. Implicit in the quotes of Hentoff and Granz is the onus on women jazz singers to communicate to the audience the sum of her experiences, both musical and nonmusical, embodied in individuality and skill. However, a preview of the jazz criticism generated on the subjects of this study, internationally renowned jazz vocalist-composers Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson, reveals the great challenge posed by listening for each artist’s vocal embodiment of experience and expression, and subsequent meaningful description.

Scholars who have written about women jazz vocalists have generally contributed biographical compendiums (Dahl 1989; Gourse 1996; Placksin 1982, 1985). Moreover, they have more often written biographies (Bauer 2003; Clarke 2002; Cohodas 2004, 2012; Dahl 1995, 1992, 2001, 2008; Greene 2006; Nicholson 1996; O’Meally 2000). (Though an obvious line of inquiry, studies of vocal jazz’s relation to other vocal musical forms

⁵⁶ For an in-depth discussion on the divided traditions of instrumental and vocal jazz, see Lara Pellegrinelli’s doctoral thesis, “*The Song Is Who?: Locating Singers On The Jazz Scene*” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007).

are nonexistent, underscoring scholar Travis Jackson's claim that "the African American music known as jazz generally merits little mention of the music's of the African diaspora."⁵⁸) Though not an aim of this project, this history bears exploring because it represents the musical community to which Lincoln, Simone and Wilson belong. However, while members of the jazz singers' canon, what distinguished this trio from most jazz singers (yet connects them to other vocalist-composers performing in different musical styles, as I explore in the sixth and final chapter) is their expansion of the vocal jazz tradition primarily through the creation and performance of their own songbooks.

Charles Seeger (1977) called the dilemma of translating musical experience into written or spoken words the linguocentric predicament. Seeger's observation that no matter how elegantly an author writes, there is something fundamentally untranslatable about musical experience points to the dearth of studies that have taken as their central aim black women vocalists (see, Davis 1998; Duvall 1988; Jackson 1976; Jones 1974).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, critics and scholars assert the presence of a distinct sound tradition among black women singers in multiple genres—blues, gospel, and especially jazz. This chapter reviews the disparity between jazz criticism and jazz musicians' perspectives regarding the vocal performances of Abbey Lincoln,

⁵⁷ Historically, the term "jazz" has represented a problematic signifier that in musical discourse often does more work to obscure than to elucidate. However, the term offers an important identity plane on which to discuss certain musical styles, such as call-and-response, improvisation, and so forth.

⁵⁸ Travis Jackson, "Jazz Performance as Ritual: The Blues Aesthetic and the African Diaspora," in Ingrid Monson, ed., *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 23.

⁵⁹ Seeger's idea of the "linguocentric predicament," extends even to trained musicologists who have come against the near impossibility of accurately producing notational transcriptions of African and African American music. Sound effects in the transmission of African and African American music highlight the fact that musical transcription cannot capture the consistent use of vocal and instrumental elisions, slurs, breaks, riffs, jumps, and swinging—the percussive incantation—of African American music (Baraka, 1998; Floyd, 1995).

Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. For, a large number of jazz critics omit from discussion the ethical, historical and spiritual aspects of vocal jazz performance that are central to these artists' music. Jazz musicians bring a fuller understanding of this trio's musicianship because of their own cultural and musical knowledge, but also because listening—as any jazz musician will confirm—represents half of the work inherent in jazz performance. The experience of repeated listening and playing with Lincoln, Simone and Wilson enabled musicians to sound off in more complex (and complicated) ways. Steven Feld has called music writing “the special kind of feelingful activity.”⁶⁰ To move beyond writing that flattens through vague description and to get closer to the kind of writing that allows for the dynamic processes at work in the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, this chapter later turns to linguistic analysis in which to better understand the dominate practices employed in each artist's vocality. I discuss these singing traits in terms of phonological style markers in Chapter Three. Authorial themes and practices of Womanist Authoethnography and Re-Memory are highlighted in Chapters Four and Five. Through a process of inductive reasoning, my journey in learning how to listen culminates in a framework rooted in a concept of “voicing” that is active and philosophical as well as aesthetic.

JAZZ CRITICS AND MUSIC WRITERS ON LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON

Music critic and performance theorist Simon Frith has observed that what lends the voice dynamic qualities is that the voice is both the carrier of sounds and the carrier of words; thus the singing voice makes meaning in two ways simultaneously. Like other instruments, voices are

⁶⁰ Stephen Feld, “Communication, Music and Speech about Music” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16 (1984): 1.

described in musical terms, as something with a certain pitch, a certain register, a certain timbral quality and so forth. The singing voice is, of course, part of the body, produced by body parts. A commonplace, but a fact too easily forgotten in Africanist ethnomusicology, where the bodiliness of black musicking is usually signified by, and so confined to, dancing.⁶¹ As part of the body, the voice stands for the subject more directly than any other instrument. Indeed, so tied to the body is the voice that even when disembodied we easily identify it as belonging to a particular subject, whether individual or social.⁶²

A discussion about the history of the black voice is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Historically theorists tended to view the black voice as sound objects. For example, American folklorist Milton Metfessels (1928) attempted to capture the character of the “Negro ‘jubilee’ voice” through an experiment with transcription, or “phonophotography.” Similar comprehensive analyses are found in the writings of ethnomusicologists (Birch 1893; Aitken 1899). Dubow (1987), Bhabha (1994), and Blacking (1995), cite the black voice as resistance to colonialism. The expansion of black cultural studies into the terrain of black music has provided a social and historical backdrop, what a significant portion of this dissertation attends to. For example, linguist Twum-Akwaboah (1973) researched retentions of West African syntax in

⁶¹ Grant Olwage, “The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre” in *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13, no. 2 (2004): 206.

⁶² Ibid.

African American speech, with particular emphasis on action words. The idea of action words is important to this study because Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, as do many vocalists in the black music tradition, place heavy emphasis on action words.⁶³ More recently theorization on black women's voices have been the subject of scholarly attention and elucidation (Barret 1998; Davis 1998; Duvall 1988; Griffin 2004; Jackson 1976; Jones 1974). While not musico-logically theoretical, these scholars nevertheless assert the presence of a distinct sound tradition in black women's vocality.

This project concerns itself with one aspect of black women's vocality—jazz singing. In spite of the commercial interest that jazz singing has raised in American culture and the subsequent critical attention jazz has won within scholarly research in the last decade, very little is published about the actual mechanics employed by jazz vocalists to affect their singing. One group in particular seems culpable for the lack of discourse—jazz critics. Never a well-paying gig, the business of writing jazz criticism maintains a certain panache, which has resulted in the formation of a canon.⁶⁴ However, though writing about the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson has occupied music critics and writers for generations it has also confounded them.

⁶³ Bratcher, *Sound Motion, Blues Spirit and African Memory*, 26.

⁶⁴ Nina Simone remains curiously absent from most U.S. jazz criticism after 1968 as a consequence of her self-imposed exile in the Caribbean, Europe and Africa. However, she appears regularly in the presses of her various nation homes. Moreover, even feminist jazz historians have failed to include her in recent biography studies and compendiums.

What follows then is a discussion of some other ways of thinking about and hearing these artists' voices, which might lead to questions that deepen our understanding of the music, including: How does figurative language functions in a song? Can a singer's wordless sound produce cultural meaning? This is not to infer that there are innate physiological differences pertaining to organs associated in the singing voices of black women. Before I am accused of essentialism, I do not want to imply that there is something in the structure of the black diaphragm, neck, throat, or mouth that contributes to a certain vocalization. Nor do I mean a black voice as markedly different as skin color or texture of hair. Instead, I am talking of a cultural approach to musicking, a particular New World style with roots in West Africa.⁶⁵

To begin, we will consider many quotes on the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson below in Table 2.1. While none of them is entirely satisfactory, each has virtues that the others lack. All specify somewhat different, though overlapping, attributes of a particular style of vocality.

⁶⁵ Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105.

Table 2.1 Jazz Critics & Writers on Lincoln, Simone & Wilson

Quotes extracted from the reviews of jazz critics and writers on the live performances and recorded albums of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. (All sources from the clippings file of all three artists at Rutgers University's Institute for Jazz Studies)

Abbey Lincoln	Nina Simone	Cassandra Wilson
<p>[Lincoln] doesn't so much sing as turn the songs into acted out performances. —Larry Kelp, <i>The Tribune</i>, 6/15/79</p> <p>There is uncertainty of control in the lower register, a narrow singing range, wide variation of texture almost from note to note. —Richard Sudhalter, <i>New York Post</i>, 8/24/79</p> <p>Abbey Lincoln sings with a dark sound and a small range, which she has exploited with such cunning that you could say her virtuosity is homemade. Her range isn't especially big, her pitch seems to pivot on mood, and her voice, though powerful, isn't especially large. Like Armstrong and Holiday, Lincoln has a sound that is totally idiomatic, a voice made important more through artistic use than innate flexibility. But her dark and sensual, sulking and stately timbre is a contemporary miracle. —Stanley Crouch, <i>Village Voice</i>, 6/3/86</p> <p>As a singer, Lincoln, 60, shares certain traits with the immortal Lady Day: a voice of velvet and corduroy... Her voice here has a crackling vivacity that brings lyrics to life. —David Hiltbrand, <i>People Magazine</i>, 12/17/1990</p>	<p>Simone gets to people with a vibrant and husky contralto that tonally sounds like a blend of an unlikely combination of Marian Anderson and Ma Rainey. —Joseph Murany, <i>Liner Notes, Little Girl Blue</i>, 1958</p> <p>Miss Simone sings with a voice of flickering flame, prowling around her piano like a tiger who senses danger in the wings. —John S. Wilson, <i>New York Times</i>, 4/18/65</p> <p>[Simone] is at her best as a vocalist. Her slight but true voice carries her through a wide range of ventures, from muttered rumination to soaring fervor. She accompanies herself on the piano, and her warm, sensual almost sexual voice does the rest. —<i>Jet</i>, 4/68</p> <p>Nina Simone's voice ladles out fire and brimstone. —<i>DownBeat</i>, 1/23/69</p> <p>Nina Simone's dark, brooding renditions of pop and rock standards by everyone from Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill to Bob Dylan and the Beatles have elicited comparisons with Maria Callas. —Stephen Holden, <i>New York Times</i>, 6/3/83</p>	<p>[Wilson] surrounds a note with smoke one minute and initiates a clanking rim shot the next. She's unusual, and the qualities that make her distinct-angular melodies a mutable tone—evoke a new set of emotions that haven't been heard, or felt, before. —Peter Watrous, <i>New York Times</i>, 4/17/88</p> <p>Wilson has a truly enticing voice, a mossy contralto that can pour honey on your spine and make it tingle, but she isn't heavy-handed in spreading her tonal sensuousness, leavening it with insouciant wit. —George Kanzler, <i>The Sunday Star-Ledger</i>, 10/30/88</p> <p>[Wilson] has a sultry, warmly pliant lower register that can sound as seductive as crushed velvet, yet can reach a much higher, ethereal-sounding plane. —George Kanzler, <i>The Sunday Star-Ledger</i>, 10/91</p> <p>[Wilson] has a smoky voice, an unnerving sense of rhythm and an idiosyncratic range of vocal inflections. —<i>The Observer</i>, 10/31/93</p> <p>Wilson's husky, sensual voice has been one of the most under-exploited natural resources in jazz. —Richard Guillatt, <i>L.A. Times</i>, 12/28/93</p>

<p>Her pitch isn't exactly Western or African; she tempers her notes to a scale that's tuned to their emotional significance. —Will Friedwald, <i>Village Voice</i>, 3/26/1991</p> <p>Her refined signature sound—a timbre laced with sarcasm, longing and a survivor's strength—still retains [Lincoln's] Billie Holiday legacy. —Lisa Jones, <i>New York Times</i>, 8/1991</p> <p>Above all, Lincoln and Holiday share a profound stylistic affinity. Both have technically limited voices, with grainy textures and sweet-and-sour timbres that could never be described as luscious. Lincoln's phrasing closely follows Holiday's in its pensive, stealthy way of lingering behind the beat. Like Holiday, she knows how to elide a string of words to create an improvisatory narrative rhythm while remaining absolutely true to the lyrics' emotions. —Stephen Holden, <i>New York Times</i>, 2/28/93</p> <p>Abbey Lincoln is more of an acquired taste, her apparent lack of technique (but not her style) recalling Simone. Like her, she writes much of her own material and aspires to the universality of folk-music. —Brian Priestley, <i>Gramophone</i>, 4/1993</p> <p>Everything [Lincoln] does adds up to a grand whole: the bluntness she uses when reading melodies, the subtle changes of her vocal textures, and her use of intonation, which sometimes lets her notes fall through the cracks of the piano, lacing her sound with vinegar...</p>	<p>At 60, the almost mystically charismatic Nina Simone still has a deep, musky, androgynous sound. —<i>Entertainment Weekly</i>, 9/17/93</p> <p>Her formerly stark, minimal piano playing [was] crude and wildly baroque, but her mahogany voice still cast a fierce, hypnotic mood. —James Gavin, <i>New York Times</i>, 8/8/93</p> <p>The range of Simone's vocal expression always outreaches the material's intention; that's her scary charm...[on some songs] Simone's grainy, dark and highly self-conscious voice has absolutely nowhere to go. —Arion Berger, <i>Rolling Stone</i>, 11/11/93</p> <p>In jazz as in any music, a voice can sometimes stop you in your tracks. Nina Simone possesses that voice: taut and insistent, ablaze with authority. —<i>People Magazine</i>, 9/1995</p> <p>[Simone's] once pliant, deep and rich voice has become stiff and creaky, although still capable of bursts of angry power. —George Kanzler, <i>The Star-Ledger</i>, 9/1/98</p> <p>There is still power in her voice, but little of the subtlety that made her such a striking singer when she emerged at the end of the 1950s. With a voice that plunged down to the baritone ranger and up to a self-possessed soprano, Ms. Simone had an aural presence that was dignified and almost androgynous. Her tone could be sultry and velvety, or it could be rough and masculine. —Jon Pareles, <i>New York Times</i>, 9/1/98</p>	<p>Strong, supple, rich and smoky, Cassandra Wilson's voice is a marvelous instrument; and her use of it is truly virtuosic. —Ira Robbins, <i>New York Times</i>, 3/23/94</p> <p>[Wilson's] thickly textured contralto has echoes of Vaughan in its size and resonance. Ms. Wilson's voice is really closer to that of a blues singer. —Stephen Holden, <i>New York Times</i>, 4/4/95</p> <p>Wilson's moody tones are perfect for this blue program. The rich character of her voice continues to deepen with a sound full of smoke, brandy and tears. Her spare, direct style often recalls that of Shirley Horn in its resonant tone and isolation, a technique that gives weight to a lyric's every word. —Bill Kohlhase, <i>L.A. Times</i>, 3/3/96</p> <p>Her reedy, fluid voice, which she wields like an improvisatory instrument, has always stood out, [on <i>New Moon Daughter</i> she] sings deeper than ever, holding and caressing notes and letting them gently fade like a candle's last flicker. —David Browne, <i>Washington Post</i>, 3/8/96</p> <p>[Cassandra Wilson's] voice has the heavy, rolling darkness of a storm cloud, but Wilson isn't given to flashy lightning vocals. —Christopher John Farley, <i>Time</i>, 3/11/96</p> <p>[Wilson] has a sultry, come-to-bed voice. —Stuart Nicholson, <i>London Observer</i> 12/8/96</p>
---	---	--

<p>Ms. Lincoln brings all the weight of her experience to the words, using a dusty voice full of bitterness, defiance and understanding. —Peter Watrous, <i>New York Times</i>, 6/3/1995</p> <p>[Lincoln's] is a voice that has aged well. It's a special instrument, producing a sound that is parched rather than pure or perfect. Ms. Lincoln's voice cracks at times and her sense of pitch is idiosyncratic. But her limitations infuse her singing with honesty. —Peter Watrous, <i>New York Times</i>, 10/12/96</p> <p>In the lyrics and in [Lincoln's] forceful, every-word-enunciated voice—which forgoes the niceties of vibrato and sexy shadings for hollered vowels and the swoops of blues singing—she radiates responsibility. —Ben Ratliff, <i>New York Times</i>, 3/12/2002</p> <p>While the kittenish quality of her early work has long gone, so now is the strident sound of the '60s and '70s. They've been replaced with a more mellow and mature timbre, aged like fine cognac—unmistakably smooth, but not without its satisfying bite. —Russ Musto, <i>All About Jazz</i>, 10/2003</p> <p>Lincoln's voice is burnished with a disarming intimacy. —Renee Graham, <i>Boston Globe</i>, 12/12/2003</p>	<p>Ms. Simone's glowering alto, though still resonant, was cracked and sometimes off-pitch; her timing, phlegmatic. —Ann Powers, <i>New York Times</i>, 7/3/01</p> <p>She doesn't have Sarah Vaughan's beautiful voice. She can't scat across octaves with Ella Fitzgerald's beguiling innocence. Her voice can be scraggly rough in "Mississippi Goddam," almost painful to hear at times in "Strange Fruit," alluring and androgynous in "Hey, Buddy Bolden." Somini Sengupta, <i>New York Times</i>, 6/24/01</p> <p>[Simone's] piano playing revealed her classical training more clearly than most jazz pianists', and her singing—at times rough and raw, at other times sweet and pure—owed an unmistakable debt to black gospel music. —Peter Keepnews, <i>New York Times</i>, 4/22/03</p> <p>[Simone] had one of the most astonishing voices in postwar American music—impossibly deep yet unmistakably feminine, lacerating in its intensity yet also capable of disarming tenderness. To listen to her voice was to feel almost hijacked by its power. She radiated a brash, sly sexuality. —Adam Shatz, <i>The Nation</i>, 5/19/03</p>	<p>Ms. Wilson is a singer with an almost violently attractive voice and clearly a natural. —Peter Watrous, <i>New York Times</i>, 12/3/1997</p> <p>Cassandra's sound [is]: a mud deep, rich alto. So masculine. —James Hannaham, <i>Village Voice</i>, 5/11/99</p> <p>Wilson is a fiercely independent singer and songwriter with a creamy, sultry contralto. [Her] singing is truthful and honest and full of secrets. —Whitney Balliett, <i>New Yorker</i>, 5/15/99</p> <p>The debt Ms. Wilson owes to [Miles] Davis is apparent in her singing: the weight, and yet the delicacy of her voice, the breathy flights above and behind the beat, the insistence on melody in improvisation and, most strikingly, the art by saturation, the creation of spaces between bursts of sound. —Robert G. O'Meally, <i>New York Times</i>, 3/21/99</p> <p>Ms. Wilson plunges as deep as a baritone, with easy assurance and a sultry tone that suggests hidden reserves of occult knowledge. —Jon Pareles, <i>New York Times</i>, 6/26/00</p> <p>Cassandra Wilson, one of the most distinctive singers in jazz, offers up that honeyed contralto of hers, but to diminished effect. —Howard Reich, <i>Chicago Tribune</i>, 9/4/11</p>
---	---	--

These quotes are revealing in a few important ways. They allude to the paradox of timbre, a significant feature in black women's vocality. It is well known that pitch and timbre are mutually constitutive: register influences timbre and vowel changes alter pitch.⁶⁶ (This combination of pitch and timbre in African language is what philologists call "significant tone.") Yet table 2.1 shows jazz critics conceptualize timbre and pitch as independent parameters. It is understood that the most common terms associated with the voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson—"dark," "mahogany," "husky," and "musky"—relate to tone and the lower registers employed by the vocalists. But beyond the adjective, timbre receives incidental attention.

According to the critics, the significant common trait shared between Lincoln, Simone and Wilson can be understood in terms of timbre or vocalic grain (as opposed to the vocalic purity you hear, for example, in the coloratura of Kathleen Battle and Denyce Graves). West African music and African American music stresses the importance of timbre and rhythm in music making practices.⁶⁷ This is not, as some scholars have suggested, to imply that harmony and melody are not components of West African and African American music, but rather to point to the close relationship between language and music in African societies. African languages are tonal languages. For example, a change of pitch on any given syllable may alter

⁶⁶ Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," 205.

⁶⁷ Abbey Lincoln: *Who Used To Dance*, Verve 314 533 559; 1996.

the meaning of the entire word; therefore, you are left with one device to emphasize your point: timbre.⁶⁸ Learning to discern subtleties of tone, rhythm and melody are critical in studying and speaking African languages and music, including African American vernacular. Thus, the semantic use of timbre distinguishes African-based musical traditions from those rooted in Europe.

Discussion of various vocal functions where modulation of timbre is a significant convention—falsetto, vibrato, melisma, polytonality, microtonality—is often backseated to pitch concerns. Consider the quotes above which reveal prevailing concerns with pitch. Lincoln’s “sense of pitch is idiosyncratic,” since it “isn’t exactly western or African,” displaying her “apparent lack of technique.” Simone’s “sometimes off pitch” is attributed to her “phlegmatic timing.” Ingrid Monson reminds us that in music writing metaphorical images are in many cases more communicative than ordinary analytical language.⁶⁹ In the cases of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, music writers and critics often drew on a preponderance of fire-related descriptors such as “burnished,” “crackling,” and “parched” in the case of Lincoln; Simone’s “voice of flickering flame,” that “ladles out fire and brimstone,” and is “ablaze with authority” and Wilson’s voice that is “fully of smoke” and “fades like a candle’s last flicker” are used to

⁶⁸ Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin’: The Language of Black America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1977), 134.

⁶⁹ Monson, *Saying Something*, 93.

describe feelings that are evoked. It would appear that the more powerful a performance, the more likely a critic was to draw on primitive connotations, or the language of black magic, using epithets like: “[Simone] prowling around her piano like a tiger,” or attributing Wilson’s voice with “hidden reserves of occult knowledge,” or claiming the voice was “full of secrets.”

Sexuality represents a common thread in reviews of Simone and Wilson. Critics thought Simone’s “sensual almost sexual voice” held “sly sexuality” and they repeatedly cited Wilson’s “violently attractive” “come-to-bed voice” as *sultry*. Interestingly, reviews on Lincoln’s work during the phase of her musical career under study here lack both mysticism and sexualization, a fact underscored by the singer’s straight-ahead approach and her age. (Early reviews of Lincoln’s work attests to the popular conception of the singer’s striking beauty.) The most common terms associated with Lincoln’s voice include “forceful,” “strident,” and “disarming,” significantly, each term addresses the power of her delivery, yet does so invoking a vocabulary of disdain.

Writers and scholars have long contributed to the reception of jazz among (white) critics (see, Anderson 2004; Gennari 2006; Kofsky 1971; McMahon 1921; and Rogers 1925). Widely known in the field of jazz studies is LeRoi Jones’s 1960 polemic “Jazz and the White Critic,” in which Jones indicts critics for misunderstanding jazz. While careful to sidestep the pitfall of an

essentialized understanding of jazz, much evidence support jazz critics who routinely conflate description of the vocal performances of Lincoln, Simone, and Wilson with adjectives. These qualities become inscribed within the singing body, and it is this author's contention that recycling of such terms has not only delimited scholarly jazz vocal analysis for decades, it also allowed for the pathologizing of black female voices.⁷⁰

It would be unreasonable to expect that music critics invent entirely new language, or to use the lexicon of musicologists with which the lay populace, myself included, is mostly unfamiliar. The frequent recurrence of standard adjectival usages alone should not disqualify jazz criticism if in the process of more evaluative reviews of these artists—to move beyond pathologizing the black female voice—we confront rigorous questions. For example, we ought to ask what specific vocal traits constitute an emotional throughline between the singer and her songtext? What rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and timing devices are employed in a song? And to what aim? What effect is achieved with phrasing particularities—embellishment or the alteration of vocal ornaments? In other words, the premium that many critics place on labeling voices is not worth preserving unless it operates in tandem with expressive, interpretive

⁷⁰ Several works prop up the idea of classed vocal difference. For more on the history of concepts that gave way to the line of thinking: “pure” and “good” tones bourgeois tones, producing sounds that satisfied the educated ear versus the “bad,” “rough,” and “vulgar” tones associated with the uneducated and working class see John Potter, 1998; Richard Wallaschek, 1893; William Weber, 1992; Robert Young, 1995).

language. Consider the critics who hint at the mysterious qualities of Simone's and Wilson's voices. We might better appreciate what lends the voice its "occult" status if we understand that certain phrases are whispered, or repeated in various shades of vocal tone (here color terminology might be useful, as in: with each repetition the voice dropped deeper, gained spectrum, the line 'one little warm death, come have it,' changing from amber to honey to brandy, until you were locked in a sublimely, dizzying rhythmic spell); unhinged from the conventional timing (i.e. that shared by the band); or accompanied by unusual instrumentation. In other words, when Lincoln's voice is said to possess "velvet and corduroy" we could perhaps better understand this phenomena if critics went so far as to say what subject matter Lincoln addressed when her phrases felt smooth or rough (did she sing a phrase recitative style in order to convey a story plot? Or to give advice?), and where emphasis is placed or restraint? Critics can take a cue from musicians who bring a great attribute to the act of analyzing these artists' vocality, a developed sense of listening. Put another way, the fruitful means of singing analysis seems inextricably bound to learning how to listen, and not learning how to describe.

MUSICIANS SOUND OFF ON LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON

In his landmark 1963 book *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*, Amiri Baraka concluded that rhythmic and timbre or tone variations specific to African music were inherent in

African American music. He argued that African American music was African music and furthermore he set this African music against the backdrop of American cultural and economic history. Baraka described the white appropriation of black music in linguistic terms—as the mutation of “swing” from verb to noun. Baraka’s valorization of the verb recalls a similar move on Zora Neale Hurston’s part thirty years earlier when she discussed “verbal nouns” as one of black America’s contributions to American English.⁷¹ Writer-scholar, Nathaniel Mackey, borrowed and inverted this idea in a seminal 1990s essay, “Other: From Noun to Verb.” As table 2.2 below shows, when charged with the tasks of describing the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, jazz musicians adopt a discourse premised on “artistic othering,” as Mackey explains it, the subversive power of innovating repressive social othering by way of employing language that imitates not decodes “especially in black poetics and jazz.” Mackey’s concept has found a home with black writers, past and present, including the current black cultural studies camp for as Farah Jasmine Griffin reminds us:

Students of black music such as Zora Neale Hurston, Christopher Smalls, Amiri Baraka, Nathaniel Mackey, Brent Edwards and Robert O’Meally encourage us to think less in terms of adjectives and more in terms of verbs when describing black cultural practices including singing. [They] stress functions, effects, and processes in

⁷¹ Nathaniel Mackey, “Other: From Noun to Verb,” in Robert G. O’Meally, ed., *Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 515.

their descriptions of black music. They use words like stretching, reaching, conversing, sliding, imitating, swinging, rocking.⁷²

Griffin's observation stresses the importance of jazz listeners' learning that "jazz" singing (indeed, I would go so far as to say all black musical vocality) works by implication, not by explication; it emphasizes manner rather than matter, and consequently temporal flow is more important than static representation as evidenced in Hermine Pinson's reflection on the singing of Cassandra Wilson. After witnessing Wilson's interpretation of Antonio Carlos Jobim's famous tone poem "The Waters of March" she felt compelled to thank the singer because of how "[Wilson's] great big heart issu[ed] from her voice, and her turn[ed] and tipp[ed] the song this way and that to make it new."⁷³ *Othering*, as a line of thinking, has been the domain of Robert Ferris Thompson (1974). Thompson defines the African aesthetic as a "mode of intellectual energy that only exists when in operation, i.e. when standards are applied to actual cases and are reasoned."⁷⁴

If traditional jazz criticism has stressed first and foremost the tone color or adjective to describe the voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, the quotes from jazz musicians (Table 2.2) emphasize the rejection of fixity and builds up the notion of being as performativity, ever being

⁷² Farah Jasmine Griffin, "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality," in O'Meally, Edwards, Griffin, eds., *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 106.

⁷³ Hermine Pinson, "Yusef Komunyakaa's New Blues" in *Callaloo* 28, no. 3 (2005): 568.

⁷⁴ Robert Ferris Thompson, *African Art In Motion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 1.

and becoming, an idea found in the 1974 Kristevan model of *le sujet en procès* (the subject in process):

Table 2.2 Jazz Musicians on Lincoln, Simone & Wilson

Quotes extracted from personal interviews with jazz musicians on the live performances and recorded albums of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson.⁷⁵

Abbey Lincoln	Nina Simone	Cassandra Wilson
<p>Nobody dramatizes a lyric like Abbey—except maybe Nina Simone. —bassist Charlie Haden</p> <p>Oh, you mean The Preacher? (laugh) We sometimes call her the preacher or Rev because when [Abbey] sings she's about giving you something—a lesson, a moral, a piece of history. They talk a lot about intention in this music. She means to be heard and felt. I'm not sure every singer means to be heard like Abbey—you know some singers hide in what they're saying, which accounts for Abbey's emphasis on diction. —pianist Brandon McCune</p> <p>Abbey is the master of weaving plaintive melodies where she embeds simplicity and feeling with your favorite grandmother's timbre. Crackling and warm. —trumpeter Nicholas Payton</p> <p>Not a lot of voices reveal total personality. Abbey's voice is great because to hear her is to know her. —percussionist Daniel Moreno</p> <p>She knows how to drive a beat. And her singing is arresting in its incisiveness. And all the heart she drops dead center of every song—originals and non-originals—just knocks you out. —pianist James</p>	<p>You know she had a rule that wives and girlfriends were not allowed to come with us on tour because she wanted nothing to interfere with the music. She had a reverence for music, lyrics too. The music had to be perfect, the lyrics she sang had to mesh with the life she was living at that very moment. It wasn't improvisatory—which is another way, I think, Americans say not mastered. Simone sang life as it is, no frills just the real, honest-to-God ups and down. That's why the people love her—her songs imparted emotional courage, what it takes to get through. —Simone's musical director for 46 years and guitarist Al Shackman</p> <p>Simone incorporated a lot of quarter tones into her playing. That made the music sound uniquely expressive. I think as a singer she couldn't and wouldn't abandon this approach so it might make a line she sang sound real improvisatory. She could line up the words with the tones—her own aesthetic. —alto saxophonist Steve Coleman</p> <p>Simone's sound was capable of grabbing you no matter where you at. It could be the weakest note with uneven timbre that knocks you out, you know that quavering voice—but it'd really get to you.</p>	<p>Let's talk about her early work—the [1989] <i>Jumpworld</i> album. Cassandra laces her voice around and through very intricate, complex pieces. Hearing her sing it, you wouldn't know the music's as difficult as it is because she just flows. She has bars of 5, bars of 3, bars of 2, but she just floats. —saxophonist Greg Osby</p> <p>Cassandra has impeccable intonation, just an incredible sound. The words almost don't matter until they're attacked by the timbre! (chuckle) For me, it's the timbre. —bassist Reginald Veal</p> <p>Can I just say I love contraltos? Cassandra sings a warm feeling into everything. How can you not love that? She breathes fire into a lyric. —percussionist Jeffrey Haynes</p> <p>[Cassandra's] genius is in the fact that she mixes so many forms. She's unafraid. She plays with all these forms vocally so the lyric is always stamped with a memory of something else. So you might be hearing a Rogers & Hart song but she might approach it blues or with a r&b groove. I'd say she layers a lyric, so in listening you might uncover a bluesy, churchy feel one moment and a Brazilian one the</p>

⁷⁵ Interviews with musicians occurred on the following dates: Al Shackman, 6/21/2001; Brandon McCune, John Ormond and Jaz Sawyer, 3/9/2002; Rodney Kendrick, 4/5/2006; Rodney Kendrick, Michael Bowie, 6/2/2008; Jeffrey Haynes, Marvin Sewell, Lonnie Plaxico, 12/27/2005; Herlin Riley, Lonnie Plaxico 1/27/2007; James Weidman, 1/14/2006.

<p>Weidman</p> <p>To even come close to singing like Abbey—that authentic—one first has to develop a point of view. Abbey was all about getting her point across. —drummer Jaz Sawyer</p> <p>Abbey's voice is fully expressive without becoming indulgent. She doesn't want to distract from the words. They mean everything. But so does the melody. "If you don't mean it," she used to say, "why sing it?" —pianist Rodney Kendrick</p> <p>She stalks the beat, hangs out behind and follows where the music goes. She's a master at listening to her accompaniment. —saxophonist Julien Lourau</p> <p>--bassist John Ormond</p> <p>Abbey undresses her voice down to the bone. Critics talk about rough and scratchy, but when she sings she's putting emotion out into the atmosphere. And that's why people love her. —bassist Michael Bowie</p> <p>In Abbey's voice you hear a constant reaching for what she's heard. And that's why critics can't describe or define what any of us do. They don't hear what we hear...Abbey didn't always get there, and she knew it too. But that was okay. Beautiful. —drummer Alvester Garnett</p> <p>Abbey likes to pluck at the lyric's core. Some people say her sound grates on the ear. I would say it plucks at the truth of the matter. Sometimes she does it tenderly, sometimes she yanks. Either way the words she saying get at your heart.—bassist, Lonnie Plaxico</p> <p>I'll tell you what's distinct and very special about Abbey's singing. Some singers invite you in, Abbey commands you, almost like a teacher. From the first note, you know she is serious. Hers is not background music, not music you</p>	<p>—percussionist Jeffrey Haynes</p> <p>What kind of singer was Nina Simone? Simone was a free singer. You can't pinpoint her voice. It was always doing something different—often in the course of the same song—moaning, whispering, yelling, screaming. —bassist Lonnie Plaxico</p> <p>Simone sang the way she played—a sharp D embellishes a D just like moaning or slurring a phrase makes that part of the song stand out, give it more importance, more value. —pianist Jonathan Batiste</p> <p>What I find interesting about Simone's playing is that she played a lot in split scales, dividing up intervals into semi and quarter tones. Hers was a different, a new approach to symmetry. —pianist Marc Cary</p> <p>I think Simone looked to singing almost as an extension to the piano's chromatic system. You hear it in all the smudging she does. Some people call it bending a note, but Simone smudges the note—there's always that trace of something else underneath. The blues, baby! —pianist James Weidman</p> <p>Nina had her own intonation. Like the rest of us, she was telling you something about how she felt. Her timbre and feeling blended with her piano playing so she hit you twice. Gave you double the feel. That's why they'll never be another one like her. I saw a pretty young woman on TV singing and playing. [Alicia Keyes] But she wasn't talking about nothing—singing what she thinks a man wants to hear. That wasn't Nina. She didn't give a damn what anybody thought and that made her singing personal and gratifying to a whole bunch of people. —vocalist-songwriter Abbey Lincoln</p> <p>Nina Simone sings the blues. It's the whining quality of her voice that is a slide guitar playing blues</p>	<p>next. —bassist Lonnie Plaxico</p> <p>She's a unique vocalist in that she hears differently than most singers. She doesn't hear everything in the words: she hears in shades, tones, where one should improvise and where one should lay out—be silent.</p> <p>She approaches a lyric sparingly. As a musician it's great fun to play with her because there's lots of room to embellish, and there's excitement in listening to her, hearing where she's going to go next. —guitarist Marvin Sewell</p> <p>She brings textures to a lyric. You know how there's meat tenderizer? Well, she's a voice tenderizer. You sprinkle the meat tenderizer on but you still have to let it set, don't you? Well, that's how her songs work. She's working on you from the moment she opens her mouth to sing, but nothing is forceful—there are singers who try to force you into a place. So, casually that tone of hers is working on you, the story is carrying you but casually so. You often aren't aware of the impact, just how good it is, until a feeling is on you. —drummer Herlin Riley</p> <p>I think Cassandra has gotten a lot of criticism because she uses her voice in unexpected ways. She's not straight-ahead jazz singing like Abbey. Hers is a circuitous approach. It wends around, insinuates, gestures with glissando or pitch or shadings—whatever's at her disposal. The trick is can you be creative and brave enough to use what you've got. Cassandra is. —drummer Mark Johnson</p> <p>Cassandra doesn't just embellish with the voice any kind of way, she embellishes with emotion. That's a very important distinction. So she'll sing a line like: "I don't want to marry you. I just want you to be my man" [from Charley Patton's "Saddle Up My Pony"] real dry-like. With sass. Or she'll sing "St. James Infirmary" with bite so you</p>
---	---	---

<p>can do anything with except listen closely and take something away. It's a very different approach from how we initially thought of jazz singers who made the instrumentation—the real music—somehow palatable. Abbey single-handedly made jazz singing in the late twentieth century not about vocal acrobatics that could compete with a horn, but about words. —saxophonist Joe Lovano</p> <p>Abbey has an expressly distinctive tone... Her choice to sing lyrics that express personal experiences of her own time makes her stand out in the crowd of standard “june, tune and moon” singers... There are singers and then there are musician/singers. I have always been drawn to the latter. Abbey Lincoln drew inspiration for the music she composed and the lyrics she penned from the deep well of African and American culture. She is and will always be one our world's supreme culture-bearers. —vocalist-composer Cassandra Wilson</p>	<p>licks that gets your attention. And breaks your heart. —guitarist Tomas Doncker</p> <p>Simone used her voice like any instrument with the capacity to slide. On slide guitar you move slightly above or below a fret. On sax or harmonica you bend a note by overblowing. A testament to her knowledge of the blues piano is that she made that instrument bend to. Playing in the key of C, F and F# simultaneously, for example, would give the piano that blues feel. She mastered the intervals and this must have impacted her approach vocally. Playing between the keys like that gave her the gift of finding notes other singers could never find. —pianist Mulgrew Miller</p>	<p>hear some regret, but acceptance too. She's bringing emotion. Giving them something they can feel. —pianist Jonathan Batiste</p> <p>She visualizes everything she sings. She sings in word pictures so she's captivating because she's interpreting a picture that you might have some sense of, but can't see directly until she's finished the line or the song. People say it's mellow or moody but she's grooving all the time on this image in a very soulful way. Tinkering with the time and breaking up the words, inserting spaces like a poet or collage artist. —pianist Jason Moran</p> <p>Like all the great jazz singers—Abbey, Betty, Sarah—Cassandra is great because she listens well. She stylizes accordingly. I might play twelve bars of something and she'll riff with her sound—not really words or syllables—to finish or add to the feeling. —harmonica player, Gregoire Maret</p>
--	--	--

The rhetoric most often used by musicians to validate Abbey Lincoln's power as a jazz singer included phrasing that centers on intention: “She's about giving you something—a lesson, a moral, a piece of history (pianist Brandon McCune)”; “—reveals total personality (percussionist Daniel Moreno)”; “Abbey was all about getting her point across (drummer Jaz Sawyer)” and “ [her sound] plucks at the truth of the matter.” Saxophonist Joe Lovano paid the highest compliment to Abbey Lincoln: “Hers is not background music, not music you can do anything with except listen closely and take something away. It's a very different approach from how we initially thought of jazz singers who made the instrumentation—“the real music”—somehow palatable. Abbey single-handedly made jazz singing in the late twentieth century not about vocal acrobatics that could compete with a horn, but about words.” This

language implies that some jazz singers are more concerned with using the voice as a musical instrument, a relay of sound and less interested in expressing a lyrical point of view.

However, Lincoln's understanding of herself as a storyteller and poet was heard by musicians who respected the high premium she placed on words, an approach to singing that made many consider her "a singer's singer."

In the case of Simone, musicians often referred to her as an accomplished musician, capable of expressing herself both as a pianist and vocalist. For example, pianist Marc Cary found Simone's playing interesting because "she played a lot in split scales, dividing up intervals into semi and quarter tones. Her's was a different , a new approach to symmetry. Simone's incorporation of "a lot of quarter tones" into her playing lent her music a uniquely expressive sound, according to alto saxophonist Steve Coleman. Pianist James Wideman argued that Simone used her voice as an extension of the piano's chromatic system and attributed this to the sound of "that blues trace of something else underneath" in her voice. Underlying the comments of Cary, Coleman and Wideman is the implication that Simone's mastery of the piano—the confidence of the musical foundation she herself brought to the song—enabled her to use her voice freely, "often in the course of the same song—" to borrow from bassist Lonnie Plaxico, "—moaning, whispering, yelling screaming."

In conversations about Wilson, one often hears comments on her intonation. However, unlike critics heavy-handed usage of sexual descriptors, musicians seemed more interested in addressing how Wilson phrases. Along these lines, drummer Mark Johnson said, “I think Cassandra has gotten a lot of criticism because she uses her voice in unexpected ways. She’s not straight ahead jazz-singing like Abbey. Her’s is a circuitous approach. It wends around, insinuates, gestures with glissando or pitch or shadings—whatever’s at her disposal.” When pianist Jason Moran says that Wilson “[tinkers] with the time and [breaks] up the words, inserting spaces like a poet or collage artist, he suggests that Wilson’s approach to phrasing is a significant marker of her competency not merely as a vocalist, but as a musician. Remarks from Johnson and Moran create a distinction between jazz singers whose phrasing remains safely within the parameters of a melodic playground (singers who remain true to time signatures, often referred to as singing “straight ahead”) and those who fearlessly revision or improvise, like Wilson, who has earned the moniker, “a musician’s singer.”

Quotes from musicians on the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson point to deep intersections between vocal performance and language, harkening back to the final epigraph of this chapter wherein Theodor Adorno stated: “To interpret music means to make music...But to play music properly means, above all, to speak its language properly. This language demands

that it be imitated not decoded.” Furthermore, Adorno writes:

Music is similar to language. Expressions like musical idiom or musical accent are not metaphors. But music is not language. Its similarity to language points to its innermost nature, but also toward something vague. The person who takes music literally as language will be led astray by it. Music is similar to language in that it is a temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound. They say something, often something humane... It is not only as an organized coherence of sounds that music is analogous to speech, similar to language, but also in the manner of its concrete structure. Today, the relationship of language and music has become critical. In comparison to signifying language, music is a language of a different type.⁷⁶

Adorno’s claims gain even more impetus when music absorbs language as in a song. In other words, music’s similarity to language is fulfilled when the music under consideration incorporates lyrics. Noticeably different about the musicians’ descriptions are their sense of ‘artistic othering,’ specifically where certain style markers distinguish these singer’s vocal styles from others. Musicians are most interested in two aspects of the singing voice, pitch modification and the creation of multivocal language. Interestingly, the process of these aspects, their uses and effect, were mainly discussed by pianists Jonathan Batiste, Marc Carey, Mulgrew Miller and James Weidman. Equally concerned with the singing voice as sound (that is the marriage of language and music) some instrumentalists approached analysis with regard to sound effects in the transmission of soul through African and African American music,

⁷⁶Theodor W. Adorno and Susan Gillespie (trans.), “Music Language, and Composition” in *Music Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1993): 401-2.

highlighting the fact that musical transcription cannot capture the consistent use of vocal elisions, slurs, breaks, riffs, and other other vocal incantations (Baraka, 1998; Floyd, 1995). Generally, descriptions in Table 2.2 cohere to a line of thinking rooted in an aesthetic philosophy of the concept of sound that governs African American music, most succinctly observed by ethnomusicologist Frances Bebey:

The objective of African music is not necessarily to produce sounds agreeable to the ear, but to translate everyday experiences into living sound. In a musical environment whose constant purpose is to depict life, nature, or the supernatural, the musician wisely avoids using beauty as his criterion because no criterion could be more arbitrary. Consequently, African voices adapt themselves to their musical contexts—a mellow tone to welcome a new bride; a husky voice to recount an indiscreet adventure; a satirical inflection for a teasing tone, with laughter bubbling up to compensate for the mockery—they may be soft or harsh as circumstances demand.⁷⁷

Of particular interest to me is Bebey's observation that African and African-based music forms might not be created with the intent to please the ear but rather to express the human spirit by recreating actual life sounds, including the retelling of personal or communal experience. Evidence that critics evaluate the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, drawing on European classical music criteria is easily gleaned by their attention to pitch and the lack of attention to timbre. In this crucial way, black speech and language are more related to music than in

⁷⁷ Portia Maultsby, "Africanisms in African-American Music," in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 191.

European musical context. Singing differs from speaking in that when you sing you hold the pitch of the voice constant, usually for a syllable or two, and then move on to the next note. In the cases of the vocalists under study here, who draw on an African aesthetic, the pitch during the performance of a song is always changing, never remaining the same, even within a single syllable.⁷⁸

In various interviews the vocalists presented here have expressed statements that point explicitly to their adoption of an African approach to understanding and music-making, especially in regard to the singing voice. In an interview with Abbey Lincoln, when asked whether she engaged in vocal practices in order to prepare for a performance or recording date, Lincoln responded: “No. I’m not an opera singer. This music tradition doesn’t require that necessarily. For the last ten, fifteen years, I’ve allowed my voice to do what it will knowing that any way it comes out is okay because I’m telling a story. My audience knows this about me. I’m a storyteller.”⁷⁹ In an interview with the author, Nina Simone’s comment on singing bore striking resemblance to Lincoln’s: “I must say, the onus of musicality resides with my piano playing. I’ve never thought too hard about my singing, singing voices come natural, don’t they? I practice hard at playing but I do not practice singing. I trust the music will move me to say

⁷⁸ Peter Ladefoged. *Vowels and Consonants* (London and New York: Oxford Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 13-4.

⁷⁹ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 8.

what I need to say. The tone doesn't need to be big or fancy, a slight, curling phrase can signify welts of emotion. A whisper can be laden with significance."⁸⁰ In the following three quotes taken from Cassandra Wilson, the artist evinces a shared philosophical approach to singing as that held by Lincoln and Simone:

"There's so much to work with in the human voice. My approach is to sing and let it come out. Too much worry about what it will sound like when it does come out is misplaced. I'm more concerned about the emotions that are being delivered."⁸¹

"I've often described my singing as method singing. It's very similar to that school of acting. I really do find something in my life, an experience, that I can tap into."⁸²

"At some point it just clicked in my head that my way was much more about economy, not concentrating so much on developing some fantastic technique, being about to scat sing like Ella Fitzgerald. It's about getting inside the emotion, really projecting a persona through that music and taking your time with it."⁸³

In each quote Wilson attests to the fact that for her the emphasis is on the manner as opposed to the matter; that is, the sound of the action of the vocal apparatus in the moment becomes her primary focus, not the result of the note. Consider Lincoln's comment in the epigraph to this chapter, when she responds emphatically that to her mind, good singing is "in the way you use your voice. It is in what you say and how you say it." Lincoln, Simone and Wilson reject framing a strict definition of jazz singing, suggesting a more useful approach to

⁸⁰ Nina Simone. Personal Interview. 20 June 2001.

⁸¹ Website: <http://www.jazzreport.com/interviews/cassandra-wilson.html> accessed 10/17/2001.

the analysis of their singing voices may not reside in a musicological framework, but rather a field concerned with the usage of language in a given context and the production of sound in general: linguistics.

THE RELEVANCE OF LINGUISTICS TO SINGING

Writing long before jazz criticism gained its panache, Roland Barthes in his critical essay, “The Grain of the Voice” posed the question:

How, then, does language manage when it has to interpret music? Alas, it seems, very badly. If one looks at the normal practice of music criticism (or, which is often the same thing, of conversation ‘on’ music), it can readily be seen that a work (or its performance) is only ever translated into the poorest linguistic categories: the adjective. The adjective is inevitable: this music is this, that execution is that. No doubt, once we make an art into a subject (of an article, a conversation), there is nothing left for us to do but “predicate” it; but in the case of music, this predication inevitably takes the most facile and trivial form: the epithet.⁸⁴

However, Barthe warns against “trying to change the language about music” but suggests that we “instead change the musical object itself,” that we “modify its level of perception or of intellection: to displace the fringe of contact between music and language.”⁸⁵ Ethnographic treatments of song texts (see Chapter Four), while important, have tended to treat songs purely as verbal art and to background the question of why and how certain texts are sung, precisely the

⁸² Ed Gordon, *NPR's News & Notes*, April 4, 2006.

⁸³ Scott Simon, *NPR's Musicians In Their Own Words*, March 6, 2004.

⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text: Essays selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (London: Fontana Press/HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), 179.

⁸⁵ Ibid 186.

aim of this chapter. To undertake such an inquiry is in part to follow the suggestion of Barthes.

Since black music is held as the *prima facie* African cultural artefact to not only survive the Middle Passage but develop in myriad forms in the new world, for my analysis of the singing voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson I “shift” the discussion away from the musical object of the vocality toward black linguistic tonal properties.

The relationship between music and language has been a continual source of speculation for music theorists and ethnomusicologists.⁸⁶ A linguistic approach for musical analysis frees us from the “predicable”—the adjective—by shifting the emphasis away from description toward the ways Lincoln, Simone and Wilson make meaning through language and sound manipulation. Applying a linguistic framework to the singing of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson also enables scholars and students outside musicology the opportunity to examine songs for specific evidence on how these women draw on and expand black traditions of orality.⁸⁷

Linguists argue that all languages and dialects are equally adept at communicating necessary information among their speakers. Unfortunately, no society behaves as if all dialects are equal. At least one code in a given society emerges for purposes of standardization—in modern history, to be used in the domains of education, literary, official government inter-

⁸⁶ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something*, 74.

actions, and the media. The dialect chosen has nothing to do with any intrinsic superiority or value but much to do with the power and prestige of those who use it (Baugh 1987; Bokamba 1981; Kramaree, Schultz, & O'Barr, 1984). In the USA, we call the code National Network English (NNE). Additionally regional dialects, social dialects, and ethnic dialects abound. Some carry prestige. Others are denigrated.

Black English Vernacular (BEV) has been described as a direct reflection and result of black culture in America, uniquely suited to the needs of African Americans both during times of slavery and today (Baldwin 1981; Grubb 1986; Hilliard 1983; Weber 1991). In his eloquent essay on the dialect, "Black English: A Dishonest Argument," writer James Baldwin intoned the following:

The language forged by Black people in this country, on this continent ... got us from one place to another. We described the auction block. We described what it meant to be there. We survived what it meant to be torn from your mother, your father, your brother, your sister. We described it. We survived being described as mules, as having been put on earth only for the convenience of white people. We survived having nothing belonging to us, not your mother, not your father, not your daughter, not your son. And we created the only language in this country.⁸⁸

From a strictly linguistic view, BEV can be characterized in terms of lexicon

⁸⁷ The relationship of music to language is an enormously broad area of research. Ethnomusicological surveys and substantial musical, linguistic and literary studies indicate how vast interdisciplinary literature links research in musicology, linguistics, literary studies, philosophy, and anthropology.

⁸⁸ Randall Keenan, ed. *James Baldwin: The Cross of Redemption, Uncollected Writings* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 2010), 156.

(vocabulary), syntax (grammar) and phonology (pronunciation). Without delving into the technical controversy over whether these patterns are derived from a West African or Anglo-Saxon base, we can apply the term “Black English” on the grounds of statistical validity since the dialect is used by an overwhelming greater percentage of Blacks than Whites.⁸⁹

As black linguistic scholar Donald Winford (2003) reminds us, one of the recurring and controversial debates about BEV is its status.⁹⁰ In the United States, the acceptance or rejection of Black English Vernacular (BEV) dialect has been a societal dilemma for years: numerous studies have convincingly shown that BEV speakers are rated as “less credible” than speakers of Standard American English (SAE). From an evaluative study of black english dialect by social scientists Tucker and Lambert (1969) to the inception of the Ebonics debate in 1995 (though the term, Ebonics, was coined in 1973), opinions have been mixed as to how the issue would best be handled.⁹¹ Smitherman and Cunningham (1997) focused on the need for American society to

⁸⁹ Geneva Smitherman, “The Power of the Rap: The Black Idiom and the New Black Poetry,” in *Twentieth Century Literature* 19, no. 4 (1973): 263.

⁹⁰ Sifre Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha F. Ball, Arthur K. Spears, eds. *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 11.

⁹¹ Some researchers reject the idea of a dialect distinctive to African American people (Williamson 1971) since most of the grammatical features found in BEV can also be found in other dialects of American English. For example, because Spanish employs a grammatically correct double negation rule whereas in English the usage of double negatives (I don’t know nobody) is considered substandard. Therefore speakers of Chicano English (CE) share in common with some speakers of BEV the grammatical feature of double negation. A few researchers (Brub 1986; Smitherman 1981 and Smitherman, Donaldson 1988) call for acceptance of BEV in education and employment—in other words, completely ratified acceptance of the code à la the linguistic code of rights in South Africa where in addition to Afrikaans, thirteen tribal languages are considered official languages. Most researchers however view the social realities as inevitable and argue instead for the education of teachers to eliminate negative attitudes toward BEV speakers (Baugh 1983; Labov 1967, 1969). Another problem lies in the label: Black English in that it blurs the class distinctions and the differential language usage that reflects them (Baugh 1987; Taylor

become better educated on the issue noting that “Negative pronouncements on Ebonics reveal a serious lack of knowledge about the scientific approach to language analysis and a galling ignorance about what Ebonics is and who it speaks it.”⁹² However, for decades BEV was considered an illiterate, illogical code without rules—in short, poorly learned English (Bokamba, 1981; Green, 1963; Hilliard, 1983; Labov, 1982; Smitherman, 1981). Impressive studies (Turner 1949) that demonstrated fallacy in this belief, in terms of both source of the code and its regularity of its structure, were ignored (Smitherman-Donaldson, 1988).

Our educational system and presumably that of other countries, focuses on reading and writing NNE, taking a prescriptive approach to language. BEV-speaking children are often classified as learning disabled, language impaired, or deprived, and they are placed in special classes. (Bokamba 1981; Cecil 1988; Smitherman 1981). The absurdity of claims of verbal deprivation within a community where verbal acumen is a source of prestige and pride signals the widespread ignorance of the norms and values of that community (Grubb 1986; Hilliard 1983; Kochman 1982). For instance, Grub (1986) listed 54 labeled speech acts available to BEV speakers; NNE could not provide most of these distinctions. BEV has become more

1989; Vaughn-Cook 1981). For example, many middle-class African Americans know only National Network English (NNE), and view it as one of the major vehicles to success. (For more on blacks who speak both BEV and NNE, formally known as code switching, see Garner and Rubin, 1986).

⁹² Geneva Smitherman and Sylvia Cunningham. “Moving Beyond Resistance: Ebonics and African American Youth,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 23 (1997): 227.

familiar to American society through popular culture. The traditions of jazz and the blues are now joined by the enormously popular rap music. Televisions sitcoms, cable television comedy shows feature African Americans who utilize BEV to varying degrees. In addition, a number of films focusing on the lives of African Americans exhibit unquestionably the familiarity with BEV among speakers of other codes.

Musicological efforts of studying the pitch and tonal qualities of jazz singers may answer literal questions about how the music is *made* but an investigation of the language expression critical to jazz singing answers how the music makes meaning to audiences. I contend that it is through the combinative power of songwriting style rooted in BEV and manipulation of certain phonological style markers that the force of black women's singing is made most manifest. Employing linguistics as a framework enables the pursuit of answers relating to questions of style such as such as: How is the voice presented in a song? How does vernacular figurative language function in a song? How do singers' wordless sounds produce cultural meaning? My hypotheses underlie the following chapter, which centers on the application of a linguistics framework to singing, specifically the employment of stylistic phonological markers in the vocal performances of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson.

3

‘LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN’:
OF LANGUAGE AND OF THE SINGING VOICE

I’ve always been concerned with the story I’m telling. This music is social. Our music is social. Nobody cares whether it sounds pretty or not. Can you tell the people what it’s like to be here? To live here? That’s what the people care about. Can you be honest in your singing? Look at Billie Holiday. She had a wee-bit voice that cracked. But she sang about black bodies hanging from trees and about the child who has his own and the people loved her for that. She’ll always be remembered. Armstrong had a funny, squeaky voice, and there would be no jazz singing if not for him. So you see, we don’t come from a tradition that worries about pretty singing. Good singing is in the way you use your voice. It’s in what you are saying and how you say it.⁹³

—Abbey Lincoln, Interview with the Author

Let me begin with a reminiscence, one whose relevance to the chapter’s thesis will become apparent. In July of 2008, I stood curbside with Abbey Lincoln and photographer Carol Friedman outside of Montréal’s Trudeau International Airport.⁹⁴ The thirtieth annual Montreal Jazz Festival had invited Lincoln to headline the Saturday night lineup, and because Lincoln’s longtime manager, Jim Lewis, had passed away I traveled along as her assistant, charged with

⁹³ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters on Their Craft* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007), 8.

⁹⁴ If you own copies of significant recordings made by black women in the twentieth century, such as Anita Baker’s *Rapture* (1988) Abbey Lincoln’s *When There Is Love* (1993) and *A Turtle’s Dream* (1995), Nina Simone’s final album, *A Single Woman* (1993), and recordings by Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, Quincy Jones, Wynton Marsalis, Grandmaster Flash, etc., you have seen famed music photographer Carole Friedman’s work. For twenty years Friedman traveled with Lincoln collecting footage for the now completed ninety-minute documentary feature film, *Abbey Lincoln: The Music is the Magic*. For more information on the as yet unreleased project see: <http://www.indiegogo.com/Abbey-Lincoln-The-Music-Is-The-Magic>

securing pick-up and drop-off times to the performance venue; assuring that the demands of Lincoln's contract and rider were met; collecting her pay and paying the band. While en route to our hotel, weary from early-morning travel, a whistful Lincoln looked out the limo window and started to sing:

Old pal, old gal you left me all alone;
 Old pal, old gal I'm just a rolling stone;
 Shadows that come stealing thru the weary night,
 always find me kneeling in the candle light.
 The long day through I pray for you;
 Old pal, why don't you answer me?

"Whew," said the driver, wiping his eyes. A glance in his rearview mirror confirmed that he had been moved to tears. Steven Feld has called music writing "the special kind of feelingful activity." Though the reader can never experience Lincoln's impromptu singing of "Old Pal,"⁹⁵ some sense of its poignant delivery is captured in Ethnomusicologist A.M. Jones's (1949) description of stylization of melody in African singing:

Broadly speaking, the outline of an African tune is like succession of the teeth of a rip-saw; a steep rise followed by a gentle sloping down of the tune; then another sudden rise—then a gentle sloping down, and so on. The tendency is for the tune to start high and gradually to work downwards in this saw-like manner....There is, however, a distinct feeling in these tunes of hovering over and around a central note or notes, round which the melody seems to be built or toward which it works.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Lincoln recalled hearing the early twentieth century parlor song, "Old Pal," written by Sam Lewis and Joe Young and composed by M.K. Jerome, while growing up on her family's farm in Calvin Center, Michigan during the 1930s. Lincoln shared plans to record the song on a future recording. Sadly, the 2007 *Abbey Sings Abbey* (Verve) was her final recording.

⁹⁶ A.M. Jones, "African Music in Northern Rhodesia and Some Other Places" in *Occasional Papers of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum* 4, no. 11 (1949): 11.

Lincoln's a capella singing of the 1920 tune demonstrated much of the stylization of sound that marks early Americana work songs and African American sorrow songs. Only *good* singing can move the listener to an unabashed show of emotion such as the limo driver's. And, by her own standard—*Good singing is in the way you use your voice. It's in what you are saying and how you say it*—and that of many others, Lincoln was a phenomenally good singer. While singing “Old Pal,” she altered timbre to achieve a percussive sound. Alternating between head and chest tones, each phrase had distinct tonal shading and her pitch changes were sung as straight or shaky sounds, as bends, slurs, slides (Nketia, 1974; Burnim, 1988; Maulsby, 1991).⁹⁷ Emotional truth-telling was the objective whenever Lincoln sang. Never one to be concerned with arbitrary descriptions of singing evidenced in the comment, “nobody cares whether its [singing] pretty or not,” Lincoln bent a word, slurred a phrase, turned a one-syllable word into a four-note musical phrase always in the service of the story she was telling. This premium on truth-telling makes Lincoln's music powerful, its power derived from the ability to shape a lyric to personal experience whether it is an original song or an early American parlor song like “Old Pal.”

⁹⁷ My own singing has solidified the understanding that in all that singers negotiate while singing, pitch changes provide a great and significant opportunity to individualize a particular song. Personalizing pitch enables the singer to shape a lyric so that it reflects a particular mood, sometimes not in accordance with the composer's idea of the song.

Early that afternoon catastrophe struck at our Montréal hotel when a king-sized Murphy bed of solid oak frame fell on Lincoln (who weighed less than 120 pounds) and trapped her underneath for hours. When we discovered her, she was visibly shaken, disoriented, claiming that the bed had “jumped out of the wall and attacked her.” An ambulance was called and a phonecall placed to the promoters of the concert to warn them that the show might not go on; but go on it did. Although physically and emotionally exhausted from a 9-hour hospital emergency room stay, Lincoln alighted the stage in her signature black hat, black jacket and trousers. After hearing such revered Lincoln staples as “Down Here Below” and “Should’ve Been,” the audience stood to their feet, issuing the kind of applause that illicit an encore. In true Lincoln style, that evening her voice lacked all pretense. However, unlike her better performances or recordings, Lincoln’s voice was not particularly strong or clear. But singing her own lyrics about the trials of life after having endured one a few hours beforehand meant Lincoln brought the deepest sense of emotional truth-telling to what she was singing, which is to say her tone and phrasing aligned perfectly with the lyric. From somewhere within Lincoln called up the stamina to deliver an encore, singing acapella and with even more spirit and intensity than the previous set, “Tender As A Rose” (Phil Moore), which appears on her 1957 album, *That’s Him*, and again on the 2002 Verve release, *Over the Years*. It was the last song Lincoln would ever sing

publicly.

This anecdote in itself has little value and probably less meaning to those who aren't Lincoln fans, but serves to illustrate a point. The distinctive memory of the artist's last concert, performed in Montréal the evening of July 2, 2008, provides me with two lines of reflection on the association between language and singing: the centrality of "the way" Lincoln, Simone and Wilson use their voices and the significance of "what [they] are saying and how [they] say it" in the elusive vocal performance known as jazz singing.

**MELORHYTHM, TONAL SEMANTICS & STYLISTIC PHONOLOGICAL MARKERS
IN THE VOCALITY OF LINCOLN, SIMONE & WILSON**

The introduction to this dissertation included an anecdote involving a music store owner who asked me, 'What exactly does it mean to sound black anyway?'—a question I might have answered upon consideration of song lyrics written in black English vernacular. (In other words, 'sounding black' may be achieved by a non-black singer if both lyrical content and vocal phrasing adhere to black linguistic codes, as "Anita's Blues," by Anita O'Day and numerous songs by Christina Aguilera and Jennifer Lopez prove.) In the previous chapter, we witnessed the distinction between jazz critics whose understanding of the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson hinge on the voices' innate characteristics and musicians whose discussions on these artists center around what these voices *do* within a song. Understanding how the voices of

Lincoln, Simone and Wilson assume cultural meaning, and accounting for their popularity among jazz audiences requires re-thinking some of our assumptions about what and how music means. BEV is classified as a dialect which shares characteristics with various creole English dialects; it has grammatical origins in—and shared pronunciation characteristics with various West African languages. Employing cultural tropes and rhetorical characteristics rooted in BEV dialect, the lyrics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson are distinct from jazz standard written in standard American English. Thus, lyrics written in BEV stimulate cultural perception. (The same can be said of various African American music forms including the lyrics of blues, R&B, hip-hop, neosoul.) For, as Linguist John Baugh (1983) reminds us: “It does little good to claim that street speech is a valid dialect—which it is—when the social cost of linguistic and other differences can be so high.”⁹⁸ Baugh’s comment provides a basis for the analogy between vernacular language and vernacular music.⁹⁹ That is, black lyrical musical performance is typically grounded in ethnic dialects, which, compounded with phonological style markers (to be explored later in this chapter), distinguish this music from other American forms. As a

⁹⁸ John Baugh, *Black Street Speech: It's History, Structure and Survival* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), 122.

⁹⁹ One distinction built into the usage of the term vernacular is useful here, involving transmission—one language being associated with writing and the other having evolved through aural and singing practices. Vernacular music may be written down at any time, for one purpose or another, but, substantially, vernacular music evolves independently of notation.

vernacular idiom, it may find its way into the concert hall, but it has not evolved there. It has been sustained by diverse and well-distributed popular patronage—or, indeed, by day-to-day cultural practice that does not depend on patronage.¹⁰⁰

This chapter builds upon basic principles of English linguistic discourse as a framework for discussing the distinct voicing techniques employed in the singing of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. In becoming familiar with the most recent and ongoing phonological linguistic study of BEV, I conclude that focusing on the nature of (phonetic) tonal space and phonological specification of tone leads us to a more nuanced understanding of the vocal approaches of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. For BEV is not monolithic, it exhibits differences related to region, age, and class. For instance, although the singers under discussion here are black and female, their speech and singing patterns represent a spectrum of varieties. The recordings of Abbey Lincoln, a Midwesterner born in Chicago and raised in Michigan,¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Brothers, "Ideology and Aurality in the Vernacular Traditions of African-American Music," in *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1997): 171.

¹⁰¹ As a listener, I was drawn to Lincoln's music for her tone, which sounded similar to that of my own Midwestern relatives, as was also the case with certain idiomatic expressions Lincoln makes use of in her original lyrics. As a vocalist, I am drawn to Lincoln's songbook because of the key most of her songs are written in, and also because, like Lincoln, my natural singing voice is in the chest register so it is a comfort and joy to sing her songs, whereas Wilson's songbook is a great challenge due to her unusual time signatures and the way in which the singer's own phrasing seems premised on "fun with meter," an almost intuitive approach. Indeed, when recording Wilson's "I Am Waiting" on my own full-length album, "All That I Want," the way to access that song and lend it my own phrasing was to interpret it as a folk song, not a jazz song. Pared down acoustic guitar and my voice enabled me to sing the song straight ahead, like a storyteller in the tradition of Abbey Lincoln. However, Wilson's version features Steve Coleman on alto saxophone, Grachan Moncur III on trombone, Lonnie Plaxico on bass, Mark Johnson on drums and Jean-Paul Bourelly on guitar, creating a lush instrumental tapestry where the horns provide ample bar lines for the singer's vocals to play with meter.

possess a vocal quality best articulated by Lorraine Hansberry who, in the stage directions for *A Raisin in the Sun*, endows Beneatha with speech that “is a mixture of many things.” But it is “the Midwest rather than the South [that] has finally—at last—won out in her inflection; but not altogether because over all of it is a soft slurring and transformed use of vowels which is the decided influence of the Southside.” Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson descend from the South—North Carolina and Mississippi respectively and with each regional dialect further speech nuances emerge as a result of generational differences.

Let us now return to critics’ usage of epithets like “dark,” “honeyed” and “smoky,” descriptors inextricably bound to the voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, that point to the subject of tone and intonation. Bolinger (1985) states that tone can be meaningful or sound-symbolic and describes intonation as a relatively autonomous system, based in emotional and gestural expression, which communicates iconically, indexically and conventionally through rises and falls in pitch. A primary trait of the vocality of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson is significant tone or what I prefer to call *tonal semantics*. Linguists speak about tonal semantics (or tone language) when the meaning of a word is made intelligible by the relative pitch at which a syllable is uttered.¹⁰² Although in music the interpretation of words is fairly flexible, it is remarkable how often higher or lower pitch levels and accentuations in speech will correspond

to similar treatment in music. In other words, tonal semantics refers to the ways that intonation in a word or a phrase can change it's meaning.¹⁰³ As Linguist Geneva Smitherman points out, in tonal semantics strictly semantic meaning is combined and synthesized with lyrical balance, cadence and melodious voice rhythm.¹⁰⁴ Smitherman comments on the cultural significance of tonal semantics:

To both understand and “feel” tonal semantics requires the listener to be of a cultural tradition that finds value and meaning in word sound. In Black America, that tradition, like other aspects of Black English style, is located in the African background. From a strictly linguistic viewpoint, we may note that West African languages are tone languages. That is, speakers of these languages rely on tone with which they pronounce syllables, sounds, and words to convey their meaning....Whereas English is quite limited in its use of the features of tone to signal meaning, African languages have a very complex, highly sophisticated system of tone. Caught between a tone language (i.e., their native African tongue) and a “toneless” language (i.e. the English they were forced to adopt), Africanized English speakers seem to have mediated this linguistic dilemma by retaining in their cultural consciousness the abstract African concept of tone while applying it to English in obviously different ways.¹⁰⁵

Smitherman suggests that even when semantic and syntactical structures of West African

¹⁰² Otto Karolyi, *Traditional African and Oriental Music* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 47.

¹⁰³ An example offered by Geneva Smitherman is of the differences that can occur in the meaning of the word police when pronounced in the typical iambic pattern of English (police) and when dramatic emphasis is given to the first syllable, the Police. Part of what's involved is changes in meaning of words or phrases, and part of it is the speakers ability to get meaning and rhetorical mileage by triggering a familiar sound chord in the listner's ear. Adam Joel Banks, *Race, Rhetoric, And Technology: Searching For Higher Ground* (Mawah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers, 2006), 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid 135.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

languages were eradicated during slavery, the tonal qualities were preserved. Therefore, African tonal qualities form the basis of African American speech and vocal music.¹⁰⁶ In other words, much of the cultural meaning ascribed to vocality can be traced to the fact that black music “is a tradition that seeks, in fact needs to, communicate beyond words”—emphasizing tone which, according to Farah Jasmine Griffin “was especially important for persons who were forced to speak in a tongue that was not their native one” during the acculturation processes of slavery.¹⁰⁷

Within this context, tonal semantics, which refers to use of timbre, voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning, gains its power. For in using the semantics of tone, the voice is employed like a musical instrument with improvisations, riffs, and all kinds of playing between the notes.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the tone of the voice, its register, the cadence, the pauses and silences—are all as important and in some instances more important than the words

¹⁰⁶ The research of Edward Dalby has refuted the line of resistance pertaining to the transmutation of African oral traditions in the African diaspora by demonstrating the carry-over of words from West African languages to American English. However, as Clyde Taylor points out, this line of research strictly balances a semantic unit in Africa with one in the Americas while the major linguistic transmissions from Africa were probably not words at all. Taylor writes:

Whenever a person or a people migrate from one language community to another and learn the new language, a linguistic substratum is held over from their original tongue. The persistence of a linguistic substratum from West African languages is at the base of Black English...But to appreciate the survival of African oral creativity in the Diaspora, we must still look further. Beneath this “deep structure” of grammar and syntax One must see an even deeper matrix of communication patterns and coding Including language, non-verbal communication systems and music. (“Salt Peanuts” Sound and Sense in African/American Oral/Musical Creativity Presented in January 1979 at the National Museum of African Arts W.D.C. p.2-3)

¹⁰⁷ Griffin, “When Malindy Sings,” 108.

¹⁰⁸ Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin’: The Language of Black America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1977), 134.

themselves.¹⁰⁹

What connects the voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson is their ability to alter tone color, the voice production and vibrato on word syllables they wish to stress in any given song. They negotiate tonal semantics in far more sophisticated and individualized forms than raising a voice in order to stress a word. For both Lincoln and Simone, the employment of tonal semantics can be heard in practices like talk-singing, elongating vowels, and, in Lincoln's case, staccato phrasing. For Cassandra Wilson, the process of employing tonal semantics centers on rhythmic and harmonic patterning, which functions as a sort of acoustical phonetic alphabet. Linguist Geneva Smitherman argues that it is precisely the rhythmic patterning produced as a result of tonal semantics that gives black speech its 'songified' or musical quality, thus tonal Semantics has had the most profound effect African American vocal music.¹¹⁰ We can gain a richer understanding of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson's unique vocalities when we move beyond tonal range to an analysis of stylistic markers and phrasing. Each of these components of phrasing is employed with such unpredictability that the song wins audiences solely based on the artists' inventiveness, regardless of the significant tonal nuance each singer also brings to the lyric.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 107.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Wilson: —Something I have picked up on is a respect for rhythm as the central, the African element in our music.

Lincoln: Well, our music is eclectic. It's European like I'm European. I have European relatives, yes. But my existence, my everything, is African.

Wilson: So do you think that we now evaluate this music from an African perspective?

Lincoln: I think the industry is attempting to rip it off, tear it away from its African roots, just like with rock-and-roll. The African approach to music is first rhythmic. It's all about a heartbeat.

Wilson: Can you stop there for a second? Are we addressing that? When we talk about this music and when we talk about where it's coming from and the most important element being rhythmic, is there a scholarly discussion of that? Do you see that going on? I don't think there is enough emphasis on that particular component of this music because it is derived from something that we still don't have enough information about—Africa and the cultures and the meanings of the rhythms, how they evolved, how they traveled from Africa to America. And how they evolved in this music. I don't believe that there's just as much emphasis placed on that or that it's seen as important as harmony and melody.

Lincoln: Well, everybody who plays this music approaches it rhythmically.

Wilson: I'm not talking about the players of the music. I'm talking about the critics, the academicians, the philosophers.¹¹¹

In the exchange between Wilson and Lincoln, Wilson throws down the gauntlet before critics, musicologists and scholars who have privileged a Eurocentric approach to musicking even whilst researching and writing about jazz. Earlier in this chapter I included various quotes from critics, which underscore Wilson's observation that jazz is rarely evaluated from an African perspective—none of the critics cited mentioned rhythm as a point of criteria; or

¹¹¹ Larry Blumenfeld, "A Sisterhood of Spirit [Cover Story]," *Jazziz* 16 no. 6 (1999): 44-50.

attributed rhythmic concept to the vocalists whose singing they evaluated. Yet in her article, “Africanisms in African American Music,” ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby maintains that African rhythmic complexity is the *prima facie* trait in African-American music. According to Frances Bebey (1975), *melorhythm* is the most pervasive concept in African singing style. It speaks to the combination of melody, syncopation, and tone accents. These practices provide rhythmic accentuation, which, in the words of Albert Murray (1999), “drives home the meaning of any song.” In African music studies, the term *melorhythm* is often used to describe the singing quality of African drums. Secondary, it contains a phrasing referent, which is a recurring *melorhythmic* pattern that helps to create unity in an African ensemble composition.¹¹²

The presence of the two elements can be applied to the voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in the context of jazz performance because each artist has vocally-identified with an African approach to music-making:

In the African music milieu, *melorhythm* instruments (including the voice) are often preferred as mother instruments. The reason is that the African conceives music as sound aesthetic, language communication, mental therapy, and a transcendental (spiritual) experience, all at the same time.¹¹³

The *melorhythmic* design in Lincoln’s oeuvre is closely linked to the syllabic prosody of Lincoln’s text and the expressive characteristics of her language.¹¹⁴ As a pianist who

¹¹² Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexiconary of Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 276.

accompanied herself on most recordings and in live performance, Simone was free to create melorhythmic variations to match the character of certain vocal passages. Often, she played melorhythmic variations that purposely countered her action-intensive singing in a given song (hear “Mississippi Goddam” and “Pirate Jenny”). Of all three voices, Wilson’s is evaluated as the most melodic which may derive from her conscious harmonic blends within “distinct pitch equivalents of two or more tone levels” that become “automatically transformed into powerful melodic statements.”¹¹⁵ Melorhythmic thought and practice are demonstrated in Wilson’s uniquely structured movement of musical sound in time and levels of tone.¹¹⁶ Although typically patterned symmetrically, Wilson’s vocal melorhythm often works counter to the music’s melorhythm.

The components of the singing voice are complex and employed in various types of music for various reasons. Using melorhythm and tonal semantics as foundational pillars to build a resonant vocal performance, Lincoln, Simone and Wilson draw on stylistic features to signify ownership of the song structure. According to my many conversations with vocalists, the most obvious method in ‘owning’ a song is voice modification or what J.K. Kwabena Nketia (1971) calls phonological style markers, which would include the over-enunciated, almost staccato phrasing of Lincoln, the perpetual pitch changes and tonal shading heard in Simone’s

¹¹³ Meki Nzeri and Odyke Nzeri, *A Contemporary Study of Musical Arts: Informed by African Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (Pretoria, South Africa: Centre for Indigenous Instrumental African Music, 2007), 234.

¹¹⁴ Malena Kuss, *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: Performing the Caribbean Experience* (Austin, TX: The Universe of Music, Inc., 2007), 36.

¹¹⁵ Nzeri and Nzeri, *A Contemporary Study*, 234.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

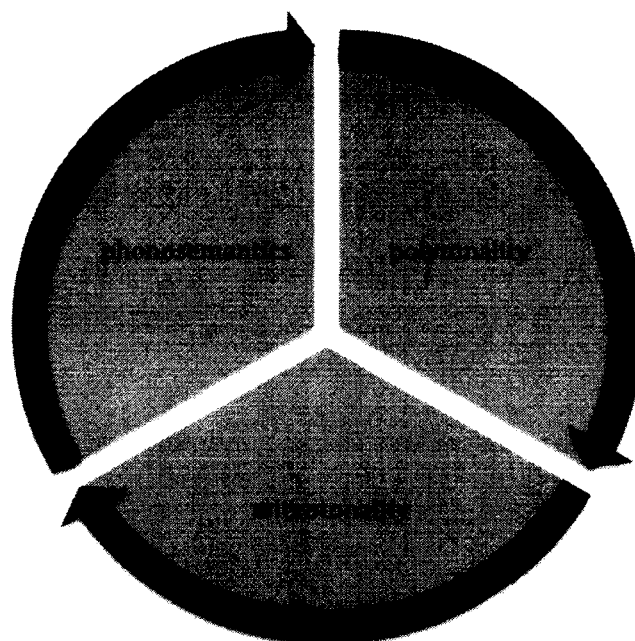
singing, and Wilson's aspiration (breathiness factor) and humming, her most exploited polytonal device. In the process of imbuing songs with the abovementioned phonological style markers, these singers may transform language itself, not only rendering it ambiguous and multivocal, but sometimes creating a whole new language, a metalanguage.

This metalanguage is premised on three aspects I have isolated in a significant amount of the music performed by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson: phonosemantics, microtonality and polytonality. As structural aesthetics these phonological style markers often overlap in a given song, allowing for both hybridity and fluidity in these singers' voices.¹¹⁷ For as Farah Jasmine Griffin reminds us, the voice is not stable and unchanging, but rather it changes according to time and context.¹¹⁸ When this metalanguage of phonological style markers is caught in the matrix of melorhythm and tonal semantics, the effect is spellbinding. In the following chapter sections, we will begin with an overview of each artist's stylistic approach to a song, and then consider four recordings in order to better understand how these voices make meaning, drawing on the phonological style markers located in the structural triumvirate of phonosemantics, microtonality and polytonality as seen in the diagram below (Table 3.1):

¹¹⁷ Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," 210.

Table 3.1 Phonological Style Markers on Lincoln, Simone & Wilson

The graph below pulls together the three most commonly used phonological style markers in the singing practices of Lincoln, Simone & Wilson. The arrows refer to the constant, dynamic foundational aspects of melorhythm and tonal semantics, the most commonly prevalent features in all three artists' music. Each artists draws on other phonological markers distinct in the performance of others so there is a constant negotiation of these style markers in the creation of a song.



ABBEY LINCOLN'S PHONOSEMANTICS

Unmistakable prosody of enunciation (she is the most 'preacher-like' of the artists discussed here), best describes Abbey Lincoln's singing. However, unlike the oration of a preacher's sermon that may include everything from a growl to a bluesy moan, Lincoln's voice

¹¹⁸ Farah Jasmine Griffin, "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality," in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*, eds. Robert O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, Farah Jasmine Griffin (New

gains authority from its stylistic enunciation heard in the staccato phrasing and elongated vowels, almost as if she is reciting the words. *Sprechtstimme*, a term used in reference to German classical music—which literally translates to: speak voice—could be used to describe Lincoln’s approach to phrasing, a technique halfway between speech and song that glides around pitches instead of hitting them precisely. For like her musical influence, Billie Holiday, the essence of Lincoln’s style is relaxation. For example, instead of a note being hit directly on the beat, Lincoln tends to hit the note just before or just after, while the melody flows evenly in and around the beat, usually four beats to the bar. Similar to Holiday, Lincoln’s singing almost always includes elongation of the first and last words in the first line of a phrase. Without exception, she uses more than one note per syllable at the concluding word of each phrase. In slow tempos, which figure prominently among the vocalist’s original songs, Lincoln often employs melisma, elongating syllables through melodic embellishments (slides and bends), which can often result in singing as many as ten or eleven notes over a two syllable word, another stylistic trait heard in much of Holiday’s later work.

Hundreds of hours of listening to the artist have revealed significant, specified features of Lincoln’s phrasing, which include: 1.) Distinctly round, full-throated and elongated /O/ and /OU/ vowel sounds; it is chiefly on syllables bearing /o/ and /ou/ that Lincoln sustains the note

or adds embellishments with elaborate rises, or deliberate falling measures 2.) Exaggerated consonant articulation (An example of this is heard in the rolled /r/ in songs like “I Got Thunder (And It Rings),” “Look to the Star,” and “Wholly Earth”); and 3.) Usage of sound symbolism, which includes corporeal sounds—expressive intonation and voice quality; imitative sounds such as onomatopoeic words and phrases used to represent birds and animals; synesthetic sounds—words and sounds representative of particular properties such as size.¹¹⁹

To listen to Abbey Lincoln is to settle in for emphasis on lyrical content; hers is not background music. Previously I mentioned the most distinct phonological marker present in Lincoln’s phrasing is prosody. Though the hallmark of her style lies in the idiosyncratic way she employs prosody, what exactly distinguishes Lincoln’s prosody from that of other vocalists with sublime articulation such as Shirley Horn or Cleo Laine? Lincoln represents an anomaly in the tradition of jazz singing as she performed her own songbook.

Lincoln’s songs are typically comprised of stanzas of different lengths, usually in sixteen or eight bars in length—even when she uses the same stanza or a conventional thirty-two bar format, she writes more than a single verse. A large portion of her songs—often personal observations about her life with a philosophical and spiritual bent—are written in common meter, the meter of Scottish folk ballads and English hymns, “and also Emily Dickinson’s

¹¹⁹ For example, in English the sound /i/ as in *teeny* suggest a small size, while the sound /u/ evokes a large size as in *huge* and *humongous*.

avored prosody”; and as with Dickinson, “there is nerve in the obsession with a single rhythm; as you drink it in, you rebel against it, then settle in when it begins to feel ritualistic.”¹²⁰

I aim to show to show that a profound understanding of phonosemantics or *sound symbolism* (Hinton, 1994; Hunter 1996) is consciously brought to the songwriting process, imbuing Lincoln’s prosody with significant dramatic effect.¹²¹

Lincoln’s fans remark on her musical and expressive style in her many original slow songs. Redolent of Holiday, Lincoln is not known for improvising, but rather she turns a lyric to reveal emotional content, imbuing a song with searing truth. For Lincoln, melorhythm enhances the lyric’s expressive force, and her tonal semantics adds dramatic quality to the musical line. As in poetry, the melorhythm follows a consistent pattern, moving quickly through the weaker syllables to linger on the strong syllables.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ben Ratliff, “An Unconventional Jazz Singer Looks Back” *New York Times*, March, 12, 2002.

¹²¹ For drawing sound symbolism evidence, this section would be considered highly controversial subject matter in the field of linguistics. The problematic nature of sound symbolism arises from its conflict with the structural linguistic axiom that sounds do their work through contrastive relations with other sounds rather than through their intrinsic sound qualities. Consider the pair of words *dope* and *hope*. Semantic responsibility for the words’ different meanings is not attributed to their contrasting alveolar stops, /d/ and /h/. It is the fact that one is pronounced with vibrating vocal chords and the other is not that is conventionally understood among structural linguists as significant. However, this chapter would gain purchase among anthropological linguists who accept the ontological argument (Friedrich 1979) that a language without sound symbolism would be as impossible as an existence without culture. I would argue that the nature of jazz singing, especially those live performances approached as ritual (see Chapter Four), and the jazz audience, including jazz listeners at home, are a welcome intellectual playground for the work of anthropological and social linguists concerned with conceptions of sound and meaning in communities called into being through music (Nuckolls, 1999). Indeed, this was the thrust of a course I offered as a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University’s Institute for Research in African American Studies entitled “Mapping Jazz: The Ethnography & Geography of An African American Music.” Term projects for the course—“jazzographies”—required students to draw on the literature of spatial practices, jazz studies, anthropology and other social sciences to assess concepts of jazz sounds and meaning in “small scale [jazz] societies.”

¹²² Alan F. Moore, *Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

In addition to my own interview, from which the quote at the start of this chapter was taken, numerous interviews cite Lincoln claiming a story-teller approach to singing. If we are to understand much of Lincoln's vocal stylistic approach as informed by her sense of self-as-griot, the importance of her original lyrics, cannot be overstated. Extraordinarily, between 1990 and 2007 Lincoln recorded ten albums, primarily of original compositions, on the Verve label. An unusual flowering for a jazz singer in her late career, these recordings reveal a voice burnished by time and experience, what Stanley Crouch referred to in one review as a "world-weary timbre." As a result, Lincoln sang nearly all of her compositions in a low key, A, A minor or B flat. On all of these recordings, her voice is contralto. It is unusual to hear Lincoln sing falsetto, which she employs sparingly on only a handful of recordings including the originals "Angel Face," "Another Time, Another Place," "Love Has Gone Away," "Love Lament," "Christmas Cheer" (co-written with R.B. Lynch) and R.B. Lynch's "When Autumn Sings" (from *Who Used to Dance*, 1996). Typically, Lincoln recorded standards in $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz time (hear her interpretations of "How High the Moon," "Jitterbug Waltz," "Can't Help Singing," and "Ten Cents A Dance"), a time signature that works supremely well with her behind-the-beat phrasing.¹²³

¹²³ See Farah Jasmine Griffin's *If You Can't Be Free Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* for a full discussion of stylistic overlappings between Holiday and Lincoln.

Of Abbey Lincoln's 1993 album, *Devil's Got Your Tongue*, producer Jean-Philippe Allard said it was the only jazz vocal recording without a romantic love song on it. *Devil's Got Your Tongue* (Verve), signals a distinct vernacular songwriting identity. Thematically, the album includes two ancestor songs, written for Lincoln's mother ("Evalina Coffey/The Legend Of") and father ("The Story of My Father"), two jazz standards ("A Child Is Born," and "Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year") and two advice songs—the title track and "Merry Dancer." A stand-out piece for its arresting imagery and sound symbolism, "Merry Dancer" boasts supple rhythm support from pianist Rodney Kendrick, drummer Yoron Israel, bassist Marcus McLaurine and tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine. In an interview with the author, Lincoln spoke with full emotional resonance about the song's genesis:

LKB: I love the imagery in the "Merry Dancer." The song begins in the vein of oral tradition, a bedrock of African American culture. "Mama told me—"

AL: "—of a beauty that is made of purest gold/One the weather will not tarnish, one that never will grow old/She said beauty comes from understanding, looking at the things we see/Beauty of the human spirit/Beauty that will set us free." I talk like her. I look like her. I sound like Her. My mother, Evalina Coffey. She's always here. Yeah. She taught me to see God when I look in the mirror. Nobody knows how to see God in themselves, and how to draw on that as the only source of energy you need.¹²⁴

Lincoln brings to her music intense melodic drive through simply structured compositions so that the listener can focus on the story she is telling. In the "Merry Dancer," she invokes a

method commonly referred to as transformative rhyme, where she consciously alters the pronunciation of one word to forge perfect meter and rhyme between other words. For example, in standard American English (SAE) we usually say that the past tense of to light is lit, but Lincoln chooses to use the term lighted: “There is a golden mirror on the temple wall/
Lighted, lighted by a candle, a candle shining through the hall.” In the second part of the verse, Lincoln introduces compelling word trios: “red and purple colors/flaming with desire/dance before the mirror/reflecting holy fire.” In the next verse, witness (and hear) how Lincoln’s phonosemantic wordplay expands the potential of a simile, stretching across three or four lines for expressions that modulate in meaning even as they gain a deeper melorhythmic sense. Further evidence of Lincoln’s aesthetic aim to rhyme include an instance where she changes pitch and alters phrase-timing to forge another perfect rhyme, arguably the only one on record that features the term *auroraborealis*, the word where she arches her voice, hits a falsetto note while phrasing staccato-like *aurora*, singing the rest of the line—*borealis hue*— in even measure:

Dance, dance before the mirror
Whirl in time and space
Whirl and shine and shimmer
Purple, green and **blue**
Dance before the mirror
Aurora borealis **hue**.

¹²⁴ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 10-11.

Here conventional sound symbolism occurs in the process of analogic association whereby certain sounds evoke certain meanings. For example, in English, many words that begin with /gl/ are associated with sight and light, as is glow, gleam, glimmer, and glare.¹²⁵ And words that contain sound clusters like /sh/ also yield sensuous phenomena of visual perception as when Lincoln sings: “whirl and **sh**ine and **sh**immer,” and lists the colors “purple, green and blue.”

Dance before the mirror,
Dance the night away,
Dance before the mirror ‘til the light of day,

There is an ancient mirror made of purest gold,
When you stand before the mirror you will see the dance unfold,
When you stand before the mirror, see the dance, see the dance unfold.

Until the final verse, the song has advanced by way of lilting phrasing, but in the final verse, Lincoln projects forcefully, starting with the word “Dance,” sung as a declarative order, underscoring the important message—embrace your spirit; or as Lincoln would say, Learn to see God in yourself. One of my favorite sung lines in the entirety of Lincoln’s repertoire is the song’s last line—the way she tears into the second syllable of “mirror” fully exploiting her lower range with a force that enables one to imagine the image reflected is now endowed with special power; followed by the emphasis on the final word: “unfold” which seems to trail off into a happy unknown but successful fate.

¹²⁵ Hinton, Leanne, Johanna Nichols, and John Ohala. “Introduction: Sound-Symbolic Processes” in *Sound Symbolism*, eds., Leanne Hinton, Johanna Nichols, and John Ohala (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University

In the title track from *The Devil's Got Your Tongue*, in addition to its striking phonosemantic power, Lincoln's wordplay is grounded in irony, puns, and turns of phrase. Other stylistic techniques featured in the song, and many of the originals penned by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, include verbal repartee, repetition, and call and response, all recognized features of BEV traced back to oral traditions of Africa (Kochman 1972, 1981; Smitherman 1977). The song carries an admonishing message to hip-hop artists, especially rappers whose vulgarity and overt materialism has invited Lincoln's scorn. Singing in a style marked with prosody, here Lincoln's wordplay makes the most of a sound shape. What initially seems modest gathers force through Lincoln's delivery half-sung, half-spoken word, which is to say that "Devil's Got Your Tongue," features non-metrical singing, reminiscent of old-time devotional singing in black churches. Beginning with the first verse, in broad oratorical gesture, the first and last syllables are extended: "Long ago falling shadows sent you on the run/and you learned to hide and sneek, running from the sun/many, many things have changed, many songs were sung/but today it's sad to say the devil's got your tongue."

Parody is an important aspect of "Devil's Got your Tongue," and its significance derives from where and in what form the parody lies. For example Lincoln signifies on the Americana song "Yankee Doodle" in the third verse, wherein she mocks black women dancers in 1990s music videos (commonly referred to as 'video hos'): "Sally Walker went to town riding on a pony/shakes her body all around, it's a testimony." Lincoln continues to cull from early American culture in a verse that draws from a scene in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin wherein Topsy dances for jellybeans. Lincoln treats the subject of rap music videos featuring “video hos” (scantily clad, beautiful women dancers) with humiliating scorn when she sings: “Tell a dirty story of a lowly jerk/even though the joke’s on us, it’s supposed to work/Tell a dirty story, show it on the screen/that’s the combination for a jelly bean.” When asked about this particular verse during an interview Lincoln responded:

Yes, I was talking about the video that they make that goes along with the rap song, where the woman has her ass hanging out and everything. And these young women don’t know any better. We don’t know any better than to degrade ourselves while the whole world is watching? [long pause] The youngsters will do anything to get paid. So there we are, dancing for a jellybean.¹²⁶

In lines like: “Dancing with the devil, quiet as it’s kept/In a new direction, a round, a turn a step” Lincoln roots the song in black English vernacular. “Quiet as it’s kept,” an idiomatic expression found in black culture that usually means knowledge of sensitive subject matter should be kept secret, is the opening phrase in the prologue of author Toni Morrison’s debut novel—from *The Bluest Eye*: “Quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941.” The function of Lincoln’s usage mirrors Morrison’s employment of the phrase—to ground the song in the African American oral tradition of storytelling—and, employing BEV dialect gives the lyric a sly slant and extends its reach to intended audiences.

¹²⁶ LaShonda K. Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 17.

I move now to a discussion of Lincoln's voice with a song from her 2000 Verve release, *Over The Years*. A rare gem in that you hear the artist in strong voice before the ravages of poor health that mark her final two recordings *It's Me* (Verve, 2003) and *Abbey Sings Abbey* (2007), the song, "Blackberry Blossoms," features Lincoln's original lyric set to traditional music, and delivers surprise in its negotiation of multiple musical genres, what Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. calls "bricolage effect." The song opens with a duet between Kendra Shank, a jazz vocalist herself, playing bluegrass guitar and Jaz Sawyer on the drums. Floating over the top of this rhythmic groove is Joe Lovano on tenor saxophone. When Lincoln's voice enters with Brandon McCune laying down gospel chords on the piano, the effect is bricolage at its finest. True to form, Lincoln's phrasing is marked by ecclesiastical diction. However, unlike the conventional sound symbolism in "Merry Dancer," the force of Lincoln's prosody in "Blackberry Blossoms" draws heavily on assonance and alliteration to capture a cadence that is both rhythmic and relentless, as in the opening stanza¹²⁷:

Blackberry blossoms in the springtime bring the fruit for *jams* and *jellies*;
 Gathered from the *brambled bushes*, growing, crawling on the ground.
 The *bramble bushes* and the *berries* climb the fences and the tree;
the thorny bushes shelter berries, and the snakes and bees.¹²⁸

Implicit in "Blackberry Blossoms" is Lincoln's command of her style, singing with little

¹²⁷ You hear this level of alliteration and assonance in numerous Lincoln originals. Examples include lines like: "/The setting sun is shining on the melancholy moon/" from the song "Down Here Below" and "/It's better if you pay the piper what the piper's due/" from "You Gotta Pay the Band."

if any emphasis on meter, her sense of flow (bound up in melorhythm), pulls listeners in as she gives a distinct sound shape to each phrase of her story song.

One of my first musical purchases after moving to the town of Williamsburg, Virginia, for graduate school was Lincoln's seventh Verve release, *Wholly Earth* (1998), and the song that instigated the impulse to write a dissertation on the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson was the title track. In my first weeks acclimating to the lonely town, Lincoln's voice seemed to issue from the stereo like that of a caring sage. In a natural conversational style she sings confidently about living through changes and acceptance of what life brings: a wisdom that burns bright through unusually long verses, followed by more long verses (rare in a pop music age which gives more minutes to choruses or 'hooks' than the song's actual story), as if you are being told a story. In the case of the high-energy "Wholly Earth," bolstered by John Ormond on bass, Marc Cary on piano, Jaz Sawyer on drums and Daniel Morreno on percussion, the story is a six-minute elegy to the planet we live on and a celebration of human connectedness and the indominable human spirit.¹²⁹ And right in the center of the piece is Daniel Morreno's soaring conga solo intoning African-tinged syncopated rhythms. From the outset an unusual polyphonic groove is set with various percussion instruments. First we hear call and response between

¹²⁸ Abbey Lincoln, *Over the Years*, Verve: 314 549 101-2, 2000.

Sawyer, tapping the high-hat cymbal, and Morreno tapping a wood block. Shakers and chimes add ostinati as the bass strolls in with an almost ominous intensity. The stage is set for a dramatic telling, and Lincoln's voice is at its expansive best here; no note is sung to diminish her expressive power:

I.

Oh the holy earth's a mural,
 Seen from way up high
 Abstracted, natural, bas relief,
 Witnessed from the sky
 Clouds that cast a single shadow,
 drifting, moving on the ground,
 creating an illusion as the world goes *round*.

II.

Places where the folks inhabit
 have a geometric grace,
 Circled, squared, sometimes tri*angled*,
 ruled with lines and space
 Water ways and craggy mountains
 Seemingly reveal a plan,
 Just as if somebody drew it
 With a great big *giant* hand.

As we have heard, Lincoln often holds notes creating an effect that lingers on accented tones as in the first word of her song, and here the first word contains /o/, which signals to an advanced Lincoln listener that she will draw out the word to dramatic effect as in "Oh." In fact, by now, we are accustomed to Lincoln's emphasis on the first and last words of each line. However, in this case phrasing in the first stanza is more exaggerated by the complete absence of piano—a highly unusual arrangement choice for Lincoln—(except for the piano trill after the

¹²⁹ The first song for which Lincoln composed the music and wrote the lyric was "People In Me" on the eponymously titled 1973 album on the Inner City label, which celebrates a similar theme of human connectedness despite ethnic and racial differences. Lincoln revisited this song on the 1993 *Devil's Got Your Tongue*.

phrase seen from way up high). The piano fully joins the accompaniment in the second verse, where Lincoln's voice takes on more animated features. For instance, she arches her voice on "triangled" breaking the word apart in threes. Additionally, Lincoln's tonal semantics meet synesthesia sound symbolism where certain sounds equal property sizes so that when she sings "great big giant hand", her voice leaps and she yells the word "giant."

III.

Life's a repetition, it's an action of repeat;
 Act of doing, act of saying
 Something bitter, something sweet
 Acts of life that keep occurring,
 Ghosts appearing through the sound,
 Waving at us from the distance

Chorus:

'Cause the whole wide world is round
 and round and round and round
 Yes the whole wide world is round.

Interestingly, Lincoln chooses a very simple approach for the refrain. However, in repeating the word 'round' the refrain gains its force and highlights the title. (Much has been written on the role of repetition in black expressive culture, which I discuss in Chapter Four.) The refrain is also marked by Lincoln's usual employment of assonance and alliteration in the phrase: *whole wide world*.

IV.

Generations generating bring the people here in mass
 Living in a World where everybody's second class;
 Forming, moving in a circle,
 Ghosts appearing through the *sound*,

Waving at us from the distance

Chorus.

Like the majority of Lincoln's songs, the phrasing in "Wholly Earth" demonstrates subtly dramatic elements. For example, most phrases begin on the tonic chord, and the underlying progression is simple and almost entirely in the diatonic major scale.¹³⁰ However, Lincoln begins the fourth verse at a low pitch ("Generations generating...), spiraling downward on each word until the end of the phrase. Lincoln's tonal semantics in the way she sings "round" extends the effect of a circle spiraling outward and inward (in the manner of her phrasing), bringing intensity to a simple melody. At the conclusion of the fourth verse, the piano, drums and bass gradually lay out, the tempo relaxes while Morreno solos on the congas in a deadlock groove.

People live before us leave a memory behind;
 Actions done, actions written,
 Acts impressed upon our mind,
 Forming, moving in a circle,
 Ghosts appearing through the sound,
 Waving at us from the distance

'Cause the whole wide world is round
 and round and round and round
 Yes the whole wide world is round.

When Lincoln screams the final "round" in "Wholly Earth," the artist has come full circle, her art no longer shaped by the public articulation of anger and pain that provided the

¹³⁰ Rodney Kendrick. Personal Interview. April 5, 2006.

foundation of the black modernists' practice of naming and visibility in civil rights-era jazz.¹³¹

Here is a prime opportunity to harken back to Lincoln's performance in the most widely discussed composition from the *Freedom Now Suite*, "Tryptich: Prayer/Protest/Peace," where her wordless vocal accompaniment derived from great vocal chord tension to produce high pitches, signaling a heightened emotional state such as fear (Ladeforged 1975)—what Eric Porter (2002) called "primal screams" joined by Max Roach's "furious drum rolls, bombs, and crashing cymbals."¹³² Of Lincoln's recordings of the late 1950s and early sixties, "Tryptich" best indicates the distance she had traveled from her super-club chanteuse days.¹³³ Griffin (2001) observes about "Tryptich": "In the scream I can hear the beaten slave woman, the mourning black wife or mother, the victim of domestic abuse and the rage and anger of contemporary black Americans."¹³⁴ While Lincoln's eruption of screaming on "Protest" symbolically represented the agony and grief of the international black freedom struggle, the scream in "Wholly Earth" represents a different point of view best captured by the artist herself in a conversation with the author:

Screaming wasn't anything I ever believed was musical, but Roach told me that it could be. The arrangements were very difficult and

¹³¹ Mark Anthony Neal, *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 39.

¹³² Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 169.

¹³³ For a more in-depth discussion on Lincoln's role in the *Freedom Now Suite*, see Ingrid Monson's *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*.

¹³⁴ Farah J. Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery*, 171.

I didn't want to do it. We were living over on Central Park West then, disturbing the neighbors and everything. The landlord took us to court a few times—told the judge he believed Max was trying to kill me on account of all the screaming that was going on. It was really me practicing. Anyway, if I had it to do again I wouldn't because my career suffered for it. And I see things differently now. Why should I scream alone? I belong to the human race. I'm a citizen of the world. I claim the planet now. Abbey belongs to the planet.¹³⁵

NINA SIMONE'S BLUES MUSE, MICROTONALITY

As stated in the Introduction, much that has been written about Nina Simone focuses on her original protest songs (Bratcher, 2007; Feldman, 2004; Ward, 1998): “Go Limp,” “Old Jim Crow,” “Mississippi Goddam”; “Revolution,” “Why The Kind of Love is Dead.” However, in a 1993 interview with music critic James Gavin, Simone made clear that she wished to distance herself from political music: “I’m not going to get into a discussion about that anymore. I watch CNN a lot, I read the *Herald Tribune* every day, and I’m waiting to see what Perot and Clinton do. So...j’attend. That’s French for I’m waiting.”¹³⁶ This project attends to the artist’s performance of a standard, a traditional tune and two original songs to expand the response to

¹³⁵ Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. 8 August 2002.

Interestingly, Lincoln performs another screaming performance on the 2003 Verve album, *It's Me*, in her playful, swinging interpretation of the 1920s jazz anthem “Runnin’ Wild,” ironically a song performed by Marilyn Monroe in the 1959 film, *Some Like It Hot*. (Lincoln screams the song’s final word—“wild.”) The irony lies in Lincoln’s history with Hollywood. She had been associated with Monroe early in her career when during her brief singing performance in the 1956 film, *The Girl Can’t Help It* (a vehicle for Jayne Mansfield), Lincoln wore Monroe’s dress. In 1957 Lincoln appeared on the cover of *Ebony Magazine* under the title “The Girl in Marilyn Monroe’s Dress.” To kill the moniker, “the black Marilyn Monroe,” used in the press thereafter, Lincoln followed the advice of Max Roach and burned the dress, a symbolic act repudiating both the super-club persona and the Hollywood starlet image.

¹³⁶ James Gavin, “The Mahogany Voice Endures, And So Do the Private Battles,” *New York Times*, August 1993.

Simone's artistry and explore the ways in which the artist spoke to non-political personal experiences, namely love, romance, and the music. As a corrective which seeks to expand the narrow discourse on Simone's original repertoire, this section analyzes the lesser-known songs "Blues For Mama" and "I Sing Just to Know That I'm Alive" to reveal Simone as composer and lyricist.¹³⁷

Disparaged by critics for singing off key, Simone consciously chose to play unevenly tempered notes, which enabled her to approach singing with a very personal feel for intonation.¹³⁸ Speaking about Simone's vocality, jazz pianist James Weidman, who played with artists such as Betty Carter and Abbey Lincoln, also noted for faulty pitch, stated: "One could say Simone approached jazz singing microtonally, but intellectually so—as an extension almost to the piano's chromatic system."¹³⁹ Characteristic of the blues and Simone's singing, one often hears melodic figures of two or three distinct pitches within one semi-tone. This intrinsic trait of African musical experience known as microtonality occurs during vocal or instrumental performances when multiple pitches occur in one tone or semitone. Musicologists and critics

¹³⁷ Simone recorded more popular love songs and more sexual blues and lullabies than protest music. Scholars Ruth Feldstein (2005) and Melanie Bratcher (2007) have brought historical and social contextualization to bear on these performances thus highlighting their significance to black women and the black community as a whole, a point I build upon in Chapter Three: 'My Name Is Peaches!': Reading Lyrics as Womanist Autoethnography.

¹³⁸ Jazz instrumentalists interviewed for this dissertation spoke repeatedly about critics who misunderstand musicians like Simone who use intentional pitch manipulations outside of twelve-tone equal temperament. Unfortunately, critics have learned to hear this approach as inadequate production of equally tempered notes.

¹³⁹ James Weidman. Personal Interview. 14 January 2006.

have often failed to describe this musical expression because the European diatonic scale can not be adapted to African microtonal feeling without a kind of indeterminacy (usually on the third, fifth and seventh notes).¹⁴⁰ The blues scale illustrates the persistence of Africanisms in African American music combined with the result of new experiences and a reshaping of European American idioms to conform to African aesthetic norms. Poet and African American music scholar Hayden Carruth describes the forced compromise of African musical sensibility and European musical modes which resulted in the “blues scale.”

Thus in F-major, the third note could be either A or A-flat, the fifth note either C or C-flat, the seventh either E or E-flat. But this meant a loss of purity; the African pitch would have been neither flatted nor natural, but something in between. Purity was lost, and before long it was forgotten-- at least on the level of conscious musicality-- and in its place came a bending, slurring, and wavering of pitch that is the primary melodic quality of the blues.¹⁴¹

Carruth’s explanation of the blues scale as a diatonic major with added or alternative minor thirds and diminished sevenths accounts for the unique (—and nearly impossible to transcribe—) expressive quality of the blues, the production of pitches uncommon to western scale structures. African American singers often invoke the slurring or bending of musical notes as a result of the seeking to achieve pure microtonal expression, the fulcrum of African American music making.

¹⁴⁰ Hayden Carruth, *Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Related Topics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 55.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

One of the striking aspects of the vocal performances of Nina Simone is her use of microtonality. However, unlike the microtonality employed (rarely) by Lincoln or Wilson, Simone achieved microtonality through secondary articulation known as nasalization, which occurs simultaneously with primary articulation. In the production of nasalized sounds the soft palate is lowered to allow part of the airstream to escape through the nose.¹⁴² For close listeners of Simone, one can discern that her phrasing from the earliest records on seems to adopt the rule of nasalizing implosives, liquids and glides in the context of nasalized sounds. Nasal, whiney tones are endemic to ‘gut-bucket’ blues, and can be heard in a range of the twentieth century’s most popular musicians from Ida Cox to Jack Teagarden (who proves that whites can perform authentically and excellently in a black idiom without mimicking), from Z.Z. Hill and B.B. King to Koko Taylor. It is precisely Simone’s usage of nasalization that generally leaves Simone’s listeners with the distinct impression that they are hearing traces of the blues in musical types ranging from show tunes to gospel to popular tunes and ballads.

Early in her career, Nina Simone distinguished herself with the idiomatic blues feel in a voice already laden with timbre, a radically different sounding voice in the late 1950s when popular jazz vocalists Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Anita O’Day, June Christy, Chris Connor,

¹⁴² Hunter 180.

Keely Smith, Helen Merrill, Peggy Lee and Rosemary Clooney adopted a hyperfeminine aesthetic, which resulted in a quiet (or cool) style, often “breathy” legato phrasing that emphasized vibrato for dramatic purposes. Simone’s debut album, *Little Girl Blue* (also released under the title *Jazz as Played in an Exclusive Side Street Club*, Colpix, 1958) broke the mold: Simone rejected vibrato, employed tonal semantics and microtonality in her performance of Rodgers and Hart’s standard “Little Girl Blue,” drawing comparisons to Billie Holiday.

When discussing the start of her career Simone reminds us: “...Remember that I wasn’t anything like a typical nightclub pianist. I wasn’t a jazz player but a classical musician, and I improvised arrangements of popular songs using classical motifs.”¹⁴³ What lends Simone’s version of “Little Girl Blue,” such surprising poignancy is the confluence of microtonality—a decidedly blue feeling—and her classical piano arrangement. Characteristic of Simone’s vocal performances is the way she builds her performance by varying and intensifying her timbres as the piece progresses and through the use of a dynamic crescendo.¹⁴⁴ These elements combine to give her songs a powerful dramatic shape and climax. Most vowels are oral, that is, pronounced in such a way that the voiced air moves only through the mouth. However, sometimes her voice

¹⁴³ Nina Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 58.

¹⁴⁴ For excellent examples of the way Simone creates emotional intensity in a song by using dramatic shifts in register and timbre hear her originals, “Four Women,” “Mississippi Goddam,” “Ole Jim Crow,” “See-line Woman,” “Brown Baby,” and her interpretation of well-known cabaret favorites such as “Nem Me Quitte Pas,” “Pirate Jenny,” and “Go Limp.”

is channelled through her nose. When this happens, the sounds are said to have undergone the process of nasalization, which would become more pronounced in Simone's singing as she developed as a singer.¹⁴⁵

Musicians working outside the realm of the European musical tradition can be described in one of two ways: those who use microtonality unconsciously (as is the case in many folk traditions), or those who employ it consciously as a tool of expression with any given musical framework, including blues, lullabies, popular songs, etc. It is this author's listening experience that the use of microtonal inflection is a dominant component in Nina Simone's vocality.

Microtonal inflections are often heard by music critics and general listeners as notes sung off key and they imbued Simone's singing with fluidly pitched or wavering "blue" notes, an expressive form that encompasses microtonality, timbre and attack.¹⁴⁶ When hearing the singing voice (or piano voice) comprised of repeated semitones—microtonal shadings—the chromatic scale western music listeners are accustomed to sounds unevenly tempered, off pitch.

According to my interview with Simone's longtime guitar sideman Al Shackman, Simone possessed an acute ability to hear the continuity of alternative pitches so that she played in tune

¹⁴⁵ Vic Webb and Kembo Sure. *African Voices: An Introduction to the Languages and Linguistics of Africa*. (Oxford and new York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143.

¹⁴⁶ Hans Weisethaunet, "Is There Such A Thing as the 'Blue Note'?" *Popular Music* 20 (2001): 101.

with herself even when bandmates played with conventional tuning.¹⁴⁷ Microtonal changes in pitch occur when Simone ascends or descends in a phrase for dramatic effect, singing (and also playing the piano) in intervals greater or less than a semitone in the twelve-tone chromatic scale.¹⁴⁸ In a ballad performance like “Little Girl Blue,” Simone often adjusts microtonality to optimize notes that receive the tremolo effect, as when she sings the first line: “Sit there and count your fingers/what can you *do*?” The melismatic drawl on the word “do” in the phrase /what can you do?/ captures the song’s bluesy essence. But also consider the phrases: “count the raindrops falling on you,” “it’s time you knew,” and “why won’t somebody send” in the second verse. At the top of the second verse (2:27), intoning the falling line “*Won’t* you just sit there/Count the little *rain* drops...”, Simone’s voice embodies both playfulness and seriousness.

Simone’s solos derived from the intensity of European classical style but were more based on blues style, using falling-fifth and arch shapes.¹⁴⁹ Her sung melody of stanzas consists of variations on a basic idea, beginning on the high octave (or sometimes on the fifth), descending through the blue seventh, fifth, and third, and coming to rest in the stanzas third line or the tonic (in the first, second, and fourth lines).¹⁵⁰ This shape is similar to blues phrasing and is based on the same pentatonic framework, but the effect is distinctive due to Simone’s

¹⁴⁷ Al Shackman. Personal Interview. 21 June 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Rodney Kendrick. Personal Interview. April 5, 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Moore, *Cambridge Companion to the Blues*, 81.

improvisation and blending of European classical stylings.

According to the scholar-activist Angela Davis (1998), dating back to the early twentieth-century blues, black women have long utilized music to signify and comment on the 'love and trouble' tradition in black women's relationships with black men. Expanding the notion of the 'love and trouble' tradition to black women not only in relationship to black men but also in relationship with themselves, I will draw on a blues recording because (historically) it is the idiom par excellence for the dissemination of advice or direction in times of 'trouble' and also a popular expression in times of 'love.' Echoing sentiments on the love and trouble tradition between black women and men, when discussing her song "Break Down and Let It All Out," for example, Simone commented:

I knew if I tried I could compose a love song to take the scab off the terrible sore to do with the relationship between black men and women. Many of the women I knew were thinking the same way, that along with everything else there had to be changes in the way we saw ourselves and in how black men saw us.¹⁵¹

According to literary theorist, Houston Baker Jr., the blues is the matrix of all black expressive culture. The Blues provide within themselves a mechanism for the continuity of the

¹⁵⁰ Rodney Kendrick. Personal Interview. April 5, 2006.

¹⁵¹ Simone with Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 117.

musical tradition.¹⁵² Larry Neal's 1971 essay "Ethos of the Blues," provides some insight into how the blues singer's performance acts as an integrative force holding audience members together:

The blues are the ideology of the field slave-- the ideology of a new "proletariat" searching for a means of judging the world. Therefore, even though the blues are cast in highly personal terms, they stand for the collective sensibility of a people at particular stages of cultural, social, and political development. The blues singer is not an alienated artist attempting to impose his view of the world on others. His ideas are the reflection of an unstated general point of view.¹⁵³

In African American culture the blues satisfies a natural tendency to narrativize.

Scholars have approached the blues from multiple perspectives, among them: blues as folklore, blues as oral literature, and blues as cultural history.¹⁵⁴ As Travis Jackson observes in his dissertation, "Performance and Musical Meaning: Analyzing "Jazz" on the New York Scene":

[T]he blues is also used as a label for a certain iconicity of style. The term becomes a "cross-modal homology" connecting differing modes of interpersonal expression; its metaphoric force leads us to view it as "naturally real, obvious, complete, and thorough." That is because of its versatility and applicability across modes it takes on a force that makes it seemingly part of everything in the world...Surveying the comments of scholars and musicians makes it clear that blues-based performance, a synonym for jazz performance, is metaphorically linked to other realms of experience: it is an ethos that informs African American visual art (Powell 1989), literature (Baker 1984, Gates 1988), and daily living (Ellison 1964, Murray 1970, 1976, Small 1987, Floyd 1995, Wilson 1995) in addition to music. And in the popular imagination, blues

¹⁵² J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *Music in African Cultures: A Review of the Meaning and Significance of Traditional African Music* (Institute of African Studies: University of Ghana Press, 1966), 46.

¹⁵³ The blues singer, for Neal, and other black music scholars, is equivalent to the griot in the African diaspora. Even though the blues singer is part of the secular community, his message is often ritualistic and spiritual. It is this role in the community that links the blues singer to the traditional priests and poets of Africa.

¹⁵⁴ William Barlow, *Looking Up At Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 344.

are associated with “realness,” soulfulness, honesty and sincerity.¹⁵⁵

Simone understood the blues as ‘iconicity of style,’ to borrow from Jackson, as microtonality can be heard in every song she recorded. However, the specific performance of blues lyrics enabled Simone to explore the singularity of experience while also serving as a collective biography, by giving name to the experiences of many through the experience of one, a particular and powerful coalescing feature in black music like the blues.

Between the late 1960s and early 1980s, the moment from which the following two musical examples derive—“Blues For Mama” and “I Sing Just to Know That I’m Alive”—Simone became well known for her practice of modifying the voice, for instance by going to extremes of pitch or loudness, muffling or masking the voice, or replacing the voice with another instrument, such as her piano.¹⁵⁶ The wordless utterances, moans, hums and wails function to create the memory of emotion and suggest that without words sound itself can refer to the past.¹⁵⁷ Such vocal obligatos found first in field hollers, the wails and moans of black gang workers, and again in the vocality of singers Bessie Smith, Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Victoria Spivey and Adelaide Hall reach an expressive limit in Nina Simone’s performance of

¹⁵⁵ Travis A. Jackson, “Performance and Musical Meaning: Analyzing ‘Jazz’ on the New York Scene” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1998), 118-119.

¹⁵⁶ Linda Hunter, “Transformation in African Verbal Art: Voice, Speech, Language,” *Journal of American Folklore* 109 (1996): 178-192.

¹⁵⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz and Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 96.

“Mississippi Goddam,” “Four Women,” “Alabama Song,” and “Pirate Jenny” which showcase chants and sighs followed by screams roars, screeches and pants.¹⁵⁸ However, the effect is equally powerful in performances like the Lincoln/Simone original, “Blues For Mama” from one of three albums the singer released on the RCA Victor label in 1967, *Nina Simone Sings the Blues*.¹⁵⁹

Supported by a strong, rollicking, bluesy beat, supplied by Eric Gale on guitar, Bob Bushnell on bass, Bernard “Pretty” Purdue on drums, Ernie Hayes on organ, and the stand-out harmonica of Buddy Lucas, “Blues For Mama,” centers around the narrator signifying to another black woman about the rumor and community gossip against which she must define and protect herself. Interestingly, her performance does not specify the gender with which the narrator identifies, which is to say that some of Simone’s intonations evoke maleness in the musical conventions of western culture (the song also ‘works’ from a male point of view until the last two stanzas).¹⁶⁰ Borrowing from the stylings of the classic blues singer who declared herself both racially and sexually beyond confinement, Simone communicates the artful interweaving of these various perspectives through her embodied voice. The first stanza presents a voice laden

¹⁵⁸ Clyde Taylor, “‘Salt Peanuts’: Sound and Sense in African/American Oral/Musical Creativity” in *Callaloo* 10, no.16 (Fall 1982): 6.

¹⁵⁹ Other albums released by Simone in 1967 include *Silk & Soul* and *High Priestess of Soul*.

¹⁶⁰ In West African cultures women singers seek lower ranges while men singers typically strive for higher ranges and falsetto, as heard in Little Jimmy Scott, Prince, Earth, Wind and Fire’s Philip Bailey and Smokey Robinson.

with wavering notes to underscore the complex and broad emotions, which are also heightened by embellished phrasing or various strategies in the instrumental arrangement, specifically call and response or the insertion of breaks at critical moments. In the fourth line, for instance, Simone draws the word “neighborhood” into a microtonal descending sweep. And in the last line of the second stanza when Simone intones in declarative voice “Hey, lordy, lordy mama,” (1:27) all the instruments lay out, Simone wails in a nasally tone and a drumroll (1:33) disrupts the break.

Hey Lordy mama
 I heard you wasn't feeling' good
 They're spreadin' dirty rumors
 All around the neighborhood
 They say you're mean and evil
 And don't know what to do
 That's the reason that he's gone

And left you black and blue
 Hey, gal
 Tell me what you gonna do now

They say he's left you all alone
 To weather this old storm
 He's got another woman now
 Hangin' on his arm, yeah yeah yeah
 That old fool's tellin' everybody
 He's sick and tired of you
Hey Lordy Lordy mama

What you gonna do
 Hey, gal
 Tell me what you gonna do

In *I Heard It Through The Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture*, folklore scholar Patricia Turner examines the function and pervasiveness of rumor in African American culture. Building a thesis on questions such as why rumors take root in black communities; how they get started and what they represent, Turner's work translates white oppression into rumors or "folk warnings" that spread throughout the African American community. In the case of "Hey, Lordy Mama," however, it is not white oppression but rather a black androcentric community which translates into a form of oppression for black women. The male-centered community in the song is signaled by the word 'they.' In the following verse we understand that the community is closing ranks around 'Mama' because, like Zora Neale Hurston's Janie, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 'Mama' has stepped beyond the boundaries prescribed for black women:

They say you love to fuss and fight
 and bring a good man down,
 and don't know how to treat him
 When he takes you on the town
 They say you ain't behind him
 and just don't understand
 and think that you're a woman,
 But acting like a man.
 Hey, lordy Mama what you gon' do now?

In the last two verses, the focus shifts from dialogue between women to Mama's internal

dialogue; a significant shift in as much as it signals the narrator's advice-to-self, experienced by audience members as advice to all women. Simone achieves dramatic effect in modifying her voice in key lines. Firstly, she sings the first line: "Get your nerves together, baby" rubato—a free expression of time, not bound to a strict pulse within the musical performance. Significantly, pursuant lines are sung in time. Her voice descends in pitch in the last phrase of the next line "All these years you *loved him*," as if underscoring the difficulty of maintaining the love. She enters the last verse in boldly projected nasalization, wailing the final question: What you gonna do?:

Get your nerves together, baby
 And set the record straight
 Set it straight
 Let the whole round world know it wasn't you
 that caused his bitter fate
 All these years you *loved him*
 And he knows it's true
 'Cause what you're wantin'
 for your man
 Is what he's wantin', too
 Hey, gal
 Tell me what you gonna do now

When you love a man enough
 You're bound to disagree
 'Cause ain't nobody perfect
 'Cause ain't nobody *free*
 Hey, Lordy Mama
 Tell me what you gonna do
 What you *gonna* do¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Nina Simone, *Legendary Nina Simone*, BMG Records compact disc; 74321785632.

The power of “Blues For Mama,” derives in part from its place on the blues continuum.¹⁶² The lyrics evince the communal expression of black experience which has been described as a complex interweaving of the general and the specific, and of individual and group experience. Continuing and remaking the blues tradition of early twentieth-century blues women such as Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith, Victoria Spivey, Alberta Hunter, Lucille Hegamin, and Billie Holiday, Simone’s powerful voices challenges the status quo, talks back to stereotypes, and commands respect while giving voice to the diversity of black women’s experiences.

Recorded in Paris in 1982 for the album, *Fodder On My Wings* (Carrere), “I Sing Just to Know That I’m Alive” presents Simone joined by a rhythm section led by long-time guitarist and musical director, Al Shackman, electric bassist Sylvain Marc, percussionists Sydney Thaim and Paca Sery (congas, bells, woodblock and tympani), unidentified horns (trumpet and tenor saxophone), and male background singers. The first voices heard are a male chorus repeating “soukous,” orienting the listener to Africa.¹⁶³ Simone enters in plain speech, “1981. 1981. It’s

¹⁶² I borrow the phrase blues continuum from Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones). For more on the blues continuum see the same-titled chapter in Baraka’s *Blues People: Negro Music In White America*.

¹⁶³ Derived from the French word *secousse* (jerk or shake), soukous is a popular musical genre that originated in the French Congo (Zaire) in the 1930s and early 1940s, and also a popular social dance during the late 1960s. Noted for heavy rumba undertones, features of soukous music include brass and woodwinds, male voices, three or four guitars and lyrics, generally sung in Lingala.

done,” referring to the fact that she had left Geneva, Switzerland, and moved to Paris in 1982.

With textured timbre she soars into long growls the first minute of the song, before launching into *sprechstimme* or talk-singing: “I sing just to know that I’m alive/I play just to feel that I’ll survive/And this birth that’s taken place well holiness is just the case/I sing just to know that I’m alive.” Raspy hollering interspersed with the utterance of rapid nonsensical vocables form the bridge to the final verse: “Mountains they don’t move, no they don’t/And the people they can’t dance and they won’t/ Je chant et je swing /I sing and I swing/I sing just to know that I’m alive.”

Recorded 28 years after her debut, certain aspects of “I Sing Just to Know that I’m Alive,” confirm Simone’s style. For example, she treats the song to sudden and drastic changes in dynamic level, singing in a low register to achieve musical contrast with the band. As John Ohala (1994) observed, such phonetic modifications are often super-imposed on the linguistic message to enhance its meaning; such phonetic modifications are significant to Simone’s music because lyrics often serve a complementary function, bolstering the energy of her music thus shouts and hollers become memorable parts of the song. In other words, while it is axiomatic in (English language) linguistics that the relationship between sound and meaning is arbitrary,

these phonetic practices in music symbolize modifications that are meaningful.¹⁶⁴

CASSANDRA WILSON'S SLEIGHTS OF TIME & POLYTONALITY

A cursory listen to any number of Cassandra Wilson albums reveals the vocalist's finger-snapping counter to the rhythm engaging the band. This rudimentary observation perhaps speaks to the artist's most significant aesthetic trait, for Wilson conceptualizes a temporal approach to each song, and 'time' represents a building block for every musical project. Several seminal studies in African American culture have suggest that time usage is a universal aesthetic applicable to many African diasporic arts. Hurston (1981) and Asante (1991) assert that time manipulation (what musicians tend to refer to as *playing with time*) is vital in African American language and music, while wa Mukuna (1997) conclude that time manipulation is the vital aspect to rhythmic considerations. Holloway (1989) reports that the Gullah concept of time correlates to traditional African concepts of time. He notes that precise times and dates were irrelevant in ordinary converesations, folklore and music. Mbiti (1970) and Pennington (1990) report that many West and East Africans conceptualize time in two dimensions—the long past and the present—which connect the sacred world to the physical world and dictate daily rhythms. Reference to “the long past and the present” was particularly evident in the Black

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

songs of alienation.¹⁶⁵

Time lines are crucial markers of temporal reference in much African ensemble music and an aesthetic tool in the vocality of Cassandra Wilson, who delights in making phrases longer, draping melodies across the bar line, “playing with the time.”¹⁶⁶ Kwabena Nketia (1963) first employed the term “time line” to describe “a constant point of reference by which the phrase structure of a song as well as the linear metrical organization of phrases are guided.” While musicologists have contributed multiple perspectives on time lines (Chernoff, 1979; Kubik, 1972; Nketia, 1963; Nzewi, 1997; Stone, 2005) in consideration of Wilson’s music, Meki Nzewi’s thoughts on time lines as “a phrasing referent, not a structural referent” holds the most value.¹⁶⁷ While Nzewi is speaking to instrumental phrasing, I see the validity in extending this argument to the first instrument, the voice. Nzewi argues that attempts to contrive theoretical notations in African musical creativity are misguided given the dynamic and fluid philosophy of time line usage.¹⁶⁸ Wilson favors an intense vocal attack, grounded in her adroit sense of time line flexibility—anticipating the (musical) changes, but also knowing which melodic or harmonic phrase can be brought to the time line.

¹⁶⁵ Bratcher, *Sound Motion, Blues Spirit, and African Memory*, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Scott Simone, *NPR’s Musicians In Their Own Words*, March 6, 2004.

¹⁶⁷ Meki Nzewi, “African Music: Theoretical Context and Creative Continuum; the Cultural Exponents, Definitions” (Olderhausen, Germany: Institut Für Didatik Populäre Music, 1997) 33-25.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Inspired by Miles Davis and Charlie Parker, from the outset Wilson's vocality

demonstrated difficult intervals associated with hornplaying: "Most vocalists don't hear the way horn players hear. They rely on easy intervals that horn players would never use. The horn players are the ones to study for different approaches to melody. I've trained myself to listen to what they do and how, so I can translate it into my craft, my approach to melody and unusual harmonies." The unusual harmonic spaces Wilson speaks of are usually indefinite and ungrounded, allowing her vocality to be reflective, unconfined by narrative convention. She is inextricably linked to her band, her vocals often overlapping with percussion and piano. Unlike Lincoln who understood her role with the musicians as that of "bandleader," and who was not given to improvisation, Wilson views herself as a member of the band and relishes improvisation, as witnessed in the following exchange with Glen O'Brien of *Bomb* magazine:

GO: How much is improvised from night to night? I mean how is it different from Wednesday to Thursday?

CW: Depends. Each night is very different because of improvisation. The structures are the same, the song forms may or may not be the same as every other night. I want to get the band to the point where we can alter the form right there—you wanna just hang inside of a certain change, or be in a space for a couple more bars than you did the night before and allow room for the development of ideas. That has to happen to keep the music in a growth mode. It has to constantly evolve and, hopefully, takes us from this project to the next.¹⁶⁹

Described by critic Gary Giddins as "a singer blessed with an unmistakable timbre and

attack,” Cassandra Wilson, like Simone and Lincoln, is often cited as having “limited range.”

However, Wilson doesn’t suppress an emotion, rather she is calculating in when to dispense a particular range of emotion in a given song. When questioned about phrasing and singing in general, Wilson said: “I tend to ignore bar lines. It’s more important to me to create the shape that supports the lyrical content and the thought or story behind the lyrics. It’s also musical, a pulling and bending, a contraction of time.”¹⁷⁰ Wilson’s phrasing hinges on three distinct practices: note elongation, reconfiguring tempos, and the creation of new melodies within the context of the song’s foundational melody.

Fans acknowledge Wilson for subjecting popular music to radical reconception. (For example, her versions of Cyndi Lauper’s “Time After Time,” James Taylor’s “Only A Dream in Rio,” Aretha Franklin’s “Angel,” Bob Dylan’s “Lay Lady Lay,” Stevie wonder’s “If It’s Magic,” Jimmie Webb’s “Wichita Lineman,” and Neil Young’s “Harvest Moon.”) However, the early decision to compose her own song was inspired by alto-saxophonist/composer and M-Base founder, Steve Coleman and Abbey Lincoln, for whom the singer provided background vocals during the mid-eighties when Lincoln was returning to the stage after more than a decade of non-recording. In lyric structure, Wilson’s songwriting style is more closely related to

¹⁶⁹ Glen O’Brien, “Cassandra Wilson,” *Bomb Magazine*, Spring 1999, 34.

¹⁷⁰ Cassandra Wilson. Personal Communication. 27 December 2005.

Simone's in that her lyrics are generally brief, yet they are rendered by a full, rich and remarkable timbre which itself adds force to every phrase sung. Also similar to Simone, Wilson often imbues her lyrics with tonal shading by alternating between throaty projections and whispers. Her vocal performances can sound more akin to incantation, like she is praying aloud or repeating a mantra, than what listeners have come to associate as jazz singing. This is especially evident on the original songs explored later in this section: "Redbone," "A Little Warm Death," and "Heaven Knows."

Musically, however, Wilson approaches a song differently as evidence in her negotiation of melorhythm. The most obvious melodic feature of all of Wilson's originals shares the extensive use of repeated pitches, which frequently are accompanied by rhythmic motifs—pitches of short durational value followed by those of longer value.¹⁷¹ Her melorhythmic sensibility is further illustrated in the manner she consistently syncopates the downbeat, but refrains from attacking strong syllables à la Lincoln, which brings us to the distinctly different singing style distinguishing Wilson and Lincoln. The latter favors pronounced diction in song delivery where Wilson strives to imbue her lyrics with musicality, and her diction has garnered criticism. Critics often cite the artist as having difficulty with or intentionally foregoing word

¹⁷¹ Portia K. Maultsby, "West African Influences and Retentions in U. S. Black Music: A Sociocultural Study" in Irene Jackson-Brown, ed. *More than Dancing* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1985), 25-55.

articulation. Not least among the diction police is Wilson's role model, Abbey Lincoln. In an interview with Wayne Enstice, after listening to "Hellhound On My Trail" from Wilson's 1993 Blue Note album *Blue Light Til Dawn*, Lincoln said:

I have a hard time sometimes understanding what the story is, because I don't always understand the words she uses. She has a wonderful sound, got her own sound. But I never can get lost in the story she's telling because it's hard for me to hear what she's saying. It's her sound more than the words that you hear. I don't know what she's talking about. The queens would tell you a story, and you understood every word they said. I think Cassandra should fix this.¹⁷²

Lincoln's criticism of Wilson's singing style, is, of course, informed by her own approach to singing. She places a premium on articulation; she wants to "get lost in the story." Lincoln is not alone in her criticism of Wilson's (lack of) articulation.

Critics who have described Cassandra Wilson's singing as lacking in articulation are really hearing the occurrence of microtonality. Jazz Critic Kevin Whitehead represents the league of critics uninformed about the African musical traditions many African American singers draw upon. Whitehead ends his otherwise laudatory review of Wilson's September 2002 concert, featured as part of Chicago's Summer Jazz Fest, with:

When [Wilson] drops to a quiet moment, chances are she'll sink beneath her accompaniment. Syllables drift off or run together, whawuzat? Seems a shame to squander those good words....OK with me if Wilson wants to step over the borders of jazz; she's staked out her own turf, and more

¹⁷² Enstice, *Jazzwomen*, 210.

power to her. But I wish she'd recommit herself to a jazz singer's sense of rhythmic incisiveness and virtuoso articulation. Then she'd have it all.¹⁷³

Lincoln's and Whiteheads' criticism do not consider Wilson's more musical approach to a lyric, an approach that prioritizes sound quality over semantic meaning, Wilson explains in an interview:

I use that conversational approach when I write lyrics. I don't think about poetry and how everything is supposed to be. I think about the sounds of the lyrics, and how the words mesh; not so much about what they mean. So people sometimes have problems with my lyrics because they don't often understand what I'm trying to say. But I feel if you sing the lyrics and get the sound across correctly, then you should get meaning from the overall sound of it. So I like to choose words that mean what I want them to mean, but also that have a certain sound.

In other words, for Wilson, her approach is premised on sound before sense, emotion before technique. Moreover, Lincoln and Wilson's different approaches to vocalicity could be understood in terms of enunciation versus pronunciation. Here, Barthes' discussion of Panzéra, in the article "Music, Voice, Language" is useful. Barthes observes that articulation "involves the singer in a highly ideological art of expressivity—or, to be even more precise, of dramatization."¹⁷⁴ Yet, Barthes warns that in some cases articulation "explodes into the music,"

¹⁷³ Kevin Whitehead, "Wilson Wows With Creative Set List," *Chicago Sun Times*, September 16, 2002.

¹⁷⁴ Barthes, "Music, Voice, and Language," in *Responsibility of Forms: New Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), 283.

and that “language is the intruder, the nuisance of music.”¹⁷⁵ Contrarily, singers such as Cassandra Wilson are mindful of pronunciation yet bend and shape words thus enabling “music to enter the language.”¹⁷⁶ Take humming, for instance, Wilson’s signature polytonal device which adds music to language. Sometimes the humming, the bending and shaping of her words renders her delivery so “sumptuous” it causes critics such as British music writer Adam Schatz to go as far as to say the singer should abandon language altogether. In a review published in the U.K.’s *Guardian*, Schatz writes:

[Wilson’s] voice is sumptuous the way Lauren Bacall’s was, and because it is more sumptuous than a voice has any right to be, it wavers perilously between seductiveness and self-parody. She’s at her best in songs with few lyrics or none at all. There her voice can be savoured for its lucious timbre. Her own songs tend to be wordy, which is a problem because words have a way of melting upon impact with her voice which is disorienting to the listener.

Schatz’s observation that Wilson’s voice is best revealed in songs without words suggests the listener’s lack of experience with microtonal expression which results in singing the word with a unique bending of the note. Listeners unable to recognize micro-tonality in words sung may face a challenge when listening to Wilson. However, this observation suggest a lack of listening experience of microtonal music rather than the Communications degree-holder’s lack of articulation.

Whereas Lincoln and Simone performed the groans of torture and wails of grief earlier in

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

their careers, Wilson's vocality was distinguished by timbre, melodic humming and deliberate sighs of aspiration. Perhaps this signals a generational shift; Lincoln and Simone represent those who fought for Civil Rights and Wilson is a recipient of those hard-won battles; yet some objectives of mid-twentieth century social movements remain not fully realized. Of the three vocalists, Cassandra Wilson employs the greater usage of intricate tonal and accentual systems. In any given song she will sing very low and also employ sounds where aspiration is realized resulting in what we would consider a breathy voice.¹⁷⁷ The projection of airy tones with deep timbre effect what the Robert G. O'Meally called: "breathy flights above or behind the beat," or what critic Stanley Crouch described as "singing through her skin, not her throat" with a "voice [that] has the onomatopoetic sound of the woman alone." For example, in her cover of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Waters of March" (*Belly of the Sun*, Blue Note, 2002), aspiration serves as punctuation (deliberate breaths are audible after she recites each item on Jobim's list); in Wilson's hands Jobim's lyrically obtuse song is transformed into a tone poem, a practice that can be traced back to Wilson's earliest recordings with M-Base, where the singer honed an unusual sound by interjecting moans, glides, bends and dips, and irregular phrasing rhythmically punctuate the song. A prime example of this is on Wilson's performance of Billy Strayhorn's

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid 131.

classic tune, “Chelsea Bridge.” From the singer’s 1990 JMT album, *She Who Weeps*, Wilson’s rendition of Chelsea Bridge features the singer’s voice in tandem with the musicians—Steve Coleman on alto saxophone, Jean-Paul Bourelly on guitar, Lonnie Plaxico on bass and Mark Johnson on drums. It is common practice in jazz when a vocalist wants to show her “chops” that she scat sing for the duration of a song—like Anita O’Day’s “Four Brothers,” and “Slaughter on 10th Avenue,” Sarah Vaughan’s “Shulie-abop,” Ella Fitzgerald’s “C Jam Blues” or Betty Carter’s “With No Words.” Wilson chooses to employ a reed-like polytonality which includes moans, wails, and hums in “Chelsea Bridge” where language only enters in the final fifty seconds of the song. In the previous five minutes, Wilson freestyles, improvising polytonality through various uses of meaningless vocables (not intended to imitate a horn line scat) characterized by ethnomusicologists as “off-harmony African tone unison,” but correctly understood by Olly Wilson (1999) as the “heterogeneous sound ideal,” or polycentrism of sound in multiple tones.

Let us first consider Wilson’s employment of black English Vernacular in her song “Redbone,” off her debut Blue Note album, *Blue Light Till Dawn* (1993). Beginning with a call-and-response percussion duet between Cyro Baptista and Jeffrey Haynes, Wilson begins the song with polytonal expression. She groans into the song, hinting to listeners that the song will

present a problem:

I heard the women at the church say, just the other day,
 you know she live too hard
 I heard the women at the church say, just the other day,
 you know that girl live too hard
 They say redbone girl's got a problem, stayed up all night,
 she drank whiskey, she got in a fight
 Redbone girl's got a problem, stayed up all night,
 she drank whiskey, she got in a fight
 redbone
 redbone¹⁷⁸

Like Simone's "Blues For Mama," Casssandra Wilson's "Redbone" gains its power in part from its lyrical usage of African-American vernacular. In his work *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* (1984), Houston Baker develops the ways in which black expressive culture gains its purchase with AVE by grounding the black literary idiom in the cultural matrix of African-American musical expression. Black hegemony has often created antagonistic zones of communication among black women of different class and spiritual backgrounds, and this tension creates unique dialectal spaces for black men. As in the case of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "Redbone" builds on rumor and community oppression, for it is the church women who adopt 'Redbone girl' as the subject of their gossip. The gossiping women of the church are traditional Christians who believe in one God, unlike Redbone girl, who according to the last line of the final verse, "loves her gods." In Demetria Royal's film

Conjure Women Wilson calls out the names of several Yoruban gods during her performance of the song. Thus, among a traditional church-going community, ‘Redbone girl’ is not only an outsider because “she lives too hard” and “cut men folk with a razor,” but also because of her spiritual practices. In other words, none of Redbone girl’s visible attributes are in alignment with the community’s ‘Politics of respectability’ (Higginbotham, 1996; Robnett, 1997; Shaw, 1996; Schechter, 2001; Terborg-Penn, 1998; Deborah Gray White, 1999; E. Fran White, 2001; Wolcott, 2001). The last verse reads:

Redbone girl’s going to heaven, she loves her Gods,
 she prays every night, cause she live real hard
 Redbone girl’s going to heaven, she loves her Gods,
 she prays every night, cause she live real hard
 redbone...redbone.

Set against the collective voice is that of speaker, who distances herself from the events she narrates, and the occasional refrain, which is the voice of the community: Redbone girl got a problem. The interactions among these voices, the constant interplay makes for shifting perspectives and sets up a dialogic tension like that in Lincoln’s and Simone’s “Blues for Mama.” This feature is prevalent in a great number of popular song lyrics. However, what is distinct about these songs in the hands of Simone and Wilson is that they tell us about black community dynamics and black womens’ realities.

¹⁷⁸ Cassandra Wilson, *Blue Light Til Dawn*, Blue Note Records compact disc 0777 7 81357 2 2; 1993.

Like, “Blues For Mama,” “Redbone Girl” derives its cultural significance from the fact that the song’s narrator does not complain about the injustices white America has inflicted on her community, but rather the lyrics demonstrate inner-(black)communal conflict by observing the clash between individual and dominant values, a project whereby listening audiences learn to resist the notion of a monolithic black community. For as black music scholar Guthrie Ramsey reminds us, it is important to remember that the diverse and sprawling processes we think of as African American culture (such as the blues) did not develop simply as a response to hegemony, racism and social oppression but as viable communicative responses to each other.¹⁷⁹ Hence, songs like Simone and Lincoln’s “Blues For Mama,” and “Redbone” debunk dominant social narratives and speak directly to the psychic wounds generated within black communities.

Although Wilson demonstrates scatting ability on “standards” concept albums like *Blue Skies* (JMT 1988) and *Rendezvous* (Blue Note 1997), interestingly, she resists polytonal devices like groaning and humming in her interpretation of jazz standards, which may point to the singer’s philosophy that jazz standards should be sung “straight,” a philosophy she would share with Lincoln. However, in the performance of original songs (and covers of popular music), the vocalist eschews scatting for polytonal vocalizations such as humming and moaning in most of

¹⁷⁹ Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Race Music*, 24.

her recordings. Thus, certain phonological markers are as much a tool for songwriting for the artist as the words themselves. For example, in songs such as “The Weight,” “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” (*New Moon Daughter*, Blue Note 1995) and “Time After Time” (*Traveling Miles*, Blue Note 1999), the last word (always a single syllable) of a line is resolved by humming. The result is phrasing distinguishable from all other vocalists because where the listener does not anticipate a break, Wilson inserts one, while still remaining true to the song’s melody. In this manner, she establishes a new and unique time signature. Typically Wilson will hum to bridge lines or phrases (“Hellhound On My Trail” and “The Weight”), and verses (as in “Find Him,” “Seven Steps” and “Heaven Knows”), or to introduce instrumental solos (hear, for example, “Honey Bee” and “Never Broken”). Wilson’s humming marks the close or the outro of a song like in “Sankofa,” “When The Sun Goes Down,” “Crazy,” “Lay Lady Lay,” and “Broken Drum.” In fact, humming is such a prevalent practice in Wilson’s singing that more than half of her recordings are marked by a humming intro or humming outro.¹⁸⁰

From the 1996 *New Moon Daughter*, “A Little Warm Death” (a euphemism for physical love) receives support from bassist Lonnie Plaxico, guitarists Kevin Brei and Gib Wharton, percussionist Cyro Baptista, drummer Dougie Bowne and a stunning violin performance by

¹⁸⁰ For songs that demonstrate a humming intro hear: “Black Crow,” “Body and Soul,” “Chelsea Bridge,” “Only A Dream in Rio,” “Seven Steps,” For humming outros hear: “Broken Drum,” “Closer To You,” “Crazy,” “Days of

Regina Carter. Lyrically, the song is not a love ballad but an exhortation. Verses are bound together both by lyrical sound and rhythmic sense; both drive an unstinting, unflinching pulse underlying the desired mating ritual. As usual in Wilson's musical arrangement during her Blue Note tenure, horns are omitted for the silvery sounds of percussion. Here, shakers provide ostinati; the triangle peeps through—a ray of light. Wilson's voice enters a rhythmic tapestry enjoined with new syncopation created by a rubber tub. A stand out song for its straight-ahead approach (it is one of the few songs where Wilson does not hum into the verse, or during as a bridge between lines), a few aesthetic choices enliven the start: Wilson arches her voice on the word "away," and the repetition sense in the phrase "one little warm death," where Wilson swoops as low as a baritone on the words "warm death."

A little warm death
 A little warm death won't hurt you none
 Come on relax with me
 Let me take *away* your physicality
 One little warm death, come have
 One little warm death with me tonight

It is her signature style of playing with the time that lends each vocal performance the element of surprise we have come to associate with truly great jazz singers. For example, when Wilson sings the phrase "/moon and tarry breathlessness/" she disrupts the expected stress pattern on the word "breathlessness," by lingering unexpectantly on the preceding word ("tarry")

Wine and Roses," "Drunk as Cooter Brown," "Heaven Knows," "Lay Lady Lay," "Little Lion," "Waters of March,"

which makes the line slightly off-kilter, although it works melodically. Unlike Lincoln, who attaches her phrasing strictly to the melody, Wilson often intentionally riffs off the melody, singing across bar lines. Here is the line in full verse context:

A little sweet death
moon and tarry breathlessness
Feels like eternity
there's nobody here, just you and me
One little warm death, come have
One little sweet death with me tonight

The repetition sense signals the song's climax, followed by Wilson's breathless utterance—"hey"—and followed by Regina Carter's violin, which acts as an extension of Wilson's phrasing (until minute 2:24), when she breaks into a romping solo, over which Wilson's humming floats.

Generally, a Wilson song's outro signals a winding down of all instruments, but here Wilson's group brings the antithesis. The rhythm section lays back a little, but the groove still seethes while the vocals cut loose unlike at any other point in the song. Wilson's voice gains intensity. Snapping and clapping her way through repeated urgings, she doubles up the phrase: "/one little warm death oh one, one little warm death/" groaning and eliding through. In the particularly delightful phrasing Wilson brings to the line "/I wann love you-love/" (4:28), she sings the single-syllable four-letter word (love) for five measures. The mixture of the narrator's

personal desire and excitement boils over and becomes a collective rhythmic trance akin to the ring shout.¹⁸¹ In the last half-minute of the song background singers drop in to harmonize with Wilson.

For an example of stylistic humming and the “contraction of time,” we turn to the oft-used theme in Wilson’s oeuvre—female articulation of desire embeded in the original “Heaven Knows” (*Glamoured*, Blue Note, 2003). To this song, Wilson brings to an aesthetic of “coolness” best described by Robert Ferris Thompson: “mystical coolness in Africa has changed in urban Afro-American assertions of independent power...[but] the name, cool, remains...the body [or sound] is still played in two patterns, one stable, the other active, part energy, part mind [and] this image [is] indelible...resistant to western materialist forces...similar to the shaping of the melodies of Africa.”¹⁸² This passage demonstrates the degree to which the forging of two patterns enlivens Afrodiasporic art, especially music, an idea Wilson draws on in the vocal arrangement of a song, where her penchant for experimentation with polymeters is revealed.¹⁸³ Even before the story begins, “Heaven Knows” threatens to carry you away with the band’s lush sway. Her voice finds richness amid Marvin Sewell’s guitar riffing. Jeffrey Haynes’s

¹⁸¹ Bratcher, *Sound Motion & Spirit*, 119.

¹⁸² Robert Ferris Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, 45.

¹⁸³ Wilson’s play with polymeters can be heard in numerous songs. One of this author’s favorites is “Voodoo Reprise” from *Traveling Miles* (Blue Note, 1999), which features the rhythm section in a deadlock 6/4 while Wilson sings in 4/4.

percussion is a key driving force. Gregoire Maret, who had recently started to tour with Wilson as a fixed member of her band, “Go Tell My Horse” lightens what could be an aurally cavernous tune, his harmonica’s silvery sound the perfect spectrum end to Wilson’s contralto. Wilson lays back on the beat, her singing—“part energy, part mind” actively producing a day-dream of a shimmering love song, the impetus behind the vocalist’s choice of *Glamoured* for the album’s title, referring to the Gaelic sense of the word: “an air of compelling charm; a magic spell; enchantment.”

Wilson sings in a voice laden with timbre, but here she is particularly invested in exploiting the lower range for rich tones that evoke scenes of allurement. According to John Murph’s review of the album in the November 2003 issue of *JazzTimes*, “On songs like her self-penned “Heaven Knows” and “Broken Drum,” her caressing voice can be so bewitching that sometimes the lyrics become secondary. That can be problematic, especially considering how carefully she chooses her material.”

I know how to climb the mountain range,
 the rough terrain inside of you.
 Complicated paths that twist and wind,
 I know I’ll find my way in you.
 Even when you groan and frown,
 I hear the sound of pure delight in you
 Let me be the one who feeds your soul.
 Let me be your heaven knows.

She changes register moving from dulcet headtones like those employed on “I know how to

climb...” to deeper chest tones. She expresses lines like: “Even when you groan and frown I hear the sound...” using *ciret*.¹⁸⁴ Such phrasing makes Wilson’s storytelling emotional and adventurous. By the end of the first stanza we understand that Wilson’s vocal matches the narrator’s aim to charm, possibly even seduce her love interest. Wilson invokes polytonality, humming into the second verse where the rhythmic support that is supple and full of quiet restraint, a powerful resonance in a languid atmosphere undergirding Wilson’s lyric built, which juxtaposes natural themes (“song of trees” and “everlasting spring”) with urban images (“city streets”), the setting for what one gleans has been a lovely courtship:

I know how to sing the song of trees,
and city streets that flow through you
Cold and discontent, I smell the scent
of everlasting spring in you.
Even when you turn away,
I know the play is just beginning.
I could be the one who feeds your soul,
I could be your heaven knows.

Following the bridge and a brief acoustic guitar solo by Sewell, the song shifts into a sensuously driving tempo. Thus the spirit of romance is conjured. In the final verse, we hear Wilson expand the time by extending the length of notes at climactic points, which happen to fall on the action words *zoom* and *defusing*, and adding vocal cadenzas through humming.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Bratcher, *Sound Motion and Spirit*, 121.

¹⁸⁵ Maultsby, “Africanisms in African American Music,” 192.

I know how dance in secret rooms
 while cameras zoom right in on you.
 Frame by frame defusing space and time,
 I'll be the rhyme that centers you.
 When the world is far away,
 and no one sees the pain you're going through
 let me be the one who soothes your.
 I could be your heaven knows.

This section has attempted to provide tools for understanding how each artist makes meaning within her dominant stylistic traits, and think about those traits in linguistic terms and also in terms of a black vocal art tradition. The powerful linguistic mechanisms of polytonal wordless expression, microtonality and phonosemantics interact with other performance strategies such as gesture, dance, costume and, of critical importance to this work, songwriting to constitute an artform that becomes part of the culture, transforms that culture, and whose vitality ensures continued growth and transformation. When language is transformed to deep, metaphorical, poetic, sacred, ritual language it becomes critical language. To fully understand the ways in which lyrics written by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson contribute to a metalanguage of black women's experiences across the African Diaspora it is necessary to examine their lyrics for distinctive philosophies. During each artist's performance, there are significant narrative practices at play in the original songs which suggest shared philosophical traits in the practice of lyric writing. In Chapters Four and Five I investigate the content of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson's lyrics for these common traits.

4

**“MY NAME IS PEACHES!”:
READING LYRICS AS WOMANIST
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

My skin is brown
My manner is tough!
I'll kill the first mutha I see
My life has been rough
I'm awfully bitter these days
Because my parents were slaves
What do they call me?
My name is Peaches!¹⁸⁶
—Nina Simone, “Four Women”

In September of 1966, following her first international bestseller (*I Put A Spell On You*), Nina Simone released her fifth album on the Philips label. Unique for its hybrid nature (the eleven songs presented were recorded for other albums released between 1964 and 1966), *Wild Is The Wind* maintained a place on *Down Beat*'s chart for twenty weeks, rare for a “jazz” vocal album during that period or any. Unquestionably, the standout piece on the album is Simone's own “Four Women,” an enduring classic. In her autobiography Simone recalls of the song:

The women in the song are black, but their skin tones range from light to dark and their ideas of beauty and their own importance are deeply influenced by that. All the song did was tell what entered the minds of most black women

¹⁸⁶ Nina Simone, *Nina Simone Sings Nina*, Verve compact disc 314 529 867-2.

in America when they thought about themselves; their complexions, their hair—straight, kinky, natural which?—and what other women thought of them.¹⁸⁷

The writer Joel Siegel described “Four Women” as “brief, incisive portraits reflecting the experiences and generational perspectives of a variegated quartet of black women.”¹⁸⁸ For Patricia Hill Collins the four women represent what she describes in *Black Feminist Thought* as the “controlling images” of black womanhood. Citing ‘Aunt Sarah,’ ‘Saphronia,’ ‘Sweet Thing,’ and ‘Peaches’ Collins writes, “Simone explores black women’s objectification as the Other by invoking the pain these women actually feel.”¹⁸⁹

Beginning where the black woman enters the American saga—the slave plantation—Simone presents us with “Aunt Sarah” whose “back is strong enough to take the pain that’s been inflicted again and again” by the slaver’s whip. The second verse introduces “Saphronia” whose “father was rich and white” and “forced her mother late one night.” The third model of the black female ‘Other,’ “Sweet Thing,” can be “yours if you have some money to buy.” Simone posits black women’s historical experience with sexual assault in her depictions of “Saphronia” and “Sweet Thing.” In antebellum America, black women were typified as sexually promiscuous. Supported by the belief that black women were perpetually aroused and desirous

¹⁸⁷ Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), 117.

¹⁸⁸ Sylvia Hampton with David Nathan, *Nina Simone: Break Down And Let It All Out* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2004), 27.

¹⁸⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 113.

of sexual intercourse, the characterization of ‘promiscuous’ not only justified the routine rape of women slaves by white men but also rendered black women complicit in their own sexual abuse.¹⁹⁰ Simone also invokes the image of Jezebel (the stereotypic lascivious or sexually loose black woman) in her creation of *Sweet Thing*. The song ends with “Peaches” whose story is the epigraph to this chapter. (Simone’s choice of the nickname Peaches is an ironic one since black life in America with all of its pecuniary and social difficulty has been anything but *peachy*.) Unlike the three women who come before her—victims of labor and sexual exploitation—Peaches is neither. In her own words she is “awfully bitter these days because my parents were slaves.” As a cultural trope Peaches embodies an inchoate spirit of social protest experienced by many blacks prior to and during the Civil Rights era, and exemplified in Simone’s enraged yelling of the song’s final line: “My name is Peaches!”

When “Four Women” was released in 1966 some black radio stations banned the song because they believed it insulted black women.¹⁹¹ In retrospect, Simone has asserted that “the song told a truth that many people in the USA—specifically black men—simply weren’t ready to acknowledge at that time.”¹⁹² According to Simone biographer Sylvia Nathan, “Four

¹⁹⁰ Helen A. Neville and Jennifer Hamer, “‘We Make Freedom’: An Exploration of Revolutionary Black Feminism,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 4 (2001): 455.

¹⁹¹ Simone, *I Put a Spell On You*, 117.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

Women” was still one of the most requested songs in Simone’s repertoire until her last concert in 2002.

Like many other black women vocalists and lyricists, in her performance of “Four Women” Nina Simone positioned herself as an important culture bearer and chronicler of black history. Yet with the exception of works by Michele Russell, Angela Y. Davis, Tricia Rose and Hazel Carby, scholars have neglected to mine black women’s lyrics for the cultural and gendered values and expressions embedded therein. Since song lyrics tend to be *autoethnographic* in nature and not ethnographic—that is, “they disobey the prime directive of ethnographic writing: that one must cross some kind of cultural boundary and explain another life distant from one’s own”¹⁹³—to analyze popular song lyrics is to go against the grain of scholarly objectivity. However, inasmuch as they comprise a viable tool for deciphering the experiences, beliefs and deepest feelings of their originators, black women’s song lyrics represent historical documentation. Drawing on the repertoires of singer-songwriters Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson, this chapter aims to highlight the degree to which musical discourse reveals the real-life experiences, the “ethnographic truth”—to borrow from

¹⁹³ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23.

black music scholar Guthrie Ramsey—of black women’s communities.

Western culture supports the notion that education filters down from the academy to the community. Subsequently, the intellectual validity of sources that derive from the non-academic community—like popular music—are often called into question. Such posturing discourages scholars from drawing on the experiences of everyday people to shape academic discourse, in particular theory. The problematics surrounding what constitutes source material or experience worthy of analysis has, unfortunately, narrowed the perception and production of theory in an Afrodiasporan context. Prior to the publication of Angela Y. Davis’s *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998) no book took as its sole focus the theorization of songs written and performed by black women. The absence of scholarship on black women’s songs derives from the academic perspective that songs are emotional, ephemeral, physical and accessible. Yet, as critic Barbara Christian reminds us, significant portions of black cultural production are at their core theoretical despite their general accessibility. In her book chapter, “The Race for Theory,” Christian writes:

People of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in songs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very

humanity?...My folks, in other words, have always been a race for theory.¹⁹⁴

Seminal studies in African American culture echo Christian's argument for the 'race for theory.' Newbell Puckett (1926/2003), W. E. B. DuBois (1939), Zora Neale Hurston (1981), Charles Spurgeon Johnson (1940), and Lorenzo Dow Turner (1945) each hypothesized that African and Afrodiasporic philosophical principles are pervasive in folkways, music, dance, religious beliefs—even burial customs. This dissertation operates from the premise that popular black female vocal performance represents an embodiment of knowledge and theorizing in opposition to the academy's print bias. Despite song lyrics' ability to bring previously occluded black experience and history to light, musicology, to a very large extent still the study of European composers and their compositional strategies, has proven resistant to embracing black women's music. In recent years Ethnomusicology and the relatively new field of Jazz Studies have witnessed the proliferation of studies geared to black music analysis. However, publication in both fields reveals a predilection for "compositional masculinity," a term created by scholar and dramaturg Edward David Miller to explain musicologists' rationalization of male mastery over music's mathematical linearity.¹⁹⁵ My goal here is to offer a theoretical lens for reading

¹⁹⁴ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," in *The Black Feminist Reader*, eds. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 13.

¹⁹⁵ See for example the detailed musical analyses of music by male composers such as Ken Rattenburg's *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer* (1990); Mark Turker's *Ellington: The Early Years* (1995); Ingrid Monson's *Saying Something* (1996); Henry Martin's *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation* (1996); Juha Henriksson's *Chasing*

and interpreting the lyrics of black women that cuts across traditional boundaries of canon, genre and academic discipline. My objective is two-fold: (1) to explore how these artists' lyrics reveal womanist philosophy and (2) to show how an autoethnographic reading of the lyrics illustrates how black female singers (and their original songs) theorize on themes at the core of African American life, for as anthropologist Elliot Skinner notes, "If the paradigms are to be useful, they must be filtered through the black experience before being judged universal and not simply hegemonic."¹⁹⁶ Analysis of songs featuring the dissemination of cultural values, community uplift (a concept that foremost attends to uplifting the black family) and the struggle against racism, serve us on such an expedition.

WHY NINA SIMONE, ABBEY LINCOLN AND CASSANDRA WILSON AREN'T FEMINISTS

With *American Women in Jazz: Nineteen Hundred to the Present* (1982) and *Stormy Weather: The Music and Lives of a Century of Jazz Women* (1984), Sally Placksin and Linda Dahl sparked a growing trend within Jazz Studies toward feminist essentialism. These works seek to explain the sexism in male-dominated jazz arenas by drawing a connection between the

the Bird (1998); Lewis Porter's *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (1998); Graham Lock's *Blutopia* (1999); Peter Lavezzoli's *King of All, Sir Duke* (2001); Paul Tingen's *Miles Beyond* (2001); Yves Buin's *Thelonious Monk* (2002); Alan Goldsher's *Hard Bop Academy* (2002); George Cole's *The Last Miles* (2005) and Travis Jackson's forthcoming, *Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (2012).

¹⁹⁶ Elliot P. Skinner, "Hegemonic Paradigms and the African World: Striving to Be Free," in Darlene Clark Hine and Jacquelyn McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 55.

celebrated jazz pantheon (overwhelmingly male) and misogyny. Questioning the efficacy of such studies, Joan Wallach Scott in her important article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” observed the pitfalls of feminist historians whose descriptive (as opposed to theoretical) approaches fail to address dominant disciplinary concepts “in terms that can shake their power and perhaps transform them.”¹⁹⁷ Scott contends that it has not been enough for historians of women to prove that women had a history—precisely the aim of feminist jazz studies most concerned with biographizing little-known female jazz players (*see* Bennett-Lowe 2000; Dahl 1984; Gourse 1995; Hill 1992; Leder 1985; Placksin 1982; Unterbrink 1983).¹⁹⁸ While historians often rely on descriptive usages of gender to chart new terrain, this approach leads to description-based history void of theoretical formulations useful to the discipline. My discussion on the ways the lyrics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson explain *how* gender makes meaning in black communities is driven by questions of gender analysis which undergird much of Africana womanist discourse (Amadiume 1987; Brown 1989; Cannon 1985; Dove 1998; Hudson-Weems 1993, 2003; Ogunyemi 1985; Riggs 1994; Sanders 1992; Walker 1983). To better understand how this music creates meaning within black communities, and what it represents in terms of gender relations, this work is guided by questions such as: How does

¹⁹⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review*, no. 5 (1986): 1055.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

gender ascribe meaning to the perception of black families? Historically, what role has gender played in the black struggle against racism? And, in the social context of black hegemony, how have black women's musically articulated gender roles among themselves?

Despite the areas of convergence between feminism and womanism, namely that women are oppressed on multiple interlocking levels, it is important to establish why feminism is not an appropriate framework for analyzing lyrics written by these three artists. The tendency of feminist analysis to privilege gender as the single most important determinant of identity undermines the critical role of black cultural identity and its traditions (many of which are manifest in music). Focused on how for black and white women gendered identity has been reconstructed and represented in very different, indeed antagonistic and racialized contexts, historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham emphasizes the problematics of feminism.¹⁹⁹ She asserts that any assessment of the ways in which race and gender inform identity must be framed historically. Herein lies the premise for my adoption of Africana womanism—instead of feminism—as a theoretical lens. Feminism not only presupposes a shared experience of women resulting in discourse often essentialist and ahistorical, but as Higginbotham points out, American feminist analysis emerges from an understanding of American historical development of gendered identities whereas Africana womanism aims to consider transnational historical

developments of racialized gendered identities.²⁰⁰ (This, too, might explain how the original womanist lyrics of transnational black female singer-songwriters such as Angelique Kidjo (Benin), Miriam Makeba (South Africa), Sade (England), and Caron Wheeler (England)—to name a few—enjoy significant “cross over” appeal reflected in album sales and their international touring schedules.) It is through an understanding of the effects of slavery and colonialism on *all* black communities that Africana womanist praxis seeks to change social consciousness and material conditions of black women, men and children globally, an idea reflected in the following quote by womanist theorist Chikwenye Ogunyemi:

Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a “brother” or a “sister” or a “father” or a “mother” to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core: its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels.²⁰¹

The popular idea that Africana womanism is a strand or subponent of feminism suggests that womanism emerged among women of color solely as a result of racism in the white feminist movement, an inaccurate perception that wholly negates the agency of black women activists.

¹⁹⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 17, no.2 (1992): 251-75.

²⁰⁰ Ibid 272.

²⁰¹ The fact that Nigerian scholars and black American writers and scholars developed the concept of womanism at roughly the same time points to the fact that on a global scale black women experience oppression similarly.

This work operates from this premise: because African-American women are differentially located in a race and class hierarchy and, historically, their social status has been quite different from white women, womanism cannot be subsumed under feminism.

The artists featured in this chapter do not identify as feminists nor do they consider their roles as musicians in any way an extension of feminism. In part this stems from the popular notion in black communities that feminism is a white ideology that seeks to elevate women's status to that of their male counterparts, and in part, it is because many black women do not wish to be put on the same level as their men, who in great numbers remain oppressed. In her assertion that black women have to aim much higher than the white feminist, Ogunyemi stresses that black womanists have to "knit the world's black family together" to achieve black, not just female, transcendence.²⁰² Feminism's reputation as white women's praxis notwithstanding, the fact that the musical leadership of black music has been primarily male may also explain the attitude toward feminism shared by Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. For the singers under discussion, feminism might be construed as a rejection of the African American cultural sensibilities and ideas of sociability that define the interactional value between men and women inherent in black music making. Consider Lincoln's early work with

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English,"

(former husband) Max Roach, Oscar Brown Jr., John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk; Cassandra

Wilson's close collaboration with M-BASE (a Brooklyn-based funk collective that included musicians Lonnie Plaxico, Steve Coleman and Greg Osby), Henry Threadgill's trio, AIR, and guitarist Marvin Sewell; and Simone's thirty year professional relationship with guitarist and musical director Al Shackman, not to mention her lyrical collaborations with Bajan composer Tony McKay, James Baldwin and Langston Hughes. In other words, these artists did not create in a vacuum, certainly not a feminized one, but among and *with* male artists. Such ideas are reflected in the following brief comments on feminism made by the artists themselves:

NS: I never thought of myself as part of women's liberation because I felt the questions white female radicals were asking had no relevance to me.²⁰³

CW: I'm not into feminism. I like to see everybody together—the male and the female. I don't want to see an all-man's festival, although, invariable, that's what it turns out to be when you have a jazz festival.²⁰⁴

AL: I'm not interested in any feminist thing. I have a friend, Cobi Narita, who produces feminist jazz festivals, and I told her more than once, 'Don't include me. Go somewhere else.' Feminists have nothing to do with this music, and I don't want to be someplace where there are not any men around.²⁰⁵

In an interview with Amiri Baraka published in *JazzTimes*, Lincoln sounded off on her

Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society 11, no. 1 (1985): 72.

²⁰² Chikwenye Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," 69.

²⁰³ Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 117.

²⁰⁴ Wayne Enstice and Janis Stockhouse, *Jazzwomen: Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 207.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid* 197.

dislike of gender-focused jazz programming. She also seized the opportunity to voice the high premium for originality placed on male jazz artists who expect to thrive in this musical tradition:

AL: I'm tired of them talking about 'women in the music,' like it's new. Women have always been in *this* music. But the men have been at the front of it. The men have a hard time keeping a standard *that* individual. If the work is to be seen it has to be original. Otherwise you can kick his booty butt off the stage.²⁰⁶

Explicit in the quotes of Abbey Lincoln and Cassandra Wilson is a sense that feminism disconnects them from male musicianship and leadership. Numerous interviews reveal that these artists do not view their musical output as limited by male domination. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Lincoln told music writer Sally Placksin: "When I was with Max Roach, when we collaborated, that's when I learned what this music is. He was a great teacher for me."²⁰⁷ In addition to bestowing the moniker "great teacher" on Roach, Lincoln often stated that Thelonious Monk was the first to label her a composer, thus encouraging her to fully embrace songwriting. Similarly, Wilson credits composer/alto saxophonist Steve Coleman for pushing her towards the originality requisite for jazz singing. Shortly after moving from New Orleans to New York City in 1982 (four years before recording her debut album as a leader, *Point of View*, on the JMT label), Wilson's work with Coleman began. Wilson described Coleman's early tutelage:

²⁰⁶ Amiri Baraka, "Abbey Lincoln: Straight Ahead," *JazzTimes*, January/February 2001.

Steve told me, ‘You’ll never accomplish anything in this music if you imitate people. Bird and Sarah Vaughan have already said what they’re going to say. You need to say what you’re supposed to say. Who are you? You have to develop an individual sound. I can help you do that.’ It was really challenging, but I felt empowered by learning how to deal with Steve’s music. He always expected me to be able to do that. I appreciated that about him. He was so advanced, but he respected what I brought to the music—the intuitive aspect of my approach.²⁰⁸

Nina Simone’s statement that she “never thought of [herself] as part of women’s liberation” because “the questions white female radicals were asking had no relevance to [her]” speaks explicitly to the problematic position of black women within the women’s movement. Prior to the mid-1970s, the movement appealed to women oppressed by gender but privileged by race and class, and it lacked coherent theories to articulate black women’s experiences (Collins 1990; hooks 1989; Weems 1993). Simone addresses feminism’s ineffectual ideological appeals to black women when she points out that “the movement failed to raise questions relevant to black women,” joining voices with the many black women activists of the 1960s who did not view gender relations as relevant to their experiences in the Civil Rights movement. These viewpoints on feminism suggest that the struggle for the entire black community’s survival eclipses a preoccupation with gender.²⁰⁹

‘PLEASE READ ME’: WOMANIST AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The term autoethnography is not a fixed one as exemplified in the collection

Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social (1997), which includes essays ranging from reflective autobiographical work by anthropologists to ‘native’ ethnography.²¹⁰ Yet, despite the variety of distinct issues among autoethnographic texts, they are linked through

²⁰⁷ Abbey Lincoln, Interview by Sally Placksin, *Jazz Profiles*, National Public Radio, November 5, 2002.

²⁰⁸ Greg Tate, “Meet This Generation’s First Lady of Jazz: Cassandra Wilson, Moon Daughter,” *Essence*, July 1996, 60.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ See Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (New York: Berg, 1997).

acknowledgment that the ethnographer and subject are constituted through acts of interpretation. This work builds on literary critic Françoise Lionnet's notion of autoethnography, "as writing that emphasizes ethnicity as mediated through language and ethnographical analysis."²¹¹ Though it has been considered primarily within the context of literature and anthropological studies, autoethnographical analysis shapes a significant portion of lyrics composed by black women and is a decided element in the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. Functioning as a "self-contained figural anthropology of the self" autoethnographic lyrics read as musical self-portraits.²¹² In the discussion that follows I interpret autoethnographic songs through the lens of Africana womanism to get at the ways black women understand and articulate through music how race and gender shape their identities.

In the field of black musical studies this chapter is closely situated in a theoretical sense with two important works: The chapter "Bad Sisters: Black Women, Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music" in Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap and Black Culture in Contemporary Culture* (1994) and Angela Y. Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998). While these works are quite different—they consider the blues era of the early twentieth century and the hip hop era of the late twentieth century—together they highlight remarkably similar themes and practices in

²¹¹ Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical voices: race, gender, and self-portraiture*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 99

²¹² See Françoise Lionnet, "Autoethnography: The An-Archic Style of Dust Tracks on a Road" in *Reading Black*,

song lyrics written by black women. Rose's discussion highlights central themes in the lyrics of black female rappers including courtship, the importance of the female voice, and black female public displays of physical freedom. In the tradition of womanism, Rose resists positing women rappers in opposition to male rappers, but shows how they are engaged in a dialogic process with them. Davis categorizes the blues lyrics of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday into several groups: living and working conditions; exploitation; travel; prison experience; love and sexual desire; and desertion and violence. Contextualizing these lyrics within a black feminist framework, Davis reveals the creative and social consciousness of these artists. Like Rose and Davis, I aim to contribute a theoretical language rooted in womanist tradition and inclusive of core themes in the original lyrics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson to the field of black music studies.

Distinguishable by their predilection for first person presentation, womanist auto-ethnography songs function not only as self-representation but also as a collection of ideas and values from the singer's community. What is distinct about womanist autoethnography is its interlocutory nature, reflecting self-identification but also reflecting an internal dialogue with the

plural aspects of ‘self’ that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity.²¹³ However, song lyrics that read as womanist autoethnography are distinct from forms like autobiographical poems or memoir/autobiography in two crucial ways. Firstly, singing can exploit the immediacy of performance in ways that the aforementioned forms cannot because the power of the present is guided (barring audience participation) by the performer. Secondly, autobiography grows out of a tradition which emphasizes the individual as a supreme and unique being, whereas the ‘self’ of *autoethnography* draws sustenance from the past experiences of the group. In other words, autoethnographic lyrics are not necessarily concerned with the process or unfolding of singular and extraordinary life events, but rather, they express an aspect of the selfhood that reflects those experiences shared among many within the community. With its simple yet stark vignettes that suggest identification with each of its female characters, Nina Simone’s “Four Women” epitomizes the construction of the self as a member of multiple oppressed black female groups. One of the most trenchant and timely commentaries of black womanhood, Simone’s song posits race and gender as factors that have the ultimate power not only to construct black women’s social identities but to determine their destiny.

²¹³ Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1990), 118.

My combinative usage of Africana womanism and autoethnography implies that there is a dialectical link between theory (womanism) and practice (autoethnography). Both jettison the tensions surrounding that which constitutes “theory” by reminding us that the thoughtful analysis of everyday praxis, as evidenced in the song lyrics under scrutiny here, coupled with our own critical thinking can yield accurate historical analysis of black communities over time. The following discussion mines lyrics that both celebrate and articulate pride in black men and children. An examination of such lyrics reveals the ideas and activism of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson who contribute to womanist theory from a musical autoethnographic perspective.

Post-World War II America witnessed the use of pro- nuclear family ideals as a normative standard. Understood to be the principal socializer, wherein identities are formed and cultural values are transmitted, the nuclear family was at the center of propaganda that saw Americans as superior to communists. (Nowhere is this idea more apparent than the 1959 Kitchen Debate between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, which connected ideas of domesticity and containment.) During the Cold War, the home became the site at which such dangerous and destabilizing social forces as atomic power and female sexuality would be tamed. Of 1950s American families historian Stephanie Coontz

writes:

Cold War anxieties merged with concerns about the expanded sexuality of family life and the commercial world to create what one authority calls the domestic version of George F. Kennan's containment policy toward the Soviet Union: A "normal" family and vigilant mother became the "front line" of defense against treason; anticommunists linked deviant family behavior to sedition.²¹⁴

The oversimplification of domestic normalcy and reverence for marriage and family life was regularly featured in the media, like the popular magazines *Look* and *McCall's* and on the television shows *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It To Beaver*, and *Ozzie and Harriet*. Although historians have challenged and refuted the "golden age" of the traditional family (see, Coontz 1992, 1997, 1998, 2000; Ehrenreich 1983; Franklin 1997; Kellogg 1988; Tyler-May 1999; Meyerowitz 1994; Smith 2004; Weiss 2000), the mass mediated campaign which sought to valorize marriage and family greatly influenced black cultural productions. However, Robin D.G. Kelley (1994) warns against conflating post-war black family ideals to mainstream family values generated in middle-class white America. Kelley maintains that black family concepts derive in large part from black church-based ideas about domesticity, gender roles, motherhood and chastity.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (NY: Basic Books, 2000), 33.

²¹⁵ In *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1994), Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham first coined the term "politics of respectability" to describe the work of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church during the Progressive Era. Geared toward two audiences—blacks and

REDEMPTION SONG: BLACK WOMEN IN PRAISE OF THE BLACK FAMILY

Based on a presumed African American audience and her association to musical modernists Max Roach, Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker, one can speculate on the reception of Abbey Lincoln's Riverside recording *That's Him* (1957). The album cover shows Lincoln wearing a form-fitting soft pink gown with thin straps, one of which has fallen off of her shoulder, against a white backdrop, lounging on a blue pillow in a (wanton) feminine pose. Here is a beautiful and sexy black woman singing songs that valorize black heterosexual love during an era fixed on ideals of marriage and family. The hyper-romantic track listing of *That's Him* includes the songs "Strong Man," "Happiness Is A Thing Called Joe," "My Man," "Tender As A Rose," "That's Him," "I Must Have That Man," "When a Woman Loves A Man," "Don't Explain" and "Porgy."²¹⁶ Although Lincoln did not pen these songs, she was responsible for the album's opening track. Written and composed by Oscar Brown, Jr., "Strong Man" emphatically denies stereotypes about black men by affirming their physical attractiveness and their commitment to relationships.²¹⁷ Recalling the development of "Strong Man," Brown stated that

white people who needed to see that African Americans could be respectable—Higginbotham specifically cites African Americans' promotion of polite manners and chastity as "Respectability" tactics necessary to "uplift the race." As Mark Anthony Neal reminds us, central to the function of the black church as the quintessential institution of the Black Public Sphere was its embodiment of the basic tenets of black hegemony. Thus, "Respectability" is representative of black hegemonic discourse particularly used by black women who were also more likely to be judged by it. Recently, scholars such as Victoria Wolcott (2001), Patricia Schecter (2001) and E. Fran White (2001) have adopted and expanded upon Higginbotham's concept of the "politics of respectability," signaling its significance in the examination of intraracial class conflicts especially as they pertain to black women's lives. The employment of this concept in myriad forms brings home the fact that black gendered identities are more complex than the hegemonic, often masculinist, interpretations of tradition generated in middle-class white America.

²¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Lincoln chose to record the lesser-known Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh "Porgy" inspired by DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, which appeared seven years before the Gershwin's "(I Loves You) Porgy." The Fields/McHugh "Porgy" features a more upbeat Bess whose tone is more celebratory, almost completely devoid of the melancholy and impending tragedy we hear in Gershwin's Bess. Thus, the lyric was more in alignment with the overarching theme of Lincoln's album *That's Him*, which sought to celebrate black heteronormative love. The Fields/McHugh "Porgy" was also recorded by Ethel Waters and Ruth Brown.

²¹⁷ Eric Porter, *What is This Thing Called Jazz: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 162.

at the time his approach to songwriting included asking singers what type of song they wanted. While most singers stammered at the question Brown reported: “Abbey had a very definite idea. She said she didn’t want to sing a song about a no-good man. She wanted to sing about men like her father and her brothers...She wanted me to write a song about Max.”²¹⁸ Lincoln makes reference to a generic masculinity as perceived by the dominant culture when she sings, “I’m in love with a strong man, and he tells me he’s wild about me...Great big arms, muscled hard, dark and shining he holds around me.” However, in lines like “Hair crisp and curly and cropped kind of close, picture a lover like this. Lips warm and full that I love the most—” where she gives physical description, Lincoln translates into musical contrast the clash between black and white cultures’ notions of handsomeness.²¹⁹

Issued one year later in 1958, Nina Simone’s debut album *Jazz As Played In An Exclusive Side Street Club* (also known as *Little Girl Blue*) shows similar focus on romantic love in performances such as “He Needs Me,” “Plain Gold Ring,” “My Baby Just Cares For Me,” which would become a hit in 1985 when Chanel used it for a highly successful UK ad campaign, and, of course, the album’s lead track, Simone’s interpretation of the classic “(I Loves You) Porgy,” from the opera *Porgy and Bess* (Dubose Heyward, George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin), which received considerable airtime on the radio, reaching number two on the R&B charts and top 20 in the summer of 1959.²²⁰

On the surface, recordings such as Lincoln’s “Strong Man,” and Simone’s “I Love You

²¹⁸ Abbey Lincoln, Interview by Sally Placksin, *Jazz Profiles*, National Public Radio, November 5, 2002.

²¹⁹ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*, 38.

²²⁰ Ruth Feldstein, “‘I Don’t Trust You Anymore’: Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s,” *The Journal of American History* March 2005 <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.4/feldstein.html>> (19 June 2005).

Porgy,” are no different than other popular love songs recorded by white female vocalists during the late 1950s—consider Peggy Lee’s 1956 top 20 hit “Mr. Wonderful” or Doris Day’s 1958 single, “Our Love is Here To Stay.” However, in context of the impugnable onslaught against the black family by white sociologists and the media, Lincoln’s and Simone’s recordings assume added significance inasmuch as these songs, and other songs by black women for and about black men, were the only form of popular media to emphasize attractive black masculinity in an era when television and mainstream magazines catered to white audiences in their depictions of romance and family values. Long overlooked and dismissed by scholars, love songs performed by black women form a musical discourse that provided the dissemination of ideas about black romantic love during the post-war era, a trend that continues through the 1960s with the overwhelming popularity of Motown’s all-girl groups, The Shirelles, The Supremes and Martha Reeves and the Vandellas.²²¹

Though early in her career, *Abbey is Blue*, Lincoln’s fourth album, demonstrates a dramatic shift in artistic style rooted in womanist consciousness. Whereas Lincoln’s first recording, *Abbey Lincoln’s Affair...A Story of a Girl in Love* (1956), features saccharine interpretation of jazz standards such as “I Didn’t Know About You” (Bob Russell and Duke Ellington), “This Can’t Be Love” (Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers), and “Love Walked In” (Ira and George Gershwin), the 1959 *Abbey Is Blue* is self-consciously political in its repertoire, including songs like: “Afro-Blue” (Oscar Brown, Jr. and Mongo Santamaria), “Let Up” (Abbey

²²¹ For a discussion on the all-girl groups of Motown see, Susan Douglass, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up With the Mass Media* (NY: Three Rivers Press/Crown Publishing, 1995). For Motown music and the culture of rhythm and blues see Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (NY: Penguin Books, 1988); Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Lincoln), and “Brother, Where Are You?” (Oscar Brown Jr.). Musically, the two albums appear on opposite ends of the spectrum. Commenting on the singer’s debut album, *Abbey Lincoln’s Affair*, in which the singer is backed by an orchestra led by Benny Carter, Farah Jasmine Griffin observed, “Though there are instrumental jazz elements, especially the trumpet, this is not a jazz album. [Lincoln] is not in dialogue with any of the soloists, nor are any of the individual musicians named.”²²² In stark contrast, *Abbey is Blue* showcases a propulsive rhythm section, including the virtuosity of players Stanley Turrentine (tenor saxophone), Kenny Dorham (tenor saxophone), Wynton Kelly (piano), Cedar Walton (piano), Tommy Turrentine (trumpet), Bobby Boswell (double bass), Philly Jo Jones (drums) and Max Roach (drums).

From *Abbey is Blue*, the song “Brother, Where Are You?” connects directly to Civil Rights and Black Nationalist discourses of the late 50s, which often included attention to dysfunctional black heterosexual or black familial relationships. Two years before she recorded the song, Lincoln was deeply moved by her reading of E. Franklin Frazier’s historical, sociological consideration of black life, *The Negro in the United States*.²²³ This, combined with the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, inspired a new sense of womanhood for Lincoln, “one based on social and aesthetic commitment to a global black freedom struggle.”²²⁴ In his analysis of “Brother, Where Are You?” Eric Porter speaks of the song’s image of a young boy on a city street as a metaphor for people’s alienation from one another. But, I contend Lincoln’s voice extends the warning (of a potential broken family) found in Brown’s lyric. For example, embedded in the refrain, “Brother, where are you? They told me that you came this way” is the

²²² Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 164.

²²³ Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 153.

historical black migration narrative. Before World War I the overwhelming majority of black people lived in the South. The mass migration of blacks to urban areas, especially to the cities of the North, generally witnessed black men leaving behind their women and children for better employment opportunities and in many cases also to escape life-threatening Jim Crowism in the form of lynchings and other white mob violence meted out against black people. In other words, for black women migration often meant being left behind. Lincoln's specifically female voice reminds us of this history and other real social and economic consequences, such as incarceration and unemployment, that have precipitated the separation of black women and men when she remits plaintively: "Brother, where are you? They said you came this way. Brother, where are you? Don't you know I need you now."

That "Brother, Where Are You?" was released during an era American social history scholars May (1988) and Mintz and Kellogg (1988) refer to as the "golden age" of the American family, raises the very critical issue that despite white public discourse on the pathologizing black matriarch, black women were desirous of black men and marriage. Nowhere is this clearer than in Lincoln's "A Wedding Song," written for music composed by Max Roach.²²⁵ In an interview Lincoln recalled:

I wrote that song to cement the joy I felt and to express my gratitude that I had found a companion, someone to work together with and exchange ideas with. Although I grew up in a house with both my mother and father, I had never really thought about marriage. I didn't have anything against it but I knew black men and women have a hard time together. My parents did and eventually mom divorced dad. But when Max asked me to marry him, I was really thrilled because I believed in him and myself. I thought we could build something together and we did. Even though the marriage didn't last what

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Written at the time when Roach proposed to her, in 1962, Lincoln would not record the song for another twenty years. An eight-minute version of the song appears on the 1983 Enja album, *Talking to the Sun*.

we made together did. We created something lasting—and it wasn't a baby neither (laughter)—it was the music! That's what a black woman and man can do together—really build something—if the world would let them.²²⁶

Lincoln's "A Wedding Song" reads:

A hint of fained excitement when at first I saw him there
The nearest comprehension of a solemn, somber stare
The pain that was apparent as the blackness of his hair
Until a precious, devil smile that seemed to say, I dare
The sounding of my heart was heard to carry through the air
I held my breath a moment as I spoke a tiny prayer

The way it was to hear his lusty laughter overspill (Oh my spirit)
A face that told of living much that made my eyes to fill
Was veiled as though anticipating faithless fortune still
And then he took my hand and led me to the highest hill
Where shining stars and yellow moons did cause my heart to thrill
And all my life with all my love his bidding I'll be willing.
And all my life with all my love his bidding I'll be winning.⁴⁴

One of Lincoln's most romantic originals "A Wedding Song" from the 1983 Enja album *Talking to the Sun* captures the singer's own reverence for marriage. The implication that "prayer" might seal her matrimonial fate ("I held my breath a moment as I spoke a tiny prayer") is emphasized later in the verse where Lincoln metaphorizes marriage as "the highest hill." She ends the song affirmatively repeating three times: "And all my life with all my love his bidding I'll be winning."

This image of a black woman striving to 'win' her man's love counters the image of the

²²⁶ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters On Their Craft* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007), 14-15.

pathologizing matriarch which figures so prominently in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's famed report which would appear six years later.

The publication of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report, "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action," issued by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Policy Planning and Research in 1965, identified a "tightening tangle of pathology" in black families. The report explained racial, economic, and social inequalities as products of black cultural deficiencies, by accusing black women of emasculating black men in order to make their own gains in education and employment. Black women were also indicted for failing to live up to their prescribed gender roles as dutiful wives and mothers. Naming the black woman as the primary destructive force of the black family was but one aspect of the report that perpetuated the myth of the black matriarch. It also succeeded in cementing the idea that the relative failure of black men and women to marry and/or maintain matrimony significantly contributed to the abject impoverished conditions among black mothers and their children. Against this backdrop, Lincoln and Simone performed a plethora of songs that advance a womanist consciousness centered on devotion to black men and children and uplift of the black family.

The year the Moynihan report was published Nina Simone recorded *Pastel Blues* (1965), which contained the lead track, a Simone original entitled "Be My Husband." The song represents an offer of partnership for mutually supporting love and labor and a moral sexual ideology. Pared down to the voice and the drum that Bobby Hamilton strikes on the downbeat,

“Be My Husband” has a prayer-like or chant quality which intensifies the speaker’s proposal.

Her urgency is felt through wordless polytonal expression in the form of moans and unexpected rising notes that dramatize the narrator’s desire for monogamy and lifelong marriage. The verse for Simone’s “Be My Husband” is written in the AAAB form of African American spirituals and blues where the last line clarifies the initial idea of the first lines repeated three times:

Be my husband and I’ll be your wife (3x)
 Love and honor you the rest of your life...yeah
 If you promise me you’ll be my man (3x)
 I will love you the best way I can (yeah)

As a monogamous woman, the narrator curbs the threat of infidelity by reminding her man of his oath in lines like the following taken from the third verse: “Stick to the promise man you made me/that you’ll stay away from Rosalee.” In the fourth verse the speaker’s love is promised in terms of the work appropriate to conventional gender roles that she is willing to shoulder: “If you want me to I’ll cook and sew.” Here “women’s work” serves as a gesture of her devotion. According to Richard Leppert and George Lipsitz, lyrics of this sort are reflective of the national phenomenon in the early post-war years of a return to traditional pre-war gender divisions, articulated especially in the domestication of the suburb with its removal of women from the labor force, as well as in a broad range of popular cultural expressions built upon the

assumption of innate antagonisms between men and women.²²⁷

Simone revisits the theme of marriage on her last studio recording, *A Single Woman* (Elektra, 1993), with the song “Marry Me”:

You should marry me
I know you don't agree
There's no two ways about it
I should marry you
But I haven't a clue
Of just what to do about it

I know I'm tired of sleeping all alone
Oh you and I should really make a home
Or two, or three, or four, or more

You should marry me
I know you don't agree
There's no two ways about it
I should marry you
But I haven't a clue
Of just what to do about it

It's not for old folks like I used to say
Oh baby, baby, don't leave me this way
Marry me
Marry me
Marry me²²⁸

Like Lincoln's “The Wedding Song,” Simone's “Marry Me” and “Be My Husband” represent aesthetic evidence of what scholar Angela Y. Davis terms ‘psychosocial realities’ within the black population that are in direct opposition to the Moynihan report and other negative myths

²²⁷ Richard Leppert and George Lipsitz, “‘Everybody’s Lonesome for Somebody’: Age, the Body and Experience in the Music of Hank Williams,” *Popular Music* 9, no.3 (1990): 270.

²²⁸ Nina Simone, *A Single Woman*, Elektra compact disc 7559-61503-2.

and stereotypes which seek to perpetuate the idea that matrimony and family life are not sought among blacks.

Unlike the lyrics written by blues women in the early twentieth century which rarely mentioned domesticity and marriage, Simone's and Lincoln's songs acquiesce to normative ideologies of romance, marriage and even stultifying housework—as when Simone sings in “Be My Husband,” “If you want me to I’ll cook and sew”—albeit with black cultural particularities. Where their musical foremothers Gertrude “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith were expected to both embody and sing songs about women who deviated from orthodox female behavior (perhaps an explanation to why both artists were revered by both men and women in black working-class communities),²²⁹ Simone's “Be My Husband” and “Marry Me” and Lincoln's “The Wedding Song” capitulate to marital idealization of the dominant culture. Moreover, these songs forge and memorialize images of soft women deeply invested in their roles as lovers, wives and mothers to rebuff the image of the hard, emasculating woman depicted in the Moynihan report.

On the album *New Moon Daughter* (1995), which showcases five originals, Cassandra Wilson continues the tradition of songs in the key of black heterosexual relationships. However, where, in 1959, Lincoln poses the question “Brother, where are you?” Wilson takes it a step

further, assuming a more active stance in “Find Him.” The music created by guitarists Brandon Ross and Kevin Breit, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, percussionist Cyro Baptista and drummer Dougie Bowne lends “Find Him” an earthy feel reminiscent of early blues where the singer often relayed conversations in the body of a song. Wilson’s lyric grapples with the real, horrendous oppression black men face and suggests that this oppression plays a part in the demise of black relationships and bears potentially destabilizing consequences for the black family unit, though not necessarily permanently. In the song’s first verse we learn that Joe has left the family and Jewel advises the narrator to “go get” her man. Cognizant of a history of “enslavement” and “damnation,” the narrator nevertheless displays total confidence that she will find him. Wilson exhibits a commitment to recapturing the language of autonomous black communities when she sings:

Jewel told me, Go get Joe.
 Where is he? Dying slow
 But I bet I can find him
 Through the clouds that fill his mind
 I can find him
 in the darkest part of the night
 Oh enslavement,
 damnation, destruction,
 dysfunction, decimation
 I can find him.

Implicit in “Find Him” is a value system that emphasizes the support and respect on the

²²⁹ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*, 38.

part of black women for their men. This value system is not reflected in popular music where it is understood that white men maintain normative socioeconomic trends as defined by their own cultural parameters. Conscious of black male impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, Wilson nevertheless redeems the black male figure, his primary redeeming quality resides in his commitment and loyalty to his female partner (and family) and his ability to find her “even broken down and blind.” Finally, Wilson’s message is a hopeful one; she empowers the black man as witnessed in the line, “*He* will find him”:

Joe told me, Prepare a space
Full of love and God’s sweet grace.
And he will find me
when the devil’s days unwind
He will find me
even broken down and blind
The choices are simple
living them ain’t easy
The fearful will tremble
Just keep on believing
He will find him, he will find him
Yes you will find him
Find him.

**‘FIRST CAME A WOMAN’: WOMANISM, CHILDREN AND THE SUBTEXT OF
BLACK NATIONALISM**

One of the aims of womanism has been to join forces with black men in order to achieve collective progress. Yet, often important Afrocentric nationalists have formulated the gender of

black cultural identity as male (Gaunt 2006; Olaniyan 1995; Wright 2004), positing that women could gain freedom for their men and children by assuming subordinate roles as assistants and helpmates. Ula Taylor and Belinda Robnett have furthered our understanding of the sexism and chauvinism of the Civil Rights and black power movements. Interpreting historical documentation of the responses of black women engaged in both movements, these scholars provide clear depictions of gender bias. Typically, gender bias begins with the erasure of mothers and children from nationalistic discourse as illustrated in works ranging from W.E.B. DuBois to Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon. Observing this tendency to erase women and children, theorist Michelle M. Wright (2004) writes:

Nationalist discourse relies on certain strategic exclusions. By excluding the role of the mother, nationalist discourse can grant its male citizens fantastic powers, albeit ones wholly located within the ideal, or discursive, realm rather than the material realm of praxis. By erasing the mother as an agent, masculinist discourse can grant men the power to...establish finite origins and ends to the national narrative.

Along this same trajectory, in her work, *The Games Black Girls Play*, ethnomusicologist Kyra

D. Gaunt (2006) noted that:

Contemporary interpretations of cultural nationalism (i.e., Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, hip-hop) have more often than not limited our ability to view and appreciate the social power of women—not to mention acknowledging their intellect and sexuality as factors that contribute to the black vernacular arts.

Wright's and Gaunt's statements underscore Michele Wallace's claim that black women's

activism and creativity “is routinely gagged and disappeared” (Wallace 1978). Thus the black woman performing songwriter occupies a uniquely politicized zone where she takes center stage to voice multiple aspects of black women’s lives, including motherhood.

For black women for whom motherhood represented a primary identifier and mode of empowerment neither black nationalist nor feminist arenas were likely support infrastructures. Despite common ideological claims of the fifties and sixties that black mothers aided the revolution in the form of nation building, the agency of the mother nevertheless evades black nationalist discourses.²³⁰ Similarly, feminist historiography points to earlier debates that resulted in the maternal schism among feminists who argued for inclusion or exclusion of motherhood within feminist discourse. From its genesis, however, womanism has included strong and positive identification with mothering.²³¹ Thus, alongside black nationalistic discourse and feminist discourse that so often renders black women and children invisible, womanist lyrics that feature children and draw attention to child rearing bear critical significance in their capacity to increase the importance of women’s roles as mothers, socializers and

²³⁰ Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 141.

²³¹ In the keynote address “Gains and Challenges: Linking Theory and Practice” at Makerere University (July 21, 2002) Amina Mama observed that Western feminists rooted in second wave feminism have generally defined themselves in opposition to mother-identified women of previous generations. In Africa, by contrast, womanists have held a different position. They do not see the issue of motherhood as theoretically irrelevant, a theoretical departure which might explain the problematics surrounding usage of the term ‘feminist’ in an Afrodiasporan context.

teachers of the young and each other.

Abbey Lincoln's original, "First Came A Woman," (*When There is Love*, 1993) offers an excellent example of this genre. The lyric reminds us that no 'nation' can survive without the birth and nurturance of children and the transmission of culture, especially evident in the first refrain: "First came a woman to get the child/And carry it all the way home/Make it and carry who's ever conceived/And carry them all the way home/They say we live alone, we die alone/That everyone here is born alone/But there was a woman to get the child/And carry it all the way home."²³²

As Blum and Deussen have shown us, when black mothers are referred to in public discourse, they are often portrayed stereotypically—if not as matriarchs, then as weak and irresponsible (and single) welfare mothers. Although black womanist scholars challenge negative images of black mothering, this work is largely unknown outside of the academy. Therefore, womanist autoethnographic lyrics which attend to "motherwork," a term developed by Patricia Hill Collins, represent more than aural space for maternal sentiment; they also repudiate white public discourse and lend a balanced definition of nation to the concept of black nationalism. For example, during the height of the Black Power and Civil Rights movement, Nina Simone addressed black children in two powerful performances. Simone's recording of

Oscar Brown Jr.'s lullaby "Brown Baby" (*Nina Simone at the Village Gate*, 1962) and her original "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (*Black Gold* 1970) provided positive guidance to black children and sought to instill in them integrity, goal orientedness and pride:

Brown baby Brown baby
 As you grow up I want you to drink from the plenty cup
 I want you to stand up tall and proud
 And I want you to speak up clear and loud
 Brown baby Brown baby Brown baby

 As years go by I want you to go with your head up high
 I want you to live by the justice code
 And I want you to walk down freedom's road
 You little Brown baby²³³

[Excerpted from "To Be Young, Gifted and Black"]

Young, gifted and black
 We must begin to tell our young
 There's a world waiting for you
 Yours is the quest that's just begun
 So when you're feeling real low
 There's a great truth that you should know
 When you're young, gifted and black
 Your soul's intact.²³⁴

The lyrics from "Brown Baby" grow out of the integrationist climate of the 1960s and speak to the rational expectation from blacks that their hard-won civil rights would make good on the promise of far greater and richer opportunities. These ideals are present in the narrator's wish for her child to "drink from the plenty cup" and "to walk down freedom's road." An analogous

²³²Abbey Lincoln, *When There Is Love*, Verve compact disc 19697.

picture emerges from Simone's "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," also recorded by Donny Hathaway (*Everything is Everything*, 1970) and popularized again by Aretha Franklin in 1972, wherein the speaker emphatically reminds any listening black youth "there's a world waiting for you."

Cassandra Wilson's "Jeris's Blues"—titled after the singer's real-life son—and "She Who Weeps" (*She Who Weeps*, 1990) continue this tradition. The latter, a blues-lullaby, is literally and metaphorically a family affair. Composed by Wilson's mother, Dr. Mary Fowlkes, and featuring Wilson's bassist father, Herman Fowlkes, "She Who Weeps" displays direct parallels to Simone's "Be My Husband," discussed in the previous section. Composed as a traditional blues, the narrator's method for coaxing her infant to sleep comes in the form of a promise of a new day with the presence of daddy:

Mama's little baby (x3)
 Please go to sleep
 Your daddy's comin back (x2)
 Your daddy's comin back to stay
 Now, in the mornin'
 In the mornin'
 It's gonna be a brand new day²³⁵

As recently as 1999, Abbey Lincoln gave us the original "Conversation With A Baby." Found on the Verve LP *Wholly Earth* and dubbed a "jazz lullaby" by critics, Lincoln's

²³³ Nina Simone, *Nina Simone At the Village Gate*, Collectables compact disc; 5438.

²³⁴ Nina Simone, *Black Gold*, BMG International compact disc; B00005UD3F.

whimsical song offers musings on the origin of babies. The tune's opening line signifies on abortion—"We're really very lucky that you got here/Nowadays they slay them at the door"—and moves to the narrator's deep joy over the baby. The narrator describes the child ("Look just like your daddy, like an angel") and praises the child for the unspoken knowledge she/he already possesses. With the rhetorical question, "So where do all the little babies come from?" at the refrain's core, Lincoln surmizes that children come from the sun ("You little rascal you/You came here from the sun"), symbolically representing a mother's—or given the aged quality of Lincoln's voice—or grandmother's idolization of her child.

Such performances attempt to extend notions of positive motherhood, typically eschewed in white media, to the black experience. These songs also show the ways in which black women performing songwriters participate in bridging or dissolving gender dichotomies (the public/private or professional/domestic spheres) which have had devastating effects on mothers, "hiding 'motherhood' away in the private sphere" where its importance is diminished.²³⁶

To return to a guiding hypothesis of this chapter then, an organic, primary focal point of womanist lyrics has been to inscribe positive perceptions of black women's affection and love for black men and their children. Whereas much white public discourse about the deteriorating

²³⁵ Cassandra Wilson, *She Who Weeps*, Winter & Winter compact disc; 34443.

²³⁶ Signe Arnfred, "Images of 'Motherhood': African Perspectives," *JENDA: Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 4, no.1 (2003): 33.

black family and pathological ideas of family life possessed by black women and men (recyclings that have persisted the last two hundred years), womanist autoethnographic lyrics reveal healthy and dynamic views of black romance and family culture. They evidence a mode of thought centered on the twin axes of black women's devotion to and pride in their familial and community roles. The popularity of these artists and others who have written songs in the same vein—consider Kelly Price's "He Proposed to Me" and Mary J. Blige's "Beautiful Ones" which counter distortive black matrimony myths; India. Arie's "Good Man"; Jill Scott's "Brotha," Angie Stone's "My Man," and Alicia Keys's "Samsonite Man" which celebrate black masculinity in general; and Anita Baker's "Men in My Life," Lauryn Hill's "To Zion," and Kelly Price's "The Lullaby," which illustrate the pride and joy of black motherhood—suggests that such redeeming messages about black women in relation to their men, children and family is one that many believe in and relate to. Moreover, the sales of music by these artists certify these songs as legitimate expressions of communal sentiment.

SINGING TRUTH TO POWER: SOCIAL PROTEST SONGS

The post-war era marked a period of unprecedented energy against the second-class citizenship accorded to African Americans in many parts of the nation. Resistance to racial segregation and discrimination with strategies such as civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, marches, protests, boycotts, "freedom rides," and rallies received national attention as newspaper, radio, and television reporters documented the struggle to end racial inequality.

There were also continuing efforts to legally challenge segregation through the courts. Success crowned these efforts: the Brown decision in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 helped bring about the demise of the entangling web of legislation that bound blacks to second class citizenship. One hundred years after the Civil War, blacks and their white allies still pursued the battle for equal rights in every area of American life.

A significant consequence of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements is that they inspired creative discourse that allowed black Americans to identify their own experiences in oppressive social structures and to link individual troubles with larger socio-historical issues. It is worth noting that the black poetry circuit of the Black Arts Movement took particular notice of the music of jazz musicians. Greg Tate observes that BAM “practically made John Coltrane a national hero in the black community.”²³⁷ Poets Paulette White and Lance Jeffers published eponymous “Nina Simone” poems while Nikki Giovanni, in her poems “A Strong Wind Blowin’” and “The Genie in the Jar,” paid homage to Abbey Lincoln. The publications of these poems signal the significant role black women vocalists played, or could play, in black freedom struggles.²³⁸ Langston Hughes, one of a few black poets to maintain a presence in the mainstream publishing world, one that began during the New Negro Movement of the 1920s and continued through BAM, co-wrote with Simone “Backlash Blues,” included on the 1967 album, *Nina Simone Sings the Blues*. These examples point to significant cross-influence between black poets, writers and musicians promoting ideas of racial self-help and black cultural pride during the height of the freedom struggle. Mark Anthony Neal’s (1998) argues that jazz lost its

²³⁷ Greg Tate, “Growing Up in Public: Amiri Baraka Changes His Mind,” in *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays in Contemporary America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 171.

working-class audience during the sixties (and that rhythm and blues became the music of choice for most black Americans), but Lorenzo Thomas observes in his article “Ascension: Music and the Black Arts Movement” that black college students from working-class backgrounds particularly found the poetry movement sparked by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal “a perfect vehicle for expressing and exploring their social reality.” Many of these poetry followers likely ventured into jazz listening if for no other reason than to hear the heroes they first encountered in the poetry.

Black women’s writing also found its first mass expression and publication during this period which witnessed the first novels of Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Cade Bambara, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison—to name a few; so, too, did black women’s autobiography, including the publication of Mahalia Jackson’s *Movin’ On Up* (1966), Pearl Bailey’s *The Raw Pearl* (1968), Rose Butler Browne’s *Love My Children* (1969) and Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970). It is within the context and company of these black women writers, past and present, that I wish to contextualize the body of social protest songs, which in their assertion for equal rights for all black people adhere to womanist philosophy. The crucial role of music in generating and sustaining the Civil Rights and Black Power movements is indisputable, and much has been written about this tradition (see, for example, Brown 2003; Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Hall 2001; Kelley 1999; Monson 1997, 1999; Neal 1998, 2003; Ramsey 2003; Stuckey 1993; Van DeBurg 1992; Ward 1998). Moreover, recently scholars have paid particular attention to the original compositions of

²³⁸ Lorenzo Thomas, “Ascension: Music and the Black Arts Movement,” in *Jazz Among The Discourses*, Krin Gabbard, ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 258.

Lincoln and Simone penned during the mass demonstrations and civil disobedience of the sixties (Fieldstein 2005; Griffin 2001; Monson 2003; Moten 2005; Porter 2002). Considered by many to be the aural counterpart to the sit-ins, non-violent demonstrations, and prayer meetings that dominated the Civil Rights movement, songs such as Lincoln's "Retribution," "Let Up," "In The Red," "Straight Ahead," and her non-verbal screaming performance on Roach's "Tryptich: Prayer/Protest/Peace" and Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," "Backlash Blues," "Revolution Part I & II," "Ole Jim Crow," "Why (The King of Love Is Dead)," and "You Took My Teeth" contain rich political narratives. These songs enabled the artists to identify themselves as members of an oppressed community and, simultaneously, to frame and explain their experiences in individual terms.²³⁹

This section then seeks to answer the question of how gender has played a role in the struggle against racism. Focusing on the musical activism of Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone during the Civil Rights and Black Power periods I will show how these black women, often omitted from Civil Rights discourse, went far beyond the status of secretary or helpmate accorded many women during the period and had a powerful hand in shaping peoples' understanding of the times and galvanizing political action.

In August of 1960, Candid Records issued Max Roach's album *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* with a cover photo of African American civil rights activists at a lunchcounter Sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina. The accompanying liner notes, authored by producer and jazz critic Nat Hentoff, emphasized to record buyers the connections between jazz

²³⁹ Ibid.

and civil rights by discussing the political activism of musicians and interpreting the historical allusions to slavery, as manifested by Lincoln's keening and piercing wails on the album's best-known piece, "Triptych: Prayer, Protest, and Peace".²⁴⁰ Of "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace"

Eric Porter writes:

The piece begins with Lincoln demonstrating the range of her voice as she projects a wordless spiritual over Roach's accompaniment. "Protest" is a frenetic section, with Roach complementing Lincoln's primal screams with furious drum rolls, bombs and crashing cymbals....The piece concludes with Lincoln's lilting vocal line over a steady rhythmic pulse."²⁴¹

In Ken Burns's documentary *Jazz*, Lincoln commented on her screaming performance on "Triptych": "Max Roach and Oscar Brown Jr. wrote the *Freedom Now! Suite*. It wasn't anything I ever envisioned. And I didn't think that screaming was musical. But it turned out to be."²⁴² By the time of her performance on *We Insist!* Lincoln had recorded four albums under her own name; however, the earlier records do not house the explicitly political material of *We Insist!* Farah Jasmine Griffin observes that "the collaborative efforts between Roach and Lincoln have extramusical consequences as well."²⁴³ Griffin quotes Lincoln: "The collaboration was wonderful because for the first time it was a black man and woman. We have a hard time in

²⁴⁰ Robert K. McMichael, "We Insist-Freedom Now!": Black Moral Authority, Jazz, and the Changeable Shape of Whiteness" in *American Music* 16, no. 4 (1998): 381.

²⁴¹ Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 169.

²⁴² *Jazz* (Episode Ten: A Masterpiece by Midnight). DVD. 2003. Directed by Ken Burns. Washington D.C.: Florentine Films and PBS Home Video.

²⁴³ Farah Jasmine Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery*, 172.

ths world as a couple.”²⁴⁴

The appearance of her solo album *Straight Ahead* one year later (1961) forged Lincoln as a social singer and, ironically, led her into a sort of creative cul-de-sac, musically speaking (she did not record another album until 1973’s *People In Me*). Sparked by a dismissive review of Lincoln’s *Straight Ahead* by jazz critic Ira Gitler, *Down Beat* magazine devoted two consecutive issues to the two-part “Racial Prejudice in Jazz” debate (March 15, 1962, 20-26; March 29, 1962, 22-25)²⁴⁵, including edited transcripts of the discussion between performers and critics: Abbey Lincoln, Max Roach, Ira Gitler, Nat Hentoff (critic/producer), Lalo Schifrin (composer/pianist), Don Ellis (trumpeter), and Bill Coss and Don DeMichael (*Down Beat* editors).²⁴⁶ Lincoln received compositional credit for four of the album’s seven pieces. Original songs like “Retribution” find Lincoln refuting notions that she (or any other black person) wants a hand-out in lines like “Give me nothing! Don’t want no hand to hold/Just let the retribution match the contribution, baby.” The album also contains musical renditions of poems by renowned black male poets Paul Laurence Dunbar (“When Malindy Sings”) and Langston

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ In his review, Gitler lambasted Lincoln’s musical militancy. For detailed discussion on Gitler’s review see Ingrid Monson’s “Abbey Lincoln’s *Straight Ahead*: Jazz in the Era of the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, eds. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), Farah Jasmine Griffin’s *If You Can’t Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001) and Eric Porter’s *What Is This Thing Called Jazz: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁴⁶ Ingrid Monson, “Abbey Lincoln’s *Straight Ahead*: Jazz in the Era of the Civil Rights Movement,” in eds. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn, *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 173.

Hughes (“African Lady”).

Following the 1963 murder of NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the 16th Street church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, Nina Simone wrote her first protest song, “Mississippi Goddam.” The song’s cleverness lies in the way Simone initially destabilizes the immediate reaction to the song’s content by combining the lyrics to a rousing show tune beat. Heard on the live recording is the audience laughter even after Simone sings the opening chorus: “Alabama’s got me so upset / Tennessee made me lose my rest / And everybody knows about Mississippi, goddam”—and states that “This is a show tune, but the show hasn’t been written for it yet.” But this is where the song and its reception change course. Simone rips into America’s race policy, simmering as she sings “Don’t tell me, I’ll tell you / Me and my people just about due / I’ve been there so I know / You keep on saying go slow,” a reference, in part, to the *Brown vs. The Board of Education* (Topeka, Kansas) Supreme Court decision which urged the desegregation of American public schools with the oxymoronic notion of “all deliberate speed.” The largely white audience is dead silent after the verse, a fact that Simone acknowledges, when she says “bet you thought I was kidding.”²⁴⁷ However, their silence seems

²⁴⁷ This version of “Mississippi Goddam” appears on the 1968 RCA album *Nuff Said!*, and was recorded live at the Westbury Music Fair on April 7, 1968, three days after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Located in Nassau County, Long Island, the (then) demographic of Westbury was largely white. Furthermore, the 3000-seat music venue was regular host to performers Barry Manilow, Don Rickles, Liza Minnelli, Jack Benny, Johnny Mathis, Kenny Rogers, Tony Bennett, acts typically supported by white audiences.

only to fuel the fury percolating in Simone's performance up to that point. When she starts singing "This whole country is full of lies / You all gonna die, die like flies," Simone is in a space in opposition to the non-violent stance of the mainstream Civil Right Movement and one that portended the violence in American cities like Los Angeles (Watts), Newark and Detroit in the coming years.

Brought into the Civil Rights movement at the behest of her friend playwright Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone drew from her travel experiences in the south to write lyrics that articulated her political commitment and pain.²⁴⁸ Nowhere is this more evident than on the 1964 album, *In Concert*. Historian Ruth Feldstein observes: "Three songs on the [In Concert] album indicate with particular clarity how gendered strategies of protest were consistent parts of Simone's repertoire."²⁴⁹ One such song, "Old Jim Crow," is charged with Simone's political complaints as an African American and significantly as a mother. In the song she employs personification, a literary device common to African American songwriting (especially the

²⁴⁸ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 47.

²⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion on the political and gendered dimensions of Nina Simone's protest music see, Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore!': Nina Simone, Culture and Black Activism in the 1960s" in *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.4/Feldstein.html> where the author argues that with her music and self-presentation Simone offered a vision of black cultural nationalism within and outside the US that insisted on female power (par. 7). Though her analysis raises many insightful points, such as the way Simone's focus on sexuality and gender enabled the artist to put women at the center of musical civil rights discourse, Feldstein arrives at the problematic conclusion that Simone's role "in black activism has implications of second-wave feminism" (par. 57). She astutely observes that Simone locates "sisterhood" as the central catalyst to her political activism; however, it is important to emphasize that Simone's politicization centered around race empowerment foremost. Feldstein makes excellent use of Simone's autobiography, citing it extensively, yet she

blues) to give racism a physical presence. The narrator asks Jim Crow where he's been (verse one); tells him he's been "around too long" (verse three) and reminds him that "when you hurt my brother you hurt me too."²⁵⁰ Simone continues the personification device in "Backlash Blues," co-written with Langston Hughes, where, significantly, she invokes protective motherhood and her entire community when she sings: "Mr. Backlash, Mr. Blacklash just who do think I am/You raise my taxes, freeze my wages and send my son to Vietnam/ Do you think that all colored folks are just second class fools/Mr. Backlash, I'm gonna leave you with the backlash blues."²⁵¹

When asked why she placed such an emphasis on protest music in her repertoire, Nina Simone admitted that she felt an obligation "to move the audiences [and] to make them conscious of what has been done to my people around the world."²⁵² The power of Simone's protest songs to make sense of interlocking race, class and gender issues enabled listeners to recognize patterns that directly impinged on their everyday lives.²⁵³ Listeners might have found naming racism in songs such as "Ole Jim Crow" and "Backlash Blues" cathartic. Thus, the significance of these songs and other protest songs, including "Mississippi Goddam" and "Go

does not reference specific passages throughout the autobiography where Simone refutes any connection to feminism or any feminist reading on her work.

²⁵⁰ Nina Simone, *Four Women: The Nina Simone Philips Recordings*, Verve compact disc; 440 065 021 2.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Tammy Johnson, "Nina Simone: Diva With A Cause," *Colorlines Magazine*, Spring (1994): 40.

Limp,” is that they enabled black and white people within and outside the movement to have their daily experiences voiced. Summing up her career in a BBC interview Simone stated: “As a political weapon, it has helped me for thirty years to defend the rights of American blacks and third world people all over the world, to defend them with protest songs.”

The peak years of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements (1954-1969) coincided with an extraordinary musical proliferation for jazz in general and for Lincoln and Simone in particular. As a leader, Lincoln recorded five albums and she performed on four albums by Max Roach, including: *Moon-Faced And Starry-Eyed* (1960); *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (1960); *Percussion Bitter Sweet* (1961); and *Sounds As A Roach* (1968). This period was for Simone the most prolific of her career. Between 1954 and 1968 she recorded twenty-three albums for four record labels (two independents—Bethlehem and Colpix and two internationals—Philips and RCA). The outpouring of music recorded by Lincoln and Simone during the late 1950s and 60s led to a performance-based activism as reflected in the CORE and SNCC fund-raising concerts for which both artists were regularly solicited either as performers or for the use of their names as sponsors of the events.²⁵⁴ For example, Lincoln was among the cadre of black musicians to perform at the major Civil Rights benefit concert held at the New York Polo Grounds on August 25, 1963 and the NAACP Annual Convention in Philadelphia in July of 1961. In 1964, Simone

²⁵³ Brush, “The Influence of Social Movements,” 133.

headlined for SNCC several times in just a few months, including an event at Carnegie Hall. At a January 1966 CORE fundraiser in Chicago her original “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” was declared the national anthem of black America.²⁵⁵ And, in 1967, Simone performed at CORE fundraisers around the country at a minimal cost.²⁵⁶ These benefit concerts were crucial to the treasuries of Civil Rights as Ruth Feldstein (2005) has explained.

The aural and visible presence of Lincoln and Simone on the politically charged stages of the 1960s created the aesthetic and commercial space for a subsequent generation of politicized womanist performers such as Cassandra Wilson. In particular, the confluence of music, race and politics that emerged in the music of Lincoln and Simone continues through Wilson in songs like “Justice,” on the 2002 Blue Note album, *Belly of the Sun*. Like the overt and symbolic messages of the black struggle for Civil Rights in Lincoln’s and Simone’s music of the fifties and sixties, the movement for reparations functions as a trope for Cassandra Wilson at the turn of the twenty-first century. In comparison to Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” or Lincoln’s “Retribution,” Wilson’s song is tamer. However, viewed against a set of recent historical circumstances that include affirmative action debates and the topic of reparations, “Justice”

²⁵⁴ Ingrid Monson, “Monk Meets SNCC,” *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (1999): 191.

²⁵⁵ Simone with Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 108.

²⁵⁶ For a discussion on benefit concerts for civil rights organizations and their participants, see, Ingrid Monson’s essay “Abbey Lincoln’s Straight Ahead: Jazz in the Era of the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, eds. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

assumes added significance. In an interview with Rhonda Hamilton on WBGO (Newark, NJ),

Wilson commented on the song:

I wrote 'Justice' about the time of the [2000] presidential election. I was so frustrated and so disappointed in the outcome. I really felt for those people whose vote did not count. It just seemed so sad to me that in the year 2000 there were still black people who were having difficulty voting. That's why the song was written, that was the inspiration.²⁵⁷

Wilson's song has a deep rhythmic undercurrent, a blues power—appropriate historically speaking because black musicians have long used the blues idiom to contest the social injustices experienced by black Americans. Lyrically, "Justice" does not make reference to black disfranchisement; however, Wilson does take on the subject of reparations. She finds metaphors for 'justice' by drawing on the language of consumerism; in each of the three verses she seeks to buy the things that will make her a truly equal citizen. In the first verse she never mentions race or class but simply states, "Give me a bottle of justice/I'll take that bottle of justice/I hear it sets you free/You can be just who you want to be." The second verse continues: "Pass me a slice of opportunity/I'll have that slice of opportunity/I hear it fills you up/Makes you shine just like summer butter-cups, summer buttercups/I think I'll have some of that." It is not until the song's third and final verse that Wilson makes explicit reference to reparations:

²⁵⁷ Cassandra Wilson, posting to All About Jazz web site, accessed January 31, 2004, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=1107>.

Give me a box of reparation
 I'll take that box of reparation
 No not the little one, I want the big one that matches my scars
 It's such a pretty thing, something I've needed since I
 Came here from afar, so very far
 I think I'll have some of that!
 Wrap it up real nice for me please.²⁵⁸

If the Civil Rights and Black Power movements witnessed inroads against legal and political inequality then reparations would see black Americans recompensed for their ancestors' enslavement and the unfulfilled promise of reconstruction in order to create real economic equality in the twenty-first century.

By focusing on some of the recent historical gender perceptions in black America and the differentiating conceptions of gender roles among black women as shown through the songs of Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson, I have aimed to offer a scholarly discussion born out of the public principles of Africana womanist theory reflected in the music of black women. Through their songs, these vocalists address problems, social concerns and issues that pervade black communities on a transnational scale. Indeed, each of the artists presented here is a songwriter gifted with concise and powerful expression and a singer with distinctive phrasing and stage presence. However, if we isolate them as individual geniuses who are above and beyond the audience we lose out on understanding a significant cause for their appeal to and influence on genres and musicians. Through reinscribing implicit understandings of gender in black cultural context, autoethnographic lyrics assume added significance inasmuch as they symbolize the general experiences of Afrodiasporic women. Yet, there are many variables in the lives of black women not reflected in the themes presented here, including

²⁵⁸ Cassandra Wilson, *Belly of the Sun*, Blue Note Records 7243 5 3507220, 2002, compact disc.

spirituality, exploited labor, homosexuality and media image to name a few. In writing and performing womanist songs Lincoln, Simone and Wilson enjoin other black women singer-songwriters who challenge structural racism and chauvinism to develop a space in which they evaluate strategies for family and community building.

5

‘REKINDLE THE SPIRIT’:
ON THE AURAL SITE OF RE-MEMORY

Oh Sankofa high in the heavens you soar
My soul is soon to follow you
back to yesterday’s moon
Will it remember me?
Back to yesterday’s sun
It will rekindle me
Rekindle the spirit
into tomorrow
And high on the wind
Sankofa flies again and again.²⁵⁹

—Cassandra Wilson, “Sankofa”

We have inherited a great music. This music is a holdover. It comes with us like the skin, the texture of our hair. It’s our memory banks.²⁶⁰

—Abbey Lincoln

In an East Village (NYC) listening room on a blustery January night in 2007, The Stone presented Cassandra Wilson and accompanying musicians convened by the composer/alto saxophonist Steve Coleman. The aural journey that evening was comprised of experimental music based on a conceptual framework: the West African system of divination known as Ifa, a central feature of Yoruba religious practice.²⁶¹ Entering the stage flanked by poster board diagrams depicting Ifa’s sixteen principal *Odu*, or stations of the human condition, Wilson

²⁵⁹ Cassandra Wilson: *Blue Light Til Dawn*, Blue Note 0777 7 81357 2 2; 1993.

²⁶⁰ Wayne Enstice and Janis Stockhouse, *Jazz Women: Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 197.

²⁶¹ For discussions on the relationship between Afrodiasporic art and culture, including music, and the various aspects of Yoruba spiritual traditions see, Drewal 2008; Muller 2006; Pemberton 1975; and Thompson 1974.

greeted the audience, “Odu Eji Ogbe.” What followed can be described as a musical ceremony sparked by the singer’s recitation: “Victory over enemies/Spiritual awakenings/Long life/And peace of mind.” According to Wilson, the evening’s objective centered on music the group had conceived for four Odu.²⁶² Unlike the usual acoustic Afro-folk that has generally enveloped Wilson’s vocals and lent a distinctly earthy feel to albums spanning twenty-five years, the music during the January 2007 performance hinged on collective polyphony, melding percussion, string instruments and a striking rhythm section, floating beneath non-rhyming lyrics strewn together like chants. The song “Oyeku,” which Wilson compared lyrically to the blues or the Cape Verdean *morna*, demonstrated rhythmic complexity and recitation resulting in a *ritual-musical* experience.²⁶³ In his *New York Times* review, Nate Chinen called the music “an impressively exploratory performance.”²⁶⁴ However, a more illuminating description of the Coleman/Wilson ensemble requires cultural context as it relates to the tradition of African American musicians (specifically those working in the jazz idiom but by no means limited to that genre) who evoke Africa as a creative and performative trope. As John Pemberton explains:

In the Yoruba tradition answers [to life’s questions] come from the diviner priest who recites the verses of the Odu (the 256 figures or patterns which appear on the dust of the divining tray and which refer to a vast collection of verses). The objective of Ifa divination (“the most universal and oft-performed ritual of the Yoruba”) is to determine the correct sacrifice necessary to secure a favorable resolution of the problem confronting the client.²⁶⁵

²⁶² The ensemble included guitarist Marvin Sewell, tenor saxophonist Yosvany Terry, drummer Dafnis Prieto and bassist Lonnie Plaxico.

²⁶³ In the order of Ifa, the highest form of divination among the Yoruba people—“Oyeku”—occupies the second position, or is the second Odu.

²⁶⁴ Nate Chinen, “West African Religion Lends a Spiritual Framework to a Jazz Exploration,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2007, accessed January 29, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/music/29wils.html?ex=1173675600&en=7b5b9f068438916e&ei=5070>.

²⁶⁵ John Pemberton, “Eshu-Elegba: The Yoruba Trickster God,” in *African Arts* 9 (1975): 27, 67.

The type of rigorous analysis this chapter aspires to can be seen in the work of Graham Lock, whose *Blutopia* (1999) rejects the essentialist racial stereotypes found in much scholarship on Duke Ellington, Sun-Ra and Anthony Braxton in favor of a new reading of these artists' music for implications of a musical black history that also flashes forward to a black future. Thus, the central argument of "Rekindle the Spirit" has grown out of an attempt to discover how the creative interpretations of Africa have been constructive in a range of original songs written and performed by Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. I present an investigation of the possibility of collective history production through the performance of what I call *re-memory songs* by way of a close reading of lyrics that consciously draw on Africa through symbols and images (Africanisms), ancestor worship, and African spiritual mythology. Re-memory songs present an alternative exploration to black history, one that shifts focus from "what really happened" to the ways in which black people may use the past to produce individual and collective agency, demonstrating on a personal level the mental emancipation necessary for African Americans who have historically experienced a disconnect from knowledge about their heritage. For, if historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot's assertion that history remains "the fruit of all power" is correct, the willful severance of a people from their history creates dangerous repercussions.²⁶⁶ Consider the scant representation of African culture and history in North America until the 1960s, which enabled dominant discourses to assign negative images to blackness generally and *Africanness* specifically. For African Americans this has meant a subjugation to 'European vanity,' to borrow from James Baldwin, who employed the

²⁶⁶

Michel-Rolph Trouillot maintains that if understood as (past) social process as well as our knowledge of that process, the boundary between the two meanings of history—what happened and that which is said to have happened—is quite fluid. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing The Past: Power and The Production of History*

phrase in his discussion on the semantic ambiguity and traditional usage of the word “history.”²⁶⁷ Against this backdrop, the re-memory songs of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson provide African Americans with a usable, livable past, a past created for the development of a healthy self-image in an environment hostile or oblivious to the accomplishments of Africans and their descendants.²⁶⁸ Like other narrative forms, the power of re-memory songs reside in their ability to provide knowledge and engender the configuration of a shared history and to account for the stories (and histories) suppressed by dominant forms of representation. In this regard, Lincoln, Simone and Wilson are not distinct from black Americans who construct diaspora identities, but do not necessarily advocate a return to Africa in the sense of a back-to-Africa movement.²⁶⁹ However, because a significant portion of these artists’ original lyrics establish a connection to and reverence for Africa, this chapter also considers the ways personal experience shapes the meaning we draw from the past.

WHAT IS AFRICA TO ME?: BLACK ARTISTS LOOK TO/WARD AFRICA

In 1924, Countee Cullen published *Copper Sun*, a poetry collection that includes the poem “Heritage.” The poem begins:

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 3-4.

²⁶⁷ James Baldwin, “Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption,” in *The Picador Book of Blues and Jazz*, ed. James Campbell (London: Picador, 1996), 329.

²⁶⁸ This body of music is certainly not without precedent among black musicians, especially those celebrated in the jazz idiom. In his analysis of the music of Duke Ellington, Anthony Braxton and Sun Ra, Graham Lock observed that much of their repertoire is spent revising white distortions of black history, not least because they realize that a better future for black people cannot be attained until the old stereotypes have been thrown aside. Graham Lock, *Blutopia*, 211.

²⁶⁹ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3.

Strong bronzed men, or regal black
 Women from whose loins I sprang
 When the birds of Eden sang?
 One three centuries removed
 From the scenes his fathers loved,
 Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
 What is Africa to me?

Cullen's "Heritage" depicts an Africa of romantic images such as "a copper sun," "scarlet sea," "spicy groves" and "cinnamon trees." However, the speaker's intention is not merely to celebrate the continent but to reconcile questions about his ancestry. "Heritage" opens with the question: "What is Africa to me?" which is juxtaposed throughout the poem with the narrator's traits of an imagined Africa. In eight stanzas, the rhetorical question—"What is Africa to me?"—is countered by natural images. Cullen never fully, or even partially, answers the question, reflecting the tenuousness of the relation between African American identity and actual African ancestry.

Historically, the appropriation of Africa as a focus for culturally 'raced' memory rooted in ideas of heritage represents a significant tradition among African American artists and intellectuals.²⁷⁰ Specifically, among twentieth-century blacks there exists a long tradition of looking toward Africa.²⁷¹ The works of Guridy (2010), Northrup (2007), Campbell (2006), Singh (2005), Gruesser (2000), Kanneh (1998), Meriwether (2002), Plummer (1988, 1992, 1996), Walker (2001), and Von Eschen (1997), have contributed substantially to a historiography that has drawn attention to political and economic ties between African

²⁷⁰ Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities: Race, Nation and Cultures in Ethnography, Pan Africanism, and Black Literatures*. (London: Routledge, 1998), 48.

²⁷¹ Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Edward Soja, Daphne Spain, Yi-Fu Tuan, Nancy Duncan, and John Berger, for example, form a partial list of those who have argued for a spatial hermeneutic.

Americans and Africa, specifically during the critical years of twentieth century freedom movements. Sparked by the new nations of Africa that gained their independence in the late 1950s and the assassination and displacement of leaders such as Sékou Touré, Modibo Kéita, Kwame Nkrumah, and Patrice Lumumba, African American artists producing in the latter half of the twentieth century became increasingly engaged with foreign policy issues, especially as they related to post-Colonial Africa.

The point is that, for historical reasons, including important developments in the New World, Africa has emerged as an operative concept, which can be applied to an entire area of existence and historical experience. My usage of the term ‘re-memory’ therefore presupposes an attention to the complex determinations that have endowed the term *Africa/n* with real meaning and a special significance for blacks in the diaspora. The term is thus closely bound up with the emergence in Africa itself of a self-focused consciousness of which music has been an essential medium of expression; yet few scholars working in black music studies have turned their attention to the creative implications of African American musicians looking toward Africa.

Despite the enormous significance of an imagined Africa on Afrodiasporic music, and jazz specifically, a concept that scholar Guthrie P. Ramsey describes as “Resilient musical techniques and tropes circulat[ing] and recirculat[ing] across genres, historical periods, singers and instrumentalists,” there remains a dearth of studies that consider the role of Africa in black music. Graham Lock’s chapter on Sun Ra and Egyptology, “Astro Black: Mythic Future, Mythic Past,” in his *Blutopia* (2000) and Ingrid Monson’s article, “Art Blakey’s African Diaspora” in the important collection *African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective* (2003) are two such analytic examples informed by ‘the resilient trope’ of Africa.

The argument that Africa represents a key motif in jazz can be traced to the work of Norman Weinstein, a musicologist who tracks the African theme in his 1992 work, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz*. Weinstein's work is an important source for this chapter because it remains the only book-length study of jazz and Africa to date and is a valuable and engaging work. However, like much of jazz scholarship, the author's discussion centers on male instrumentalists, entirely omitting women vocalists. Nevertheless, the indication that Weinstein's analysis might be extended to the lyrics of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson that both implicitly and explicitly reference Africa is an obvious one. For example, Weinstein provides a useful table in which he highlights jazz musicians who recorded one or more compositions evoking African nations such as "Liberia: Duke Ellington and John Coltrane"—a category to which Nina Simone might be added for her original "Liberian Calypso"—and "South Africa: Max Roach and Archie Shepp"—a category in which Abbey Lincoln belongs for her vocal contributions to "Tears for Johannesburg" and "African Mailman."²⁷²

When applied to Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone, and Cassandra Wilson, the question "What is Africa to me?" is tied to an investigation of Africa's imaginative and metaphoric influence on the original songs of these artists. Such a query provides a foundation on which to build our understanding of these singer-songwriters' creative consciousness, a consciousness borne of what scholars Judylyn Ryan and Estella Conwill Májozo call "negotiating dispersion."²⁷³ To contextualize Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in relation to Africa aids us in an

²⁷² Norman Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 148.

²⁷³ Judylyn S. Ryan and Estella Conwill Májozo. "Jazz...On 'The Site of Memory,'" *Studies in the Literary Imagination*. Fall 1998; 31.2. 130.

examination of the ways in which their re-memory songs affirm *Afrocentric* African American identity and in so doing create a collective history for black members of their listening audience.

JOURNEYS TO AFRICA:

ABBEY LINCOLN ON AFRICA

In the winter of 1973, Abbey Lincoln welcomed her friend South African vocalist Miriam Makeba who had traveled to Los Angeles, California for a recording session. In the seventh chapter of her as yet unpublished autobiography, *The Light Around The House*, significantly titled “Return Home,” Lincoln discusses her travels to Africa for the first time as Makeba’s guest:

We traveled first class and it was a glorious experience Miriam afforded me in Africa. Though we really only knew each other through our careers and I had only been in her presence once socially at Maya’s house, she looked after me like I was kin. Miriam is truly an African queen and was hobnobbing and performing for the heads of state wherever we went. For the first time I looked into the eyes and faces of Presidents, first ladies and ministers. I found the confirmation I had been seeking, an explanation to the consciousness growing within me the morning after our arrival in Guinea. Having spent the night in one of the government houses, I was taken to the big house and presented to my host, Ahmed Sékou Touré. At the long breakfast table, Miriam told him I was an actress in America and spoke of some of my achievements. Later, after Touré had given me a collection of his poetry and works and autographed it to me as his sister, Miriam interpreted the conversation for me because the official language was French and I hadn’t understood what anybody was saying. Apparently, when she said my name was Abbey Lincoln, that was when Touré looked across the table at me with admiration and christened me Aminata. When we got to Zaire, another French-speaking African nation, we were squired and seen to by the minister of information who told Miriam to tell me he had given me a name and it was Moseka. He told her to tell me [Moseka] was a god of love in the form of a maiden...and suddenly I knew the realization that was dawning had basis in fact. It was not traditional for everybody in the world to see woman as less and unequal to man. The African people had conceived a world of male and female gods and chauvenism was an invention of another culture and not an inheritance

from my African ancestors. I knew why I had come to Africa. I had been brought home again for reassurance that my life was an important life and I was being fitted and armoured for the good fight.²⁷⁴

Lincoln's 1973 sojourn to Africa included meeting the leader of Guinea, Sékou Touré, who named her "Aminata" (trustworthy), and the Zairean Minister of Information who gave her the name "Moseka" (God's image in the form of a maiden). Embracing her new African names also meant the acceptance of a new Afrocentric identity, an identity the artist conceived would be an arduous one to express in the chauvinistic culture Lincoln associated with America. Lincoln viewed her experience in Africa as a preparation for battle, thus her new names symbolized for the artist that she was being "fitted and armoured for the good fight." Lincoln ends this section of her autobiography a note of affirmation: "In Africa, I was home again and I knew it. There was nothing strange and there were no disappointments. For two months I reveled in the glory of seeing and being able to hold in my hand a part of my life I had been missing."²⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that although Lincoln, who then only spoke English, lived within French-speaking communities during her travels in West and Central Africa, she found "nothing strange" about her experiences. The supreme comfort with which she recalls her trip stems in part from the extraordinary opportunities afforded her by dint of her association with Makeba, such as fraternizing with significant African political leaders. However, Lincoln has since commented in numerous interviews that the most self-defining aspect of her experience in

²⁷⁴ Abbey Lincoln, *The Light Around The House: A Life in Poetry & Song* (unpublished autobiography).

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Africa happened immediately following that trip when “[she] discovered songs coming out of [her]...It was the biggest surprise. I started writing them down when I was about 42...In a way it's like catching the rain in your hand. It's everywhere.”²⁷⁶ From this quote we can infer that Lincoln views her trip to Africa as the beginning of her artistic transformation from an interpreter of songs to a performing songwriter.

Much of the drama, poetry and literature that grew out of the 1960s Black Arts Movement and continued through the 70s reflects an awareness of African ancestry and, more importantly, the conscious celebration of that ancestry, which hitherto had been subject to negative imaging. Alongside pivotal literary works of that time by Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, Ed Bullins, Harold Cruse, Sam Greenlee, Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan and Adrienne Kennedy was, of course, the music of luminaries Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bob Marley, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Hugh Masakela, Max Roach, Peter Tosh, Nina Simone and Abbey Lincoln. Together these artists, all of whom are representative of what Manthia Diawara (1998) has labeled the “independence generation,” sought to replace negative stereotypes of the black diaspora and Africa by producing Afrocentric art and implementing racial self-help strategies.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ As Perrone observes in his significant work, *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization* (2001), Afro-Brazilian musicians also constituted the independence generation. “In 1977, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, leaders of the Tropicália movement of the late 1960s, traveled to Nigeria to represent Brazil at the Second International Festival of Black Art and Culture (FESTAC), which featured global luminaries of black music such as Stevie Wonder and Miriam Makeba. At this event they also had contact with Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, the leading proponent of Pan African and diasporic Afrobeat. Gil and Veloso subsequently recorded albums inspired by their experiences in West Africa and by the new Afro-Brazilian cultural movements. Veloso’s album *Bicho* (1977) features a song based on Nigerian juju music, which invokes a divine force that “speaks Tupi, speaks Yoruba” and affirms the cultural affinities between Brazil and Nigeria. *Bicho* also included several upbeat disco-inflected songs like “Odara,” a Yoruba term commonly used by Candomblé practitioners to signify good or positive” (quoted from Perrone 2001: 85).

One such strategy came at the behest of Abbey Lincoln who in 1962 had organized and founded, along with Maya Angelou, Rosa Guy and Sarah E. Wright, the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage. According to Lincoln, the association was formed not as a political organization but as a vehicle for exploring the cultures of the African diaspora.²⁷⁸ The group's activities ran the gamut from fashion shows to promoting African hair styles to a demonstration at the United Nations to protest the assassination of Patrice Lumumba.²⁷⁹ However, it was the fashion show called "Naturally," that toured Detroit, Chicago, Lincoln University, and Cornell University, among other places that garnered the most critical press for the CAWAH. In the then-colonized Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (today, Harare, Zimbabwe), progressives copied the show. According to the June 1963 issue of *African Parade Magazine* (whose inside front cover featured a portrait of Abbey Lincoln wearing an afro) the Harlem-based Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage "organized a show on traditional ways of dress and put on a display of African art and culture as it was in days gone by."²⁸⁰ The "Naturally" fashion show toured the USA for a decade. In 1973, upon her return from Africa, Lincoln, under her African name Aminata Moseka, wrote and recorded a song also titled "Naturally" which extols black women's beauty.²⁸¹ Significantly, Lincoln also set an original lyric to music composed by John Coltrane depicting her own poignant journey to Africa in rediscovery of her

²⁷⁸ Griffin, *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery*, 174.

²⁷⁹ Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?*, 173.

²⁸⁰ "Black Is Beautiful," *Jet Magazine*, Aug. 1963, clipping, Abbey Lincoln File, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Clipping File, 1955-1983.

²⁸¹ Abbey Lincoln, *People In Me*, Inner City 6040. 1978, vinyl lp.

ancestral roots.²⁸² In the liner notes for the *People In Me* (1973) album Lincoln stated that when she traveled to Africa she “discovered that African-American style was really pan-African style. So the people of Africa knew who I was, they just didn’t know where I was from. I finally realized when I was over there that I wasn’t bastardized as I had been led to believe.”

Lincoln’s “Africa” moves into a steady polyrhythmic groove, facilitated by James Mtume’s conga and the playing of Afro-Cuban percussionists Ray Mantilla and Tomas Duvail, whose presence provides both a musical and symbolic expression of pan-Africanism.²⁸³ The lyric creates an antiphonal statement about freedom as Lincoln chants the names of African tribes, and Olatunji sings freedom-related adages from various African tribes, in the Yoruba language. It features James Mtume on conga and Olatunji on drums in call and response pattern with Lincoln’s voice as if to imply the singer is in a conversation with the continent. The final verse from the lyric reads:

Beautiful, wonderful Africa
 Some day I’m comin’
 I’m comin’ for to see
 the promised land
 The days of sunshine
 and nights of heaven starlight
 It’s a paradise of
 sea and sky and sand
 With some talking drums
 that tell of love and laughter
 They’re telling of a new and brighter day.

²⁸² Eric Porter (2002) has written extensively on the 1960s recordings of Abbey Lincoln, including the songs of Oscar Brown Jr. and Max Roach, like “All Africa,” and “Tears for Johannesburg” which can also be read in the context of re-memory songs. However, this dissertation seeks to highlight Lincoln’s original songs. ’s original music as the previously mentioned were composed by Oscar Brown Jr. and Max Roach.

²⁸³ Eric Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz*, 68.

While the lyric depicts a romanticized view of Africa, “a paradise of sea and sky and sand,” not unlike the Countee Cullen’s “Heritage,” the song also draws on Old Testament imagery, a practice that connects Lincoln to the long tradition of African American lyricists whose songs reflect a biblical influence. Norman Weinstein has shown that an interest in Africa, including Egypt, has been a feature of African American music since the early years of the twentieth century. In his discussion of the enigmatic saxophonist Sun Ra’s adoption of *Astro Black Mythology*, as an alternative to a Christian mythology (with the core belief that Egypt was a black civilization and is therefore blacks’ true historical legacy), Graham Lock (1999) discusses the degree to which the Exodus myth was co-opted by the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s and 1960s.²⁸⁴ Lock cites the final speech of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in which he “specifically identified ancient Egypt with white racist America.”²⁸⁵ However, African American use of the Exodus myth began hundreds of years earlier, as black religion scholar Albert Raboteau has pointed out in his discussion of slaves’ creation of a mythic past. According to historian Albert J. Raboteau (1978), the appropriation of the Exodus story was for slaves a way of articulating their sense of historical identity as a people. That identity was also based, of course, upon their common heritage of enslavement.

The 1954 publication of George G. M. James’s *Stolen Legacy*, which challenged white ideas about ancient civilization, bears mentioning. *Stolen Legacy* assumed ancient Egyptians had been black Africans and that their religious, philosophical and scientific ideas were “stolen” by Greeks. Lincoln encountered this text while living in Los Angeles during the seventies where

²⁸⁴ Graham Lock, *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1999), 15.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

she wrote a thesis on ancient Egypt and served as a lecturer in Pan African Studies at Cal State University-Northridge.²⁸⁶ The influence of Judeo-Christianity on African American culture also influenced Lincoln's lyric for the song "Africa," with her reference to Canaan—"a land of milk and honey"—and the song's dramatic ending where Lincoln screams that "all her life" she will "roam"—vis-à-vis the Old Testament Israelites.

Nearly twenty years later, Lincoln revisited the trope of looking to/ward Africa. In the original, "When I'm Called Home" from the 1991 Verve release, *You Gotta Pay the Band*. Though less explicitly biblical (the song's title, for example, signifies in black church vernacular the theme of death and ascension to the heaven home, as well as a return to her homeland of Africa), musically, "When I'm Called Home" resembles a gospel hymn in tempo, specifically in its harmonic movement of mainly primary chords (I, IV, and V) in root positions.²⁸⁷ Unlike a gospel hymn, however, "When I'm Called Home" includes no refrain but consists of three 10-bar verses made up of two-to-three sentences about the repercussions of chattel slavery. Pianist Hank Jones's obligato playing supplies the principal melody while drummer Mark Johnson uses mallets on the tom, invoking the sound of rolling thunder as the song opens.

When I'm called home
 I will bring a book
 That tells of strange and funny turns
 And of the heart it took.
 To keep on living in a world
 That never was my own
 A world of haunted memories
 Of other worlds unknown.
 I'll tell them of the trouble here
 When they call me home.

²⁸⁶ Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. 3 March 2000.

²⁸⁷ Rodney Kendrick. Personal Interview. 2 July 2008.

In the first verse Lincoln vows to recount her experiences about life in the new world—a world “that never was [her] own.” The implication here is that she inherited “haunted memories” about an “unknown” world through her ancestors. With lines like “I’ll tell them of a ghostly world/Of us and they and him,” the second verse draws an analogy between a “beggar’s life” and the black experience and locates diasporic Africans—“us”—and Africans—“they”—in opposition to an unnamed oppressor—“him.” Tenor saxophonist Stan Getz contributes a stunning 18-bar solo between the second and last verse, where Lincoln enters powerfully, her tempo slightly increased. Getz’s saxophone is joined by Charlie Haden’s bass, which outlines the chord changes with subtle lines further accented by Mark Johnson’s snare drum in 4/4, transforming the gospel-sounding song to what many would consider a jazz ballad.²⁸⁸ Lincoln implies a charged symbol of re-memory, the slave ship—in Paul Gilroy’s words “a living microcultural, micropolitical system in motion”—in the last verse when she sings the line, “I will tell the rivers of the children lost at sea.” As the line continues she sings of souls that are battered and “what it costs to spirit free,” direct references to the recurring and still relevant memory of the middle passage.²⁸⁹ Here, author Toni Morrison’s concept of literary archaeology is exemplified by Lincoln’s “reconstruction of the slavery world.” The song concludes very much in the tradition of a gospel-hymn as Lincoln invokes “Hallelujah” and declares her intention to “testify”:

When I’m called home I will tell the stars
Of the battles that were lost in a world of wars.
I will tell the rivers of the children lost at sea
Of how a soul is bartered
And what it costs a spirit free.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Kanneh, *African Identities*, 62.

Hallelujah tell a story, oh
 When they call me home.
 Hallelujah tell my story, oh
 When they call me home.²⁹⁰

NINA SIMONE ON AFRICA

On the subject of her relationship to Africa in a 1983 conversation with David Nathan, founder and president (1965-1993) of the London-based Nina Simone Appreciation Society, Simone responded:

You know Africa's my home, don't you? Yes, that's where I belong. I was happier there than in such a long time. If only I hadn't gone back to America it [a recording deal] would have worked out. Ha! I should have known, every time I go back to the states, shit always happens. I guess I should know better, but I keep on believing one day they'll really get it over there, but they just pretend all the time....Well, nothing's changed.²⁹¹

In her statement, Simone juxtaposes the sense of belonging, happiness and home, which she associates with Africa, with the unchanging racism in her native America. The quote, taken while Simone lived in Switzerland, also suggests that she returned to the States on several occasions in an effort to maintain her American roots. However, it was the connection she had to Africa that provided the artist a sense of home.

On December 20, 1962, Nina Simone traveled to Africa for the first time. The then twenty-eight year old singer traveled to Lagos, Nigeria with a party of thirty African American artists and intellectuals under the banner of AMSAC, the American Society of African Culture.

²⁹⁰ Abbey Lincoln.; *You Gotta Pay the Band*, Verve 314 51 110; 1991.

²⁹¹ Sylvia Hampton with David Nathan. *Nina Simone: Break Down & Let It All Out*. (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 2004), 89.

She had been invited to join the organization by friends Langston Hughes and James Baldwin.²⁹²

In her autobiography, *I Put A Spell on You*, Simone recalls:

I looked out over miles and miles of jungle as we flew until we dropped down to land and the blunt heat of Africa hit us. Outside on the tarmac I could hear the drums going and the songs of welcome starting up. When I got to the door I saw crowds stretched out all round, musicians and dancers, local politicians in their traditional African clothes in a small group at the bottom of the steps, school children waving and running through the crowd. We stood, all of us, blinking in the sun at the celebrations our arrival triggered. All around us were black faces, and I felt for the first time the spiritual relaxation any Afro-American feels on reaching Africa..²⁹³

Simone's initial response to Africa is, if somewhat fanciful, still a glimpse of the allure that Africa held (and holds) for many African Americans. Moreover, that Simone makes her first trip to Africa during the Civil Rights movement bears great significance. Historian James Meriwether has argued that African Americans promote stronger ties with Africa when they feel more alienated in the United States; when their situation appears to be improving, Meriwether argues, they feel less need to pursue links with Africa--that is, identifying with the ancestral homeland is viewed as a substitute for identifying with America.²⁹⁴ Simone's first visit to Africa coincided with several African nations' emancipation from colonial rule, thus increasing her awareness of the connection between the American Civil Rights Movement and freedom movements around the world. After the Nigerian trip, Simone began to emphasize the

²⁹² Simone and Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 80.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*. (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 6.

importance of Africa to African Americans.²⁹⁵ She wore an Afro in promotional photos and performed in African clothing, evoking strong reactions from her audiences.²⁹⁶ Speaking about this time in her life Simone observed:

I was seduced by Africa in my mind, my mythical home. My Africa had no countries, just hundreds of different people mixed through history into a rough cocktail and forced to seed an exiled nation in a far-off country: my great-grandfather, grandma, daddy, momma, and me.²⁹⁷

Despite showing no factual knowledge of the history of Africa and its vast cultures, this quote illustrates Simone's adoption of the continent as her "mythical home." Although the 1962 trip afforded little time for exploring—in Simone's own words the trip entailed "plenty of fanciful speeches and high-minded aims"—an ethnic bond was born of this experience.²⁹⁸ The bond established for Simone during the AMSAC tour was strengthened in 1974, when, upon her return to the U.S.A. following a three-year stay in Barbados, Simone was invited to Africa by friend and South African singer Miriam Makeba, who had taken Lincoln to Africa the previous year. Simone recalled:

Miriam had been invited to Liberia to attend a gala rally celebrating President Tolbert's new government and wanted me to go along. I knew a little about North Africa because I'd stayed in Morocco after one trip to Europe, but the AMSAC trip had been my only experience to date of West Africa, the heart of the old slave trade and the home of my ancestors before slavery, when they were free. Liberia had been founded by freed slaves returning to settle in Africa, and their descendants made up the most prosperous

²⁹⁵ Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore,'" 49.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Simone, *I Put A Spell On You*, 137.

²⁹⁸ Ibid 80.

section of Liberian society. Liberia and America were connected through history in a positive way, and Liberian culture and society reflected that. It was a good place to start at for an Afro-American looking to reconcile themselves to their own history.²⁹⁹

In her contention that Liberia and America “were connected through history in a positive way” Simone is referencing events that pre-date even Garveyism, reaching back as far as the 1847 act of the U.S. Congress which granted a charter to the American Colonization Society (comprised of free black people) to join the Republic of Liberia. Interestingly, Simone makes no mention of the precarious relationship between Liberia and the U.S.A. Historian Penny Von Eschen notes that nearly a century after the passage of the 1847 act Liberia found itself “in a strategically wartime location” and that the U.S. and Liberia reached a formal defense agreement in March of 1942, which permitted the construction of an American air base.³⁰⁰ The black press monitored the negative impact of the U.S. military presence on the political economy of Liberia and analyzed the history of the country, dating back to the nineteenth century when Firestone Tires, by dint of repaying an international loan first issued by J.P. Morgan, became the virtual ruler of Liberia.³⁰¹

Two comments in Simone’s quote deserve our attention because they reveal a mindset adopted by many African American artists and intellectuals during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Firstly, Simone connects herself to Africa by claiming West Africa as “the home of [her] ancestors.” Secondly, she defines the 1974 trip as the “start” of her reconciliation process to her African history. As part of that process, I contend that Simone consciously began

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 39.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

to look to/ward Africa for musical inspiration. In her autobiography, *I Put A Spell On You*, she speaks at length about an early experience at the nightclub ‘The Maze’ in downtown Monrovia:

I started dancing and the champagne and my happiness and the music got to me all at once, got to me good. I started stripping my clothes off while I danced, and everybody started clapping, hooting, feeding me champagne. I got down to nothing at all and danced naked for at least two hours, having the time of my life. Later I wrote a song about it, “Liberian Calypso.”³⁰²

By the time Simone got around to writing “Liberian Calypso,” the continent had lost its romantic appeal. Released on the *Fodder On My Wings* album (Carrere, 1982) “Liberian Calypso”’s second stanza depicts Monrovia in less than flattering terms:

There’s so much gossip in the town
Nobody knows what’s really going down
Stench, smelled, I couldn’t stand it
The dirtier you are the more you’re a hit

However, the song winds its way to an upbeat conclusion, dating back to Simone’s experience at The Maze nightclub:

I danced all over the place you know
All over the ceiling, all over the floor
Up in the balcony, all around
I felt so good just being in town

My joy was so complete, you know
My friend was happy. He said, Go, go.
I danced for hours, hours on end
I said, Dear Lord, you are my friend
You brought me home to Liberia.

“Liberian Calypso” became a performance staple throughout the 1980s and 90s for Simone.

³⁰² Simone with Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 140.

CASSANDRA WILSON ON AFRICA

The position more commonly taken in the post-Civil Rights era is that jazz music is deeply connected to Africa.³⁰³ However, for Cassandra Wilson the impulse to develop a relationship with Africa grew out of a desire to study African philosophy and spirituality. Coming of age in the early seventies meant that Wilson would experience the inclusion of African American studies in her education and be able to visit black museums, bastions of African history, art and culture first developed during the mid 1960s. This explains, in part, why in our first interview the focus of Wilson's trip to the Ivory Coast in 2000 (the artist later traveled to South Africa and will embark on her third sojourn to Africa—Angola—the summer of 2012) attended to what the singer referred to as “a reunion of the spirits”:

CW: I traveled to the Ivory Coast with my ex-husband, Isaach de Bankole, who, himself is Ivorian. It was like a reunion of the spirits. My spirit with African spirits. I felt a special calm and at the same time a keen awareness of everything. The gait of an old fisherman, who you would swear you'd just seen on 125th street [in Harlem]; the way children spoke to their mothers; the role of music in everyday life. Everything had a rhythm. I guess you could say I went looking for it—looking for the rhythm. Although, I had purposely gone to get away from the music for a bit. I had gone without the band or a gig. Yeah, I went looking for the rhythm--for our ancestors' way of life, and to see if and how it mirrored my own. It was definitely a reunion of the spirits because I saw what I had been working for...the peace I strive for. I saw that it's possible. Only, I don't know if it's possible in a place like the U.S. where your spirit has to fend off racism and prejudice.³⁰⁴

Though Wilson's quote does not explicitly suggest that she traveled to Africa in search of her history it is implied when she states that she “went looking for the rhythm.” The history

³⁰³ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora*, 329.

that the singer had hoped to experience was to be found in contemporary Africans' practice of "our ancestors' way of life." Later in the interview, Wilson invoked the term of "ancestor" again when she labeled the continent of Africa "the land of the ancestors."

LB: Can you speak a little bit more on why you think traveling to 'the land of the ancestors' is important...especially since you also cite Ireland and the Irish as part of your heritage?

CW: Africa is different than Ireland because my Irish ancestors left on their own accord. They were allowed to bring with them photographs, instruments, memorabilia...their language, their religion. Our African ancestors did not have that luxury. We arrived here with nothing but our "remembers" [she makes quotation marks in the air with her fingers] and the music. So, it's important to travel to Africa—to West Africa, to where our ancestors lived before they were taken, to gain a sense of what was lost. What they lost and what we lost as a result of their loss. I find that it's important to be in touch with that loss. It grows you up—spiritually.³⁰⁵

Africa holds uniquely different values for Wilson, Lincoln and Simone. However, for each artist its significance is apparent. Wilson regards Africa as a place of spiritual sanctuary, a place for diasporic Africans to visit in order to understand what was lost, but equally important, to find respite from racial injustice and its effects. To further establish Africa as her spiritual home, Wilson has studied Yoruba and considers herself a follower of the religion. Lincoln's Africa represents a site of rebirth; there she received new names before coming into her own as a composer. After traveling to Africa, Lincoln would pen her own songs—over a hundred, only occasionally dotting her repertoire and future recordings and concerts with standards. Lincoln returned to Africa several times for concert performances in Ghana, South Africa and, most

³⁰⁴ Cassandra Wilson. Interview. 1 July 2002.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

recently Morocco, where she headlined in the 2000 Red Sea Jazz Festival. Nina Simone found a home in the truest sense in Africa. She lived in Monrovia, Liberia from 1974 until 1978 while embroiled in legal battles with record companies over her royalties, and with the IRS, who seized her home in Mount Vernon, New York. During this period, Simone composed and collaborated on several Afrocentric compositions, examined later in this chapter.

'BACK TO YESTERDAY'S MOON': RE-MEMORY

Scholarship in African American cultural studies has already succeeded in confirming the significance of memory within the domain of black history and black expressive culture. The preceding section housed brief quoted remarks from Lincoln, Simone and Wilson in which each artist makes mention of her ancestors. This conscious choice to link oneself to an African forebear, to claim an African heritage, is made manifest lyrically and musically in many of the songs these artists composed. In this section, we turn our focus to those songs whose lyrics bear witness to an African heritage by explicit reference to Africa and the employment of Africanisms. The subfield of black cultural memory (Brand 2001; O'Meally and Fabre 1994; Morrison 1986, 1995; Danticat 1998, 1999; Richards 2000, 2005, 2006) has been critical in helping me think about the function of memory in a musical context, but it is Morrison's usage of the site of memory and her creation of re-memory that this chapter thrives upon.

Originally employed by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*, "rememory" constitutes the act of remembering a memory. In the post-apocalyptic slavery novel, instead of using the words "remember" and "forget," the novel's protagonist, Sethe, invokes the word "rememory" as a noun. Re-memory is when a memory is revisited, either mentally or physically and for Sethe is often a thing. When she explains re-memory to Denver she states, "If a house burns down, it's

gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my re-memory, but out there in the world” (37). As Sethe expresses it, re-memory is both subjective and intersubjective: “Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a re-memory that belongs to someone else” (36). Re-memory is also premised on a cyclical understanding of time (contrary to our linear understanding of history) as exemplified by Sethe when she states, “Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never was there—you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you.” However, despite its dependence on time as we experience it, re-memory differs from “memory” in its active force independent of the memory holder.³⁰⁶ Sethe explains: “What I remember is a picture floating around there outside my head...even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.”³⁰⁷ For Sethe, the past is alive in the present, so that re-memory more aptly defines the conscious efforts one must make in order to remember the past and to bridge that memory to the present.

Much in the way that Morrison constructs events that parallel the way the human mind recalls in *Beloved*—this serves as a means by which the reader can experience the sometimes disorienting activity of memory—Lincoln, Simone and Wilson perform songs that enable the listener to reconstruct the past by recasting Africa in present memory during the song

³⁰⁶ Mary Paniccia Carden. “Models of Memory and Romance: The Dual Endings of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, no.4 (1999): 407.

³⁰⁷ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1988), 37.

performance. I contend that through the performance and recording of re-memory songs, Lincoln, Simone and Wilson reaffirm a collective history in ways that written historical accounts not only have failed to do in African America, but cannot do. For while the reading of history enables one to glean information about that which has happened, it does not deliver on the second functional aspect of re-memory, which is to call its readers to participate in the past event(s). Much in the way that some museums (specifically “living” museums such as the Pilgrim Village, Plimoth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg) incorporate participant/observer interaction, re-memory songs invite listeners to reconstruct the past, if only for the duration of the song. Like museums, re-memory songs are empowered to archive, chronicle and preserve culture. They are aural storehouses of collective memory. Herein also lies the crucial distinction between re-memory and other revisionist concepts, like scholar George Lipsitz’s development and usage of the term counter-memory in his critical work on collective memory and American popular culture, *Time Passages*. Whereas Lipsitz’s idea of counter-memory looks to the past for hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives and forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past, re-memory finds potency in engaging the participant in the remaking of the memory.³⁰⁸ In their ability to enable listeners to create an African past in the present, re-memory songs function in the same manner as Sethe’s own re-memories as places, or better, pictures of certain places triggering off representations, vivid descriptions or accounts; re-memory songs enable listeners to create an African past in the present. This idea is reflected in the October 17, 2002, interview with Cassandra Wilson in *USA Weekend Magazine* wherein the vocalist stated when questioned about her motivation during

³⁰⁸ Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 213.

singing: “I’d like the people to feel some connection to a memory, something that produces a visceral response to the music. I hope the music is something that gives them a sense of timelessness and history.”

Re-memory songs incorporate Africanisms, those elements—symbols, behaviors, practices—of culture found in the New World that are traceable to an African origin³⁰⁹ and resonate with African American vernacular with the specific intent to mobilize collective history. In the cases of these musicians, the employment of Africanisms lends particular nuance to their songs by encoding the lyric. That is, these songwriters use Africanisms to signify meaning without diffusing the power of that meaning in the process. Re-memory songs function on two levels: first, by replacing negative readings of African images with positive meanings, and second, by involving participants (listeners) in the performance of songs derived of elements of the past creatively reconfigured to promote collective history. The extraordinary relevance of re-memory songs is that they require all listeners to consider a history often given short shrift in educational venues and popular culture; and they encourage black listeners to return to an African past they never knew as a means of cultural connection and celebration. For re-memory songs Africa is not tangential to the central notion of history, it is given primary focus. Most significantly, in the performance of re-memory songs, remembering the African past becomes redemptive.

As a consequence of the traumatic rupture from the past, French historian Pierre Nora suggests that many diasporic people have willfully adopted *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory):

³⁰⁹ Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), ix.

Lieux de mémoire occur where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-- but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.³¹⁰

I expand Nora's idea of lieux de mémoire so that it also includes songs because African Americans have historically looked to music for retentions of African culture as well as a "sense of historical continuity." Songs are ephemeral, and yet, as aural sites of memory they have functional equivalency to historical sites. Without physical embodiment like the Amistad ship or the 'Door of No Return' on Gorée Island, aural sites of memory are songs composed with the intention to bring the listener (participant) to a site where the memory of "a particular historical moment" may be re-created.

Encouraging black artists to confront the "original trauma" of the Middle Passage in which their diasporic identity is rooted, Morrison writes in the essay, "The Site of Memory":

The gap between Africa and Afro Americans and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present can be bridged for us by our assuming responsibility for people no one's ever assumed responsibility for. They are those that died en route. Nobody knows about them. In addition to that, they never survived in the lore, there are no songs or dances or tales of these people. The people who arrived—there is lore about them but nothing survives about that.³¹¹

In "The Site of Memory" essay wherein she utilizes Nora's concept, Morrison bids African American writers to "assume responsibility" for African ancestors and the past, describing the

³¹⁰ Nellie Y. McKay, "The Journals of Charlotte L. Forten-Grimké: Les Lieux de Mémoire in African American Women's Autobiography," in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262.

site of memory as a tool, mechanism, and mode of analysis employed in her craft of literary archaeology³¹²:

On the basis of some information you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth.³¹³

Combining memory, imagination, and invention, Morrison attempts to access the unlettered world of past black generations. An artifact such as a photograph can inspire her imaginative reconstruction; a single memory or a historical fact can trigger the journey into her own or others' interior life.³¹⁴ Like the vocalists-composers presented here, Morrison believes that it is the responsibility of diasporic Africans to remember and that through remembering we may be relieved of some of the "psychological morass" attributable to the Middle Passage and the effects of slavery. Morrison's practice of literary archaeology holds critical value for diasporic Africans because their point of origin also represents, in Nora's words, "the point where memory has been torn." Lincoln, Simone and Wilson create songs capable of giving the impression of a place or period by condensing "the remains" into a single image, often resulting in the production of aural sites of memory—songs capable of aurally transporting the listener to a site where the subjective memory shatters space-time configuration in order to piece the salvaged

³¹¹ Marsha Darling, "In The Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison" in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 252.

³¹² Judylyn S. Ryan and Estella Conwill Májoza, "Jazz—On the Site Of Memory," in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 31, no. 2 (1998): 133.

³¹³ Ibid.

fragments together into a new meaningful order. In African American culture, one salvaged fragment resides in the image of the bird.

The bird became a mythic representation of African life during slavery. Beginning with black vernacular sacred songs such as “Two Wings,” “If I Had Wings of A Dove,” and “I’ll Fly Away,” the writing and performance of songs that deploy black flight and the trope of the flying African inspired a tradition found in every sector of black literary arts: poetry (Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Sympathy,” Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” and Yusef Komunyakaa’s “Bird on a Powerline”); drama (C. Bernard Jackson’s *Fly Blackbird* and Pearl Cleage’s *Flyin’ West*); and literature (Ralph Ellison’s “Flying Home,” Richard Wright’s “Lawd Today,” Sterling A. Brown’s “Slim in Hell,” and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*). These creative works draw on a long legacy of black Americans’ diasporic reinvention in African-folklore inspired art, for as Farah Jasmine Griffin observes: “Interestingly, from the anonymous composers of the spirituals and folk tales to later poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Abbey Lincoln, black people have likened themselves to birds: birds in flight, birds incapable of flight, caged birds, free birds, but most especially singing birds.”³¹⁵ Griffin’s observation about ‘singing birds’ would appear especially true in the case of Wilson, Simone and Lincoln, who, collectively, have recorded over a dozen songs featuring birds, as shown in table 5.1:

³¹⁴ Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music*, 31.

³¹⁵ Griffin, *If You Can’t Be Free, Be A Mystery*, 107.

Table 5.1 Bird Songs
Original and Non-Original performances on the trope of black flight
(*indicates an original composition)

Abbey Lincoln	Nina Simone	Cassandra Wilson
*"Caged Bird," <i>Golden Lady</i> (1980) and <i>Wholly Earth</i> (1998) *"Bird Alone," <i>You Gotta Pay the Band</i> (1991) "Skylark," <i>It's Me</i> (2003) "Yellow Bird," <i>It's Me</i> (2003)	"Bye Bye Blackbird," <i>Nina Simone at the Village Gate</i> (1962) "Black Swan," <i>Nina Simone at Carnegie Hall</i> (1963) * "Blackbird," <i>Nina Simone with Strings</i> (1966) * "Fodder On Her Wings," <i>Fodder On My Wings</i> (1982)	*"Apricots On Their Wings," <i>Days Aweigh</i> (1987) "Black Crow," <i>Blue Light Till Dawn</i> (1993) "Sankofa," <i>Blue Light Til Dawn</i> , (1993) "Skylark," <i>New Moon Daughter</i> (1996) "Blackbird," <i>Silver Pony</i> (2010)

This chapter began with an epigraph from Wilson's "Sankofa," heard on her 1993 debut album for Blue Note Records, *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*. Wilson's original song resurrects the popular Africanism of the mythical Ghanaian bird of redemption known as sankofa.³¹⁶ The verse reads:

Oh Sankofa high in the heavens you soar
 My soul is soon to follow you
 back to yesterday's moon
 Will it remember me?
 Back to yesterday's sun
 It will rekindle me
 Rekindle the spirit
 into tomorrow
 And high on the wind
 Sankofa flies again and again.
 Sankofa flies again and again.³¹⁷

Straight ahead in its approach, Wilson's lyric states that in a temporally reversed journey "back to yesterday's moon," sankofa will lead her to the place where her spirit will be renewed,

³¹⁶ Sankofa is an Akan word that means, 'The past offers a guide for the future' or, Know your past in order that you may know your future. It is commonly understood in symbolic use as an Akan gold weight carved to look like a bird, with head turned and looking backward.

³¹⁷ Cassandra Wilson: *Blue Light Til Dawn*, Blue Note 0777 7 81357 2 2; 1993.

“rekindled.” Musically, Wilson colors the a cappella song’s texture by adding density in the manner of employing solo voices at staggered entrances. The end result—a mesmerizing melodic chant that features juxtaposed voices of different ranges (all her own) including alto, bass, soprano and falsetto. Demonstrating varying pitches enables the singer to emphasize the power of a single voice.

Wilson revisits the bird trope on her most recent album, *Silver Pony* (Blue Note, 2010), in a stunning revision of the Beatles’ “Blackbird,” recorded in 1968. Wilson’s vocal, which weaves in and out of the rarely employed falsetto (3:29-3:34), floats above a tight rhythmic interlocking established by Jonathan Batiste on Fender Rhodes, guitarist Marvin Sewell, percussionist Lekan Babalola, drummer Herlin Riley and bassist Reginald Veal, transforming it from the lilting folk quality of Lennon and McCartney’s original into a rollicking joyride. During a television interview with PBS talk show host Tavis Smiley (that aired on November 15, 2010), when asked why she recorded “Blackbird,” Wilson’s response reflected a message of hope and self-affirmation for black America:

It’s my understanding that Paul wrote this during the Civil Rights era. It’s a very powerful piece. And I think it says a lot about what I feel we should be doing as a people right now. The song says, Why don’t you take your wings? Why don’t you take your wings and fly? There’s so much that we have psychologically that’s a burden. We’re carrying a lot of baggage as a people and it’s time for us to release that. And fly. Move on, and be able to build on the brilliant path that’s already been laid for us. All we have to do is take the chance and go for it. There’s so much that’s holding us back psychologically... You know Joy Degruy? She talks about the issues we have as a result of being enslaved, and that’s something we need to come face to face with. Acknowledge it. Learn as much as we can about our history. Study Egypt. That’s really important right now. We are so caught up in studying the Bible, and we’re so caught up in Christianity. I think that that’s, if I may say so, that’s a large part of what’s holding us back.

Unpacking Wilson's quote sheds light on the musician's Afrocentrism. Not only does she see Christianity as a contributor to the psychological impediments of blacks (a comment the singer received backlash for in social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter), she stands as an advocate for Egyptology, continuing the long tradition of jazz musicians who found spiritual and creative sustenance when looking to/ward Egypt (Sun Ra, John & Alice Coltrane, etc). Thus when the song resolves with the question, Why don't you take your wings and fly? Wilson seeks to embed messages of agency, hope, direction and affirmation for the African American listener.

However, the road to Wilson's optimism was a hard row to tow. In Nina Simone's 1963 original "Blackbird" the trials and tribulations of the black freedom struggle informed for Simone a bleak concept of black flight. Simone's song invokes the feeling of displacement and homelessness, speaking explicitly to African Americans caught up in the hellish saga of the battle for civil rights. Where Wilson asks her blackbird, Why don't you take your wings and fly? Simone impugns her blackbird with the rhetorical question:

So why you wanna fly Blackbird, you ain't ever gonna fly
 You ain't got no one to hold you, you ain't got no one to care
 If you'd only understand dear, nobody wants you anywhere
 So why you wanna fly Blackbird, you ain't ever gonna fly.³¹⁸

Here, the narrative voice can be interpreted as the external voice of societal racism or an oppressed internal voice (a likely result from internalization of racist affliction). Simone's choice of percussion-only accompaniment (personnel unlisted), more reminiscent of frustrated flailing wings or slaps than the rhythmic intention normally associated with percussion instruments, highlights this song as a message for African Americans, since the drum, as we

shall see later in this chapter, evokes Africa. A spare musical arrangement and lyric that addresses blacks who have struggled with feeling caged up, inevitably ends on a note of despair. Given the historical backdrop of the song's genesis, it is clear that Simone felt true equality for blacks would never be reached in America. Thus, she warns the blackbird against tricking herself into a perpetual state of dashed hopes. Less than a decade after writing this song, when asked why she renounced the U.S.A. as her home Simone responded: "They kill all of the black leaders. How can I live where my people cannot have leadership?" In the Obama era, Wilson's "Blackbird" is a timely message of hope, yet we must never forget Simone's "Blackbird," a re-memory of the hardships of African diasporic life in the mid twentieth century.

Original songs by Abbey Lincoln that feature the trope of black flight achieve less literal, more figurative currency. For example, a prime example of onomatopoeic, or imitative phonosemantics is found in Lincoln's song "Caged Bird," first written in the late 1970s. Appearing first on her *Painted Lady: In Paris* album (Blue Marge 1980, later released as *Golden Lady* on the Inner City label in 1981), for fifty seconds Lincoln offers an onomatopoeic performance where her squawks and keening evoke a trapped or caged bird. Lincoln reprised the song on the *Wholly Earth* album (Verve, 1999), where singer Maggie Brown joins for call-and-response singing. In this version, Lincoln refrains from some of the onomatopoeic sounds, choosing instead to hum in unison with Brown. However, the recording offers simulated bird sounds against a wild percussive backdrop by Daniel Moreno on percussion, Bobby Hutcherson on marimba and James Hurt on piano, together creating a cacophony that calls to mind a mad bird trying to free herself. The era that witnessed the composition of "Caged Bird" also saw

³¹⁸ Nina Simone, *Nina Simone With Strings*, Colpix CPL 496, 1966, vinyl lp.

Lincoln's looping, dipping evocation of life as a perilous solo flight in the song "Bird Alone," originally inspired by Miles Davis. In the artist's own words: "I started writing "Bird Alone" in 1973 when I was in Japan recording the *People In Me* album. Miles was over there working too and I had asked him to lend me some of his musicians. The Japanese have always loved this music. There were some Japanese players eager to work with me, but they really didn't understand this form. Anyway, he sent me his musicians. And Miles wasn't doing too well. I observed him in the studio one day and I thought he was lonely and alone too. So I started writing the song for him, but I didn't finish it until years later. When I finished it I realized the song was for myself. I'm the bird alone—singing in the night."³¹⁹ Covered by jazz vocalists Dianne Reeves, Sheila Jordan, Kendra Shank, Ruth Cameron and more, "Bird Alone," off *You Gotta Pay the Band* (Verve, 1991) features Hank Jones on piano, drummer Mark Johnson, bassist Charlie Haden, Maxine Roach on viola and a poignant solo performance by Stan Getz, who would pass shortly after the recording session.³²⁰ As Griffin (2001) observed: "Unlike the caged birds of Rita Dove's and Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems, Abbey Lincoln sings of birds not satisfied with their cages, birds meant "to fly away," and ultimately autonomous birds who glide and soar on the wind."³²¹

Beyond explicit usages of the bird trope, several songs carry the flying metaphor as in the Lincoln original, "Learning How to Listen," when she sings from the top of the second verse: "Music is a lover with shiny golden wings"; or a line taken from "Down Here Below"

³¹⁹ Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. August 7, 2003.

³²⁰ "Bird Alone," holds significant value for the author who chose this as her first song to sing publicly—at St. Nick's Jazz Pub (on a stage backed by a giant photograph of Miles Davis) in Harlem, fall of 2001. She also chose this song to be sung at the funeral of her grandmother on December 3, 2001.

³²¹ Farah Jasmine Griffin. *If you Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*, 161.

which reads: “I hear the distant thunder and the crying of the loon.” Or in the final verse of “I Got Thunder (And It Rings!)” where she intones: “When my life on earth is over and the struggle here is won/I will find a new dimension in the rising sun/In the place that is forever I will spread my wings and fly/If you see a streak of lightning I’ll be passing by,” or the dazzling couplet: “We come and we go, the hawk and the dove/’Cause everything is a circle of love” from the original, “Circle of Love.” In fact, of the artists presented here, Abbey Lincoln displays the strongest impulse to draw on animal imagery vis-à-vis the African folktale. Further musical examples include the title song of Lincoln’s fifth Verve release, *A Turtle’s Dream* (1995), where she imagines that she is a sea creature moving slowly through the ocean. Swimming alone and unnoticed, the turtle has fantasies that she will one day ‘soar like an eagle’ and ‘walk like a lion,’ but understands that these dreams will never be:

Maybe one day I’ll fly
like an eagle,
fly like a bird and go and go.
Soar like an eagle,
walk like a lion,
although it won’t be, I know.

However, Lincoln concludes the song on a peaceful note of self-acceptance as witnessed in the lines: “But I can swim the ocean/And it’s deep and wide/ And in the house above me abide.”

Another song where Lincoln’s usage of animal imagery parallels that of an African folktale is “I Sing A Song” from the *Who Used to Dance* (Verve, 1996) album. The song opens with:

I awaken with a feeling
sometimes weary at a glance,
looking at my life’s condition
in the mirror of by chance.
Sometimes demons come to visit.
I can see them in the trees
or an elephant with thunder

rolling gently through the breeze.³²²

Although the opening lines present Lincoln in a vulnerable state, visited by ‘demons,’ because elephants represent wisdom and thunder represents power in many African folktales, we can infer that despite a “weary” feeling the narrator will overcome because she can also see ‘an elephant with thunder.’

‘DANCE TO THE DRUMMER AGAIN’: ON THE AURAL SITE OF RE-MEMORY

In her highly anthologized 1928 essay “How It Feels to be Colored Me,” Zora Neale Hurston speaks to jazz’s ability to become an aural site of re-memory, the work Irele defines as creating “a common past serving to celebrate the collective compact in the present.”³²³ For Hurston, jazz music signifies a meditation on “Blackness, in all it’s constructed imposition,”—as “a special site and resources for a task of articulation where immanence is structured by an irreducibly improvisatory exteriority that can occasion something very much like sadness and something very much like devilish enjoyment.”³²⁴ Hurston writes:

When I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen—follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside

³²² Abbey Lincoln, *Who Used to Dance*, Verve 314 533 559-2, 1996, compact disc.

³²³ F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the African Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103.

³²⁴ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 255.

myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark *yeeeeooww!* I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something—give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly. “Good music they have here,” he remarks, drumming the table with his fingertips. Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am *so* colored.

The above quote captures the “singular temporospatial nodes found in the tumultuous relationship between black cultural production and sound in the twentieth century, an intimate affair, to be sure, one marked by soft screams and loud whispers”—to borrow from Alexander Weheliye.³²⁵ Hurston’s ethnographic description is telling because it allows us to understand the relation between sound and re-memory where the tension between anticipation and imagination is rendered especially acute by her sense of polyrhythm and repetition. According to Welsh Asante (1985), repetition sense refers to the “intensifying of one movement, one sequence. Intensification is not static, it goes by repetition from one level to another until ecstasy, euphoria, possession, saturation, and satisfaction have been reached. Hurston’s description of the ensemble and its music oscillates between the language of fact, her material world—the New World Café’s “drafty basement”—and the language of her imagined Africa, where her “face is painted red and yellow and [her] body is painted blue.” Thus, her imagination plays a crucial role in a narrative-musical recollection of the past, if only because that past is no longer part of

the immediate experience of the singer or audience. Moreover, attention to the sounds of jazz provide Hurston with a re-memory of Africa, made possible through the motion sense known as polyrhythm; the rhythmic quality of the aesthetic is the most distinguishable of its qualities. It is the world within another world, or as Lincoln sings in the original “The Music is the Magic”:

The music is the magic of a secret world
 Secret world, secret world
 The music is the magic of a secret world
 it's a world that is always within.³²⁶

As vocalists who also understand their roles as griots in the African diaspora, Lincoln, Simone, and Wilson bear the collective cultural memory.³²⁷ Because their songs draw on imagery of Africa in sound and lyric, they compel the listener to actively structure a memory of Africa vis-à-vis Hurston, the jungle queen painted in red, yellow and blue. These sonic and vocalic instigations during performance amplify community cohesion by enabling disparate audience members to hear (experience) history communally, a concept Houston A. Baker Jr. refers to as Afro-American womanist “conjuring,” which institutes “a revered site of culturally specific interests and values.”³²⁸ Thus, the precise aim of re-memory songs is to function as a discursive, musical and textual reconstitution of the completed past. According to Hayden White, the process of reconstitution not only obeys a principle of selection and rearrangement of the material to be presented in musical form, it also involves calling into play distinct musical strategies.³²⁹ This brings us to the drum, the African heartbeat (or, as Max Roach famously

³²⁵ Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 17.

³²⁶ Abbey Lincoln, *Devil's Got Your Tongue*, Verve 314 513 574-2, 1992, compact disc.

³²⁷ Irele, *The African Imagination*, 109.

³²⁸ Houston A. Baker Jr., *Workings of The Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 99.

³²⁹ Ibid 101.

though less elegantly stated, “the Nigger of the orchestra”).³³⁰ Evidence of the importance of the drum in African music is well documented (Willie Anku 1986, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1995; John Chernoff 1979; A.M. Jones 1954; James Koetting 1970; Roy Hartigan 1995; David Locke 1982). A considerable number of recent works discuss the specific relation of drums to jazz (Anthony Brown 1990; Danny Gottlieb 2011; Burt Korall 2002; Lewis Porter 1982; John Riley 1994; Olly Wilson 1974). Anthony Brown (1990) offers insights into the change in the role of the rhythm section during the development of Bop, instigated by the pioneering efforts of ‘drumset artists’ Kenny Clarke (1914-1985), Art Blakey (1919-1990), Max Roach (1924-2007), and Elvin Jones (1927-2004), who expanded the function of the drumset from accompanying timekeeper to active participant in the music-making process.³³¹ Gottlieb (2011) offers an historical analysis of jazz drumming from Chick Webb to Max Roach. Korall (2002) focuses on the swing era of drumming in the specific contexts of radio, recordings, ballroom dance and theater. Lewis Porter’s seminal essay, “An Historical Survey of Jazz Drumming Styles” (1982) addresses cultural hybridity and identity as seen through a study of drummers’ highly individualistic expressions. Riley (1994) offers insights into time-playing, soloing, brush technique, against the backdrop of jazz history. In his work on Ghanaian percussion ensembles, Olly Wilson (1974) highlights the role of various percussion instruments, assigning ‘fixed or variable,’ rhythmic qualities to each within the whole rhythmic group, and draws parallels to functions of the jazz drumset.

³³⁰ Roach’s comment suggests that in the European frame of orchestral music-making the drum is most related to African ritual musical activity; it is the drummer whose role would seem most analogous to that of an individual virtuoso found in jazz.

³³¹ By the bebop innovation of the 1940s, the trap drumset, born in the 1890s, had assumed the basic form still in use today—base and snare drums, tom-toms, high-hat cymbals and ride and crash cymbals.

In the eyes of early African Americans, the removal of the drum by fearful whites was an attempt to cut off the Africans from their source of spirit, from their worldview, but Africans throughout the colonies found various ways, such as patting Juba, playing the banjo, fiddle, bones, triangle and tambourine, to preserve the percussive, rhythmic element so dear to their lives (Epstein 1977; Southern 1997).³³² Therefore, the significance of the drum prevails in black music traditions today. In many of the songs performed by Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, the powerful symbolic charge of the drum becomes the *prima facie* strategy for reconstitution and re-memory. The following then considers two groupings—1.) songs for which drums and percussion are the only instrumental providing tonal accompaniment for vocals; and 2.) performances in which Lincoln, Simone and Wilson reconstitute other popular songs by selecting African aesthetics and rearranging song material to be presented in a musical form that bears witness to an African or Afrodiasporic past and/or identity; in other words, covers of popular songs that receive a distinct Africanity during musical reconstitution. This chapter section addresses re-memory songs where drums and percussion receive heightened functionality to perform the cultural work of constructing diasporic identity within a musical performance.

During a 2004 NPR interview for the program *Musicians In Their Own Words*, Cassandra Wilson told Scott Simon, “A great groove for me is drums and percussion fighting it out.”³³³ Wilson’s comment provides an apt description of the sole musical accompaniment, provided by percussionist Jeffrey Haynes and drummer Bill McClellan, in her 1992 song “Dance to the Drummer Again,” from the same-titled Columbia recording. Wilson begins the song in

³³² For good overviews of African rhythm, see Robert Kauffman (1980).

expressive recitation : “I will dance to the drummer again/Yes I, I’m gonna dance, dance to the drummer again/Though death and silence try to claim me/I know the drum will sustain me/ I will dance to the drummer again.” Wilson transitions from what sounds like a self-affirming mantra about regaining strength, confidence and self-awareness into singing the lyric: “I will build a mighty nation again (x2)/With my brother here beside me/I know that the spirits sure to guide me/I will build a mighty nation again.” Percussive rhythm gains momentum during the lines about resurrecting a black nation as Wilson swings through a second full verse and chorus, where she expresses the word drummer using *ciret* (downward bending notes). The *ciret* motion energetically and actively points to a historical dimensionality, as Wilson’s lyric alludes to the epic re-memory of African civilization.³³⁴ Overdubbed voices harmonize, floating in and out, creating an otherworldly, trancelike state for the listener, which adds to the song’s overall ritualistic feel. A percussion break follows and she downshifts to a closing stroll.

Wilson’s imaginative and ideological challenge of Western representation of Africa in her own work clarifies the mental process that has attended the emergence of Africa in modern times. African spiritual traditions, specifically Yoruba, have found a privileged mode of expression in Wilson’s music, which has not only registered the significance of African societies and cultures, but even more important, the complex role of African spirituality. Wilson’s creative negotiation with the indigenous African canon (Ifa, with the mediating role of Esu) opens up a perspective of black intertextuality, where black music (and black texts) speaks to each other across time and space.³³⁵ For example, in a discussion with jazz host Rhonda

³³³ Scott Simon, *NPR’S Musicians In Their Own Words*, March 6, 2004.

³³⁴ Bratcher, *Sound Motion and Spirit*, 121.

³³⁵ On her facebook and twitter posts, Wilson consistently notes the need for African philosophical

Hamilton on WBGO (88.3 FM in New Jersey), Wilson showed an awareness of Ashanti folklore when discussing her song “Broken Drum” from the 2003 Blue Note album, *Glamoured*:

There’s an Ashanti proverb that refers to the custom of playing the drum whenever the moon would be on the wane....And the reason they would play the drum was to revive the moon from its impending doom, its death. So [the song] is saying that even a broken drum can save the moon—meaning, it’s the faith you maintain even when your resources seem limited, and the effort you make regardless of circumstances, that ultimately makes the difference in our lives.

Featuring Teri Lynne Carrington on drums, Jeffrey Haynes on percussion, Brandon Ross on guitar and Reginald Veal on bass, as purely written text Wilson’s “Broken Drum,” resembles the poetry of Yoruba, where we often find a cryptic juxtaposition of images; a refusal to explain and to build bridges for the reader form one part of the poem to another. The Yoruban philosophy informing “Broken Drum,” finds proper contextualization in John Chernoff’s understanding of African music as “a cultural activity which reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal relationships...The aesthetic point is not to reflect a reality which stands behind it but to ritualize a reality within it.”³³⁶ Consider the concise images presented in the song’s second verse (below) coupled with the trance-like percussive rhythm as example par excellence of Chernoff’s “ritualized reality.”

Come if you will to the water’s edge
And drink the stars
Falling from heaven
To the drummer’s call
When your belly’s full
Of the shimmering stream

adaptations in modern terms, cautioning that such adaptations must avoid assimilation into Western philosophy.

³³⁶ John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 36.

That feeds the land
 We'll dance to the rhythm of the drummer
 Til the moon rises again.

Unlike the “Dance to the Drummer Again,” where overdubbed voices were used to evoke a trance-like state, Wilson’s strong sense of polytonality accentuates “Broken Drum,” so that patterns of humming overlaying the percussive rhythms (2:58-3:08) provide the ritualistic tone and sense of melorhythm. The last minute of the song (3:10-4:14) presents a gradual fade of percussion; the rhythm slows to a crawl as if bringing the listener’s trance to an end. Wilson may employ drums to evoke Africa yet she does not follow the dictates of traditional Yoruba music, which does not permit the mixing of any alien sounds with those of the drums.³³⁷ Gongs, cow bells, rattles, handclapping, are never employed in any performance in which the drums are used.³³⁸

Lincoln’s 1983 Enja album’s title-track *Talking to The Sun* features a propulsive example of the ways in which percussion makes implicit reference to Africa. The intro to “Talking To The Sun,” one of Lincoln’s greatest vocal achievements, features an electric call-and-response pattern between percussion and drums. The timing is carried by sounds that are high—the high-hat cymbal in the midst of drumming, relatively soft and strong percussion. A common role for drummers is to intensify the musical energy at important structural points such as the beginning of sections or choruses.³³⁹ Drummer Mark Johnson’s performance on Lincoln’s “Talking To

³³⁷ Anthony King, *African Music Employments of the Standard Pattern in Yoruba Music*, 51.

³³⁸ Similarly, though Lincoln’s “I Got Thunder (And It Rings!)” makes implicit reference to Sàngó, Yoruban god of thunder and lightning, the song does not boast traditional quaver length phrase on three different drums simultaneously, the pattern played to honor Sàngó. Instead, the drumming featured is more akin to the traditional New Orleans funeral march, a logical choice given the placement of the drum solo in the song, preceding the final verse which deals with death: “When my life on earth is over and the struggle here is won/I will find a new dimension in the rising sun.”

³³⁹ Monson, *Saying Something*, 59.

The Sun” (from the eponymous 1983 Enja album) illustrates this well. Breaking his solid ride cymbal rhythm to play what ethnomusicologist Ingrid Monson refers to as “fills”—breaking the time to play two-handed interjections—articulates the off beat of the measure that precedes Lincoln’s entrance. Joined by Steve Coleman on alto saxophone, James Weidman on piano and Billy Johnson on bass, it is the conga performance of Jerry Gonzalez and drumming by Mark Johnson which fuses the band into a single body, as witnessed in the following quote by pianist on that session date, James Weidman: “What’s interesting about that recording is how the percussion and drums were mic’ed. That was unusual for Abbey, to have any instrumentation sitting in the center of a piece like that. If you go back and listen to all of Abbey’s recordings you’ll hear how her voice sits in the center, she’s never backseated to instrumentation and would tell an engineer in the minute—‘Don’t be hiding my voice...put it out there.’ But in “Talking to the Sun,” the drums are out there too, almost like she wanted to call the rain.”³⁴⁰ Weidman acknowledges the stunningly propulsive drive of “Talking to the Sun” wherein the narrator sings praises and thanksgiving to the sun, as did the whole of ancient Egyptian culture which practiced sun worship for many centuries.³⁴¹

Appearing ten years later on the *Devils Got Your Tongue* album (Verve, 1993), the six-minute “Jungle Queen” is one of few songs where Lincoln is not accompanied by a piano. Except for the assortment of wild bird calls and animal noises, the song is entirely percussion-based, offering persistent drumbeats by master percussionist Babatunde Olatunji playing the

³⁴⁰ James Weidman. Personal Interview. 3 July 2008.

³⁴¹ The only important god who was worshiped with consistency was Ra, chief of cosmic deities, from whom early Egyptian kings claimed descent. Beginning with the Middle Kingdom (2134-1668 BC), Ra worship acquired the status of a state religion, and the god was gradually fused with Amon during the Theban dynasties, becoming the supreme god Amon-Ra. During the 18th Dynasty the pharaoh Amenhotep III renamed the sun god Aton, an ancient term for the physical solar force.

ngoma, djembe, ashiko, and sekere drums; Kehinde O'Uhuru on ashiko drum; Sulé O'Uhuru on djembe drum and agogo bells and Gordy Ryan on the jun-jun drum, all indigenous African instruments underpinning Lincoln's shrieks, grunts, squeals such that when the singer says "I got a house that's a round house with a spiral stair/When you get your business done we can visit there" you dare not tarry.³⁴²

In addition to original songs like "Be My Husband," discussed in the context of womanist autoethnography (Chapter Four) and "Blackbird," which appeared earlier in this chapter, the vocalist-composer often included during her musical performances of the sixties and seventies, the original "Come Ye," featured on *High Priestess of Soul* (Philips, 1966). "Come ye who would have peace/It's time to learn how to pray," begins the stunning call for people to gather and bind together during the Civil Rights era, often overlooked in the percussion-only song (personnel unknown).

I must mention examples of non-original music arranged and performed by Wilson, and Simone, in which drums and percussion reconstitute "American Songbook standards" and popular songs, imbuing new versions with what LeRoi Jones called an "African treatment of rhythm." Cassandra Wilson's impressive repertoire of "covers" reveals the strongest commitment to Africanity. Hear her versions of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Waters of March"; Bob Dylan's "Lay Lady Lay"; The Band's "The Weight"; Caetano Veloso's "Little Lion"; and one of this writer's all time favorite Wilson recordings, "Only A Dream in Rio" (James Taylor) from the recording, *Belly of the Sun* (Blue Note, 2002).

³⁴² Pre-colonization, in most African societies nuclear families lived in small round huts constructed of mud and straw and topped with a conical thatch roof.

During an NPR interview with Lynn Neary on June 9, 2002, Wilson was asked to explain the title selection for her fourth Blue Note Records release, “Belly of the Sun.” Wilson replied that the title was derived from the Portuguese line in James Taylor’s “Only A Dream In Rio.” “The line ‘quando a nossa mãe acorda andaremos ao so sol’ translates to ‘when our mother rises we will meet in the sun,’” Wilson remarked. “The Yoruba translation would read ‘when our mother rises we will meet in the belly of the sun.’” Wilson concluded, exhibiting how she culls Yoruba culture in her creative practice.

“Only A Dream In Rio,” features three layers of percussive sound. Each layer has a different function from the others. In the highest range, rattles, clapping and the smallest of four drums support with unchanging ostinati the repeating pattern played on a forged iron double bell, typically referred to as a cowbell. From this top layer comes the timing and the gait of the musical flow. In the middle range Xavyon Jamison plays drum variations around certain strokes that repeat with every repetition of Mark Peterson’s bass pattern. This middle layer has a role intermediate between supplying the gait and forward drive, and adding improvisational interest. In the lowest range, the plastic tub plays intermittent patterns and variations. Each of its patterns contains one or more strokes that must occur at a certain point in the cycle of the steel pan; but these fixed strokes are not the same for every pattern, as they are in the play of Jamison’s drum patterns. Thus, the play of the lowest range is freer than that of the other drums. In addition to drums, an ogan—a piece of iron—is beaten. Wilson herself plays sarod—a stringed musical instrument of the lute family that is common to the Hindustani music tradition of northern India—and Kevin Breit plays the omnichord, an electronic musical instrument introduced in 1981 by Suzuki. The original “Only A Dream in Rio” is a nonstop flight from New England,

where James Taylor's guitar-centric folk sound thrives en route to Rio. But in Wilson's hands it is a journey via Africa, first stop Rio, and then, finally, Bahía.

In 2008, Blue Note Records published on their website an article on Cassandra Wilson's seventh album on the label, entitled *Loverly*, her first recording devoted to jazz standards since the 1988 JMT release, *Blue Skies*. What bears repeating from the article is Wilson's commentary on the album's master percussionist from Lagos, Nigeria, Lekan Babalola:

I've known Lekan for 15 years but this is the first time he recorded with me. He's a priest of the Yoruban religion and has a vast knowledge of African rhythms and how the rhythmic patterns have been retained throughout the African diaspora. We share a passion for discovering the connections between the rhythms from West Africa to the many places in the western hemisphere. That's why I brought Lekan into this project. His job was to find that West African drumming pattern underpinning each of the tunes that weren't straight ahead or ballads.

In the interpretation of American Songbook standards, Wilson continues to seek the African connection as evidenced in her clear idea of what Babalola should bring to the project: "His job was to find that West African drumming pattern underpinning each of the tunes that weren't straight ahead or ballads." This approach to *Africanize* standard songs can be heard in numerous Simone covers. For example, "See Line Woman," a folk song discovered in Mississippi as "Sea Lion Woman" by Herpert Halpert, was popularized after Simone's recording of the tune on her 1964 *Broadway-Blues-Ballads* album on the Philips label. Nina Simone calls for a spiritual return to Africa in her 1962 recording of the Nigerian folk song "Zungo," written by Nigerian composer and master percussionist Michael Babatunde Olatunji.³⁴³ Recorded live

³⁴³ Simone's recording was probably influenced by Babatunde Olatunji's album, *Olatunji And His Percussion, Brass, Woodwind, And Choir—Zungo!* released by Columbia Records in 1961.

at the Village Gate in New York City, with Simone on piano and unlisted personnel on drums, percussion and plastic tub, the plaintive song expresses longing for the homeland, specifically the village of the Buzu tribe (in Angola) termed “Zungo.” Through melodic calls that begin on falsetto notes and descend in low alto notes in the repetition of the chant-like call featured in chain-gang songs, “Zunge Ile,” which translates to ‘back to the city of Zungo,’ shares the entrancing quality of Wilson’s “Dance to the Drummer Again,” and “Broken Drum.”

Perhaps the most interesting musical act of reconstitution in an African context is Simone’s interpretation of the popular jazz standard “But Beautiful” (Johnny Burke & Jimmy Van Heusen), whose musical accompaniment is solely percussive. Simone’s microtonal phrasing rides above tom-tom and the wooden block struck on the offbeat. Shakers provide ostinati. Another interesting example can be heard in Simone’s rendition of “Funkier Than A Mosquito Tweeter,” made famous by Ike and Tina Turner, again a recording where Simone rejects the piano, choosing to highlight multiple percussion instruments—conga, djembe, and tambourine, played by Nadi Quamar. Drummer Don Alias plays three African drums, the *petit*, the *seconde* and the *mamman*, and these are pitched at specified intervals related to each other. Not only does each of the three drums have a specific, designated beat which is different, all drums must combine with their separate rhythms in very specific manners in order that the resultant ensemble maintains a conga beat.³⁴⁴ Joined by bassist Gene Perla and guitarists David Spinozza and Richard Reskinoff providing the underpinning rhythm, the percussive effect is mesmerizing, luring the listener into a funk trance groove.

³⁴⁴ Al Shackman. Personal Interview. 21 June 2001.

'WHO USED TO DANCE': MYTHO-HISTORY SONGS

One of the roles the griot in African society had before the Europeans came was maintaining a cultural and historical past with that of the present.³⁴⁵ In “Who Used to Dance,” from the eponymous Verve album issued in 1996, Lincoln begins with her own personal history in the first verse before traveling to Africa in the middle verses, where she recounts the accomplishments of her ancestors, finally returning the listener to the present day in the song’s last verse. (Lincoln draws on imagery of the griot in one of the song’s early lines: “Who used to dance and do a show and tell a story of long ago.”) The song’s lyric does not unwind cyclically but rather invokes nonlinear shifts (itself an Afrocentric approach to temporality). Furthermore, what imbues “Who Used To Dance” with quiet force is the double narrative; that is, the song tells a story on two levels, for in addition to Lincoln’s vocal in place of drums or traditional percussion, we are presented with a tap performance by Savion Glover. As dance historian Jacqui Malone reminds us in her article, “Jazz Music in Motion,” jazz musicians tell stories with instruments and voices “as tappers tell stories with their feet.”³⁴⁶ Glover bears witness to the role of dance in African cultures, beating out a story of his own in the present tense as Lincoln draws on temporally charged re-memories in the recounting of African ancestors’ accomplishments. “Who Used to Dance” showcases Lincoln’s lyrics and Glover’s tap in unison and syncopation. The song signifies by its usage of repetition on multiple levels. The line, “Who used to dance,” is repeated within each verse and during the last two minutes of the song for a total of seven times. The repetition of the line coupled with the syncopation of Glover’s

³⁴⁵ D’Jimo Kouyate, Senegalese Griot “The Role of the Griot,” in *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling*, eds., Linda Gross and Marian E. Barnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 179.

³⁴⁶ Jacqui Malone, “Jazz Music in Motion,” in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 284.

tap dancing evokes a trance-like feeling in the listener. Lyrically, Lincoln revisits the trope of ancient Egypt that she drew upon in the 1970's "Africa." However, because she not only supplied the lyric but also composed and arranged the music for "Who Used to Dance," this song's arrangement builds on the lyric in ways that Coltrane's "Africa" does not. Here, as in many of her lyrics, Lincoln draws on the African folktale tradition.³⁴⁷ As in the following excerpted verse, she sings about common images associated with Egypt, ranging from biblical imagery, "...the ones who carried staffs and rods and wrote some stories of the Gods," to "monuments of stone":

Who used to dance
and do a show
and tell a story of long ago.
and sing and dance

And run a mile
in hot pursuit
and charm a serpent with a flute,
and build some monuments of stone,
the ones no longer called our own.

In an interview with the author, Lincoln grew vexed during the discussion of this song, her tone escalating when she said: "Many people make it a point of crediting to the Egyptians, and they emphasize 'Egyptian' as if Egypt is not in Africa because they like to make the distinction—to separate Egypt from the African continent. It's brilliant architecture, therefore it can't be called

³⁴⁷ According to John Blassingame's scholarship on slave communities, folk tales are in many respects easier to analyze than spirituals or secular songs even though the systematic collection of them is more recent. Most folklorists tried in various ways to ascertain the provenience of the tales they recorded. Consequently, there is some assurance that slaves actually told these tales around their cabin fires. There was probably less distortion of the folk tales in the transition from slavery to freedom than of the songs. If, as John Mason Brewer has observed, "folk materials offer a true and unbiased picture of the ways in which a given people...think and act," they represent valuable materials for the historians. While there are few explicit references to slavery, the patterns and symbolism of the tales often tell us much about the slave's world view. Primarily a means of entertainment, the tales also

African—it's called Egyptian."³⁴⁸ Interestingly, Lincoln rejects explicit reference to pyramids in the verse, but rather emphasizes the willful disconnection of Egyptian accomplishment from black culture when she sings, "...and build some monuments of stone, the ones no longer called our own." Here is the line in full verse context:

Who used to dance
and measure time
and look to heaven for a sign
Who used to dance.

And calculate the river's flow
and build a chariot to go;
the ones who carried staffs and rods
and wrote some stories of the Gods.

Who used to dance and call the rain
but nowadays
who rides the train
who used to dance.³⁴⁹

Lincoln's references to ancient Egypt, intended to rekindle awareness of African achievement and invoke pride in black history, are suggested by the last two lyrics; for as Graham Lock has noted, the chariot has once been the favored mode of transport through the slaves' realm and it seems later to have been replaced by the more mundane but tangible train.³⁵⁰ The song's last lines harken back to the ancestors who have hence more become our modern day selves in the diaspora exemplified in the line "who nowadays rides the train."³⁵¹ As the song closes, "Who used to Dance," becomes a single musical chorus repeated like incantation, half a

represented the distillation of folk wisdom and were used as an instructional device to teach young slaves to survive.

³⁴⁸ Abbey Lincoln. Personal Interview. 3 March 2002.

³⁴⁹ Abbey Lincoln: *Who Used to Dance*, Verve 314 533 559, 1996, compact disc.

³⁵⁰ Lock, *Blutopia*, 194.

³⁵¹ Abbey Lincoln, *Who Used To Dance*, Verve 314 533 559, 1996, compact disc.

dozen times or more, over Glover's rhythmic tapping. Lincoln's last line floats into Glover's final solo, a dazzling, dizzying series of steps that crescendos to a frenetic pace, like someone running to catch the subway or fleeing harm's way. Lincoln's response, a delightful peal of laughter, ends the song.

History remains a central theme in Wilson's work, a thread that runs through her early songs such as "Iconic Memories," and "New African Blues," to her Blue Note oeuvre, including "Solomon Sang," from *New Moon Daughter* (1996), which includes the verse:

When the days grew dim
Life begin again
In the questions of the Queen

Did she understand his sorrow
Did she see his pain
Vanity and precious stones
Weigh you down the same

But when he laid down with Makeda
Solomon sang
Solomon sang

Similar to Lincoln's "Who Used to Dance," Wilson employs biblical language to tell the story of Solomon and Queen Makeda, as the Ethiopians referred to the Queen of Sheba, in two songs from the *New Moon Daughter* album, "Solomon Sang" and "Memphis." "Memphis" features a narrator who has been rescued from a prison "of her own design," by a lover whose skin is dark as a delta night, "with a sweet complexion of a pharaoh." The narrator pleads with the lover to "help her remember," and to carry her back to Memphis. The supple rhythm and blues support of Kevin Breit on electric guitar, Gary Breit on Hammond organ, Mark Petersen on bass and Gib Wharton on pedal steel guitar provide evocative resonance for Wilson's vocals affecting a

Southern drawl more than usual; Memphis, Tennessee might spring to mind until the refrain: “Dance with me along the Nile/Water wash over me/Dance with me along the Nile/Water wash over me/Water wash over me.” However, the narrator’s desired destination lies on the border between Upper and Lower Ancient Egypt, what the Greeks referred to as Memphis (“the beautiful monument”), referring to the pyramid of Pepi I. In verses such as the following, the narrator speaks to the ruptured past enslaved Africans experienced during the Middle Passage, a shared ancestral experience she holds in common with the lover whom she bids to bring her water and “wash away my pain,” presumably the pain of being torn from her past: Now history had been arranged/To hide us from our secret names/But God knows who we are/And I’m content to watch him/ slowly come to meet me/Moon river to my heart. Interestingly, Wilson signifies on Henry Mancini’s famous “Moon River,” to the Mississippi River in the last line, which again places the listener in America: this love story is about a black woman and a black man finding each other but only through their shared preoccupation with their ancestry as evidenced in Wilson’s last line before the outro: Oh will you remember me?

According to Historian David Welch, in African groups and tribes myths about deities and legends about past kings are grouped together as factual accounts of historic events in contrast to folktales which are generally recognized as moralistic fiction.³⁵² What follows then is an examination of those re-memory songs I refer to as mytho-historical. So named, mytho-historical songs remind us that that which is considered “discredited knowledge” in the words

³⁵² David B. Welch, *Voice of Thunder, Eyes of Fire: In Search of Shango in the African Diaspora* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing, 2001), 29.

of Toni Morrison or mythic in the African diaspora, specifically in the United States, is regarded as factual and historical in Africa.

What the griot gave to African society in oral history, cultural information, and ancestral wisdom, Nina Simone gives to audiences in spirituality-based mytho-history songs such as “Dambala” and “Obeah Woman.” The 1970s musical explosion in the Caribbean, specifically Jamaica and Barbados as witnessed by the recordings and popularity of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff, Burning Spear and URoy, influenced Simone’s musical direction while living in Barbados, where the singer composed some of her most African centered compositions.³⁵³ On July 28th, 1973 a live performance by Nina Simone was recorded at the Philharmonic Hall in New York City. The album, *It is Finished* (1974), is important not only because it marks the end of Simone’s relationship with the RCA label (where the artist felt she “never exercised enough creative control”), but also because the recording houses those songs shaped by her life outside of the U.S.A. Significantly, Simone is the only artist featured here who lived in a different African diasporic context, and as such immersed herself in the musical experiences of both the Caribbean and Africa. The songs “Obeah Woman” and “Dambala,” co-written with popular Bahamian singer/songwriter Xuma, reference the Obeah and Vodoun traditions Simone studied informally while living in the Caribbean.

The over six-minute “Obeah Woman,” in which Simone engages in legato singing, features longtime sideman, guitarist Al Schackman and Nadi Quamar on the Madagascar harp.

³⁵³ Simone’s recordings *It Is Finished* (RCA, 1974) and *Baltimore* (CTI Records, 1978) display striking reggae-influenced readings of songs as varied as Randy Newman’s “Baltimore,” Daryl Hall’s (of the duet Hall & Oates) “Rich Girl” and David Matthews’ “Forget.” For an in-depth discussion of the Jamaican dub music that influenced Simone’s recordings see Michael Veal’s study of the ways in which the studio-based innovations of Jamaican recording engineers during the 1970s created a sonic space for the emergence of a distinctly post-colonial Jamaican

The lyric itself is a pronouncement of Simone's personal identification with Obeah. A folk religion of African origin practiced by the Ashanti, Obeah contains many elements of Shamanism and uses the tradition of sorcery. The meaning of Obeah or Obi is translated as the "occult power," meaning a powerful way of using spells for witchcraft as well as other forms of practical magic. Commonly practiced in Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Obeah takes the use of knowledge of ancient occult powers generally handed down by word of mouth over the centuries.³⁵⁴ There is no evidence that Simone was an Obeah practitioner. (There is no mention of Obeah in her autobiography in the chapters detailing her life in Barbados where she might have come into contact with male Obeah practitioners; nor did the subject arise during my interview with Simone or her musical director, Al Shackman.) However, because of her popular association with the chart-topping "I Put A Spell On You," the vocalist might have related to the sorcery aspect of Obeah. In "Obeah Woman," Simone marks herself as a woman capable of casting spells:

Yes, I'm the Obeah woman
 Do you know what one is?
 Ha do you know what an Obeah woman is?
 I'm the Obeah woman from beneath the sea
 To get to satan you gotta pass through me
 'Cause I know the angels name by name
 I can eat thunder and drink the rain
 Been through enough
 Yeah they call me Nina and Pisces too
 There ain't nothing that I can't do
 If I choose to, if you let me—

culture locally. *Dub: Song-scape, Studio Craft, Science Fiction, and the Shattering of Song Form in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

³⁵⁴ It is believed that the Ashanti and Dahomeyans brought the Obeah tradition to the Caribbean during slavery. Unlike Santeria and Candomblé, Obeah remains an obscure tradition of religion & sorcery. Typically practiced by men, Obeahmen are thought of as voodoo witchdoctors, medicine men and great conjurers.

In the traditions of Yoruba and Vodoun, Dambala (with alternate names that include Obatala, Da, Dambalah, and Damballa Wedo) is the eldest and chief of the loas. A benign paternal sky god, wise and exalted, Dambala, who sometimes appears as a woman, represents justice and wisdom. In the following song, set in the up-tempo time signature of 5/4, and again featuring Schackman on guitar and Quarmar on percussion (the Guinea kuna and Tal Viha), Simone calls Dambala to avenge slavery:

Oh Dambala come Dambala
 Oh Dambala come Dambala
 Think of the wings of a three toed frog
 Eat weeds from the deepest part of sea
 Oh Dambala come Dambala
 Oh Dambala come Dambala

On the seventh day God will be there
 On the seventh night satan will be there
 On the seventh day God will be there
 On the seventh night satan will be there

You slavers will know
 What it's like to be a slave
 Slave to your heart
 Slave to your soul
 Oh Dambala come Dambala
 Oh Dambala come Dambala

In “Dambala” and “Obeah Woman” the rhythms used are more Afro-Caribbean than strictly African, but those Caribbean rhythms derived from African and Iberian sources. Furthermore, Simone’s titles enhance the association of these songs with Africa.

The philosophy of Ifa originated with the Yoruba people of West Africa in what is now Nigeria.³⁵⁵ Ifa teaches that each of us has a single orisha energy from the universe that is predominant within us, our guardian orisha. Sàngò holds a major position in the pantheon of the Yoruba tribe. In the folklore of Yoruba, he is the orisha whose power is imaged by thunder and lightning. Yoruba Priestess Luisah Teish has also noted that he is “the warmth of the flame, the physical strength and the spark of human spirit.” As the legendary fourth kind of the ancient kingdom of Oyo, Sàngò's rule was marked by capricious use of power.³⁵⁶ One account asserts that Sàngò was fascinated with magical powers. He inadvertently caused a thunderstorm and lightning struck his own palace killing many of his wives and children. In repentance he left his kingdom and traveled to Koso where he hung himself. When his enemies cast scorn upon his name, a rash of storms destroyed parts of Oyo. Sàngò's followers proclaimed him a god and that the storms were Sàngò's wrath, avenging his enemies.

Lincoln draws from this folklore in her song “I Got Thunder (And It Rings!).” Some feminist scholars writing on jazz have suggested that the title and key phrase of Lincoln’s song “I Got Thunder (And It Rings!)” is a celebration of Lincoln's gender and race. While these assertions certainly reflect the type of free-thinking, independent spirit Lincoln possessed, what is more relevant to this study is the vocalist’s assertion that this song was inspired by the Yoruban god of thunder and lightning, Sàngó. Lincoln's self-identification with the Ifa orisha does not, ironically, nullify feminist readings of the text, as both readings address a narrator

³⁵⁵ Ifa is a volume of sayings that include the sacred words by Orunmila who learned them from Oludumare (God). Although the Ifa sayings are compared to the Bible, it contains no formal books as Orunmila had no sense of writing but memorized Oludumare's words.

³⁵⁶ Oluwo Philip Neimark, *The Way of the Orisa: Empowering Your Life Through the Ancient African Religion of Ifa* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 13-14.

claiming power. The song's title and chorus line illustrates the manner in which Lincoln signifies on the power of her own singing voice belied by her connection to the orisha. Lines like "When you see a streak of lightening, I'll be passing by," found in the last verse, speak directly to Lincoln's identification with Sàngò. Also in keeping with African folklore Lincoln utilizes mythological imagery as exemplified in the line, "I will find a new dimension in the rising sun," which corresponds to the Yoruban belief that following death some spirits ascend to the sun:

When my life on earth is over
and the struggle here is won
I will find a new dimension in the rising sun.
In the place that is forever, I will spread my wings and fly.
When you see a streak of lightning, I'll be passing by.³⁵⁷

The impulse to draw on spiritual forms in their music is best reflected in a comment by Cassandra Wilson during an interview with *Bomb* magazine, Spring 1999:

It's your responsibility as a jazz musician not to adulterate, but to augment, to extend, to amplify, to reconfigure, because that's the whole foundation, that's the whole basis of this music, jazz. That's why it's considered to be derived more from an African aesthetic than a European aesthetic. It's dynamic and life can enter into it. There's a parallel between the religion and the music. It's a living music, as is the religion—that has not been really acknowledged as part of that tradition, but I think the two parallel each other. Religion goes through so many manifestations in order to survive, as does this music.

ANCESTOR SONGS

No discussion of re-memory is possible without pointing to scholar John Mbiti's work on African ontology. Mbiti is careful to note that much of West African cosmology has been wrongly construed as ancestor worship. "It is true that departed relatives are believed to continue to live and show interest in their surviving families but acts of respect (building shrines) do not amount to worshipping them."³⁵⁷ Bearing witness to, or acknowledging and showing respect to ancestors is a fundamental traditional aspect of many African groups and one embraced by the musicians featured in this work. For example, in an interview with jazz writer Wayne Enstice, Abbey Lincoln discussed her relationship to her ancestors:

I live for the vindication of my ancestors who were said to be savages. You know, the way you live is through your ancestors. We were ripped off here. We were not allowed to keep our names here, and our gods went with our names and our ancestors went with our names.³⁵⁹

Similarly, the article "In the Studio with Cassandra Wilson: Singing A Song from the South," printed in the September 29, 1994 late edition of *The New York Times*, provides evidence that respect for the ancestor is a critical component of Wilson's creative identity. Charisse Jones writes:

Cassandra Wilson crafts her melodies in an apartment imbued with the past, the same sense of memory that guides Ms. Wilson's spirit and shades her music. It is here that she practices jazz licks and smoky riffs under the watchful gaze of her elders. They stare from photographs. "It's really important to keep in touch with them," Ms. Wilson said on a recent sunny afternoon. "There's a line from the film 'Daughters of the Dust,'

³⁵⁷ Abbey Lincoln: *The World is Falling Down*, Verve 843 476, 1990, compact disc.

³⁵⁸ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 18.

³⁵⁹ Enstice and Stockhouse, *Jazzwomen*, 197.

where the old woman says something like, 'It's up to the living to keep in touch with the ancestors,' [That line] epitomizes how I feel about what we need to do in order to regenerate."

In the second revised edition of *Introduction to African Religion*, Mbiti observes that the African worldview holds that after physical death, the spirit remains. The connection between humans and what Mbiti calls "the living-dead" is usually based on close personal relationships--parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers, and friends.³⁶⁰ It is believed that when a spirit moves out of the body it remains a part of the human community and has interest in what is going on in the family.³⁶¹ Moreover, it is crucial that we maintain communication with the living-dead because they straddle the worlds of the physical and the spiritual simultaneously. Evidence that Nina Simone shares this belief is found in the following quote, taken from her autobiography, where the singer recounts the death of her father:

His spirit remained in the room with me and has stayed with me ever since. From that third morning to the present day my father's spirit has been watching over me, and when he knows I need to feel him near he comes around and makes sure I know he's there.³⁶²

The following section considers re-memory songs that illustrate the manner in which Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone draw on the African ontological view of respect for the living-dead ancestor in their songs "Evalina Coffey (The Legend Of)," "The Story of My Father" (Lincoln) and "Alone Again (Naturally)" (Simone).

³⁶⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 82.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Simone with Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 142.

Featured on the 1993 Verve release “Devil's Got Your Tongue,” the song “Evalina Coffey (The Legend Of)” opens with a stunningly evocative instrumental duet by Maxine Roach on viola and J.J. Johnson on muted trombone before Lincoln's powerful legato singing begins the futuristic life story of Lincoln's mother. That Lincoln draws on space imagery is evident by lines such as “Evalina Coffey made the journey here/Traveled in her spaceship from some other sphere /Landed in St. Louis, Chicago and L.A./A brilliant, shining mothership from six hundred trillion miles away”; “When the number of the ships/ descending from the one/came to number eighty-four/she knew her work was done,” which gives the age of Lincoln's mother at the time of her passing; and “Evalina Coffey, in your shiny ship/Sailing through the heavens on another trip/I expect to see you on another day/living in another light and in another way,” which attest to the African ontological view of reincarnation.

By the end of the fourth verse Lincoln has called her mother's name four times. According to Mbiti, maintaining connections with the “living-dead” is effected by calling out their names, and recognition of the ancestor's name enables the presence of the departed for up to four or five generations, “so long as someone is alive who once knew the departed personally and by name.”³⁶³ By beginning each verse with her mother's name, Lincoln makes a conscious effort to remain spiritually connected to her mother. Maxine Roach weaves a plaintive viola line throughout, but in the fifth and last verse she proceeds in a slower tempo. The slight retard emphasizes Lincoln's singing of the lines “for as long as there is life/you will always be,” underscoring Lincoln's belief that the living-dead remain with us spiritually, and re-affirming her conviction that she and her mother are spiritually connected in the same time and place:

³⁶³ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 25.

Evalina Coffey, in my mind I see,
 For as long as there is life you will always be,
 In my heart forever,
 Lighting up the way,
 Evalina Coffey Woolridge Davis,
 You're the light of day.

On the same album, following "Evalina Coffey" Lincoln pays homage to her father.

"The Story of My Father" rocks eight-bar gospel verses about the hardships endured by Lincoln's handy-man father, Alexander Wooldridge. In this song, featuring the Staples Singers as background singers, Lincoln reveres her father whom she depicts as a King in lines like, "My father built a kingdom/my father wore a crown/they say he was an awful man/he tried to live it down." Lincoln discussed the genesis of the song during a March 20, 1993 interview on NPR's *All Things Considered* with host, Katie Davis:

KD: You also wrote a song about your father. Now that has a different quality than the one about your mother, I think.

AL: Yes.

KD: It's almost like you had to set the record straight about your father.

AL: It's true. People of African heritage—the African people suffer from lack of positive image. They don't know their contributions. And slavery—you know it's like when somebody turns you around and round and round—they don't know where they are. We really don't know who we are. We don't have our own names. But this especially I wrote for my father because I remember two of my brothers were having problems with their hearts. It was after my mother had passed, and I had lost already two brothers. One passed ten days before she passed away. And my father had passed away maybe twenty years before my mother did. And so I was afraid. So I wrote this song as a prayer to my father to say to him, 'Would you forgive us for not remembering really who you were.'

What is striking to the author about this quote is that after his passing, Lincoln's father seemed to take on powerful spirit qualities, indeed he is God-like, as the singer comments that she was

“afraid” and wrote “a prayer to [my] father.” Significantly, the almost aggressive harmonizing of the Staple Singers, who provide background vocals for the track, imbue “The Story of My Father,” with an urgency that is lacking in “Evalina Coffey.” Both songs not only honor Lincoln’s parentage, but are telling about the ways she dealt with the passing of each.

In the album liner notes for *Dance to the Drum Again* (Columbia, 1992), the first recording Wilson produced, the artist pays tribute to her maternal grandmother, Louise McDaniel, who lived with Wilson’s family until her death in 1965 when Wilson was ten. In the context of the songs that revere black children in the third chapter on womanist autoethnography, the song “Out Loud (Jeris’s Blues)” written by Wilson’s mother, Mary Fowlkes (and included on Wilson’s *She Who Weeps* album) is discussed. I return to that lyric now briefly for the line “Mama used to sing in church outloud,” a line of family history as revealed by Wilson during a 1996 interview with Greg Tate:

My grandmother sang too, and she was really loud. She couldn’t really hold pitch, and it was this wild kind of singing. I count her among my influences. I remember being small and looking at her like, ‘What are you singing?’ She had so much passion. It didn’t matter to her that she couldn’t sing on key. My grandmother brought [faith] into our home simply because of who she was and how she lived. She was a devout Christian, but she was also a woman who practiced some other old-time religion. She was always out in the woods until she was in her eighties. She was a gardener most of her life, but she would take a sojourn daily out into the woods where she would gather herbs. She understood herbs. She never went to a doctor in her life....Her presence became really strong a couple of years ago. I began to smell all her smells again, like the smells she had in her room. My favorite memory is sleeping on her couch in her bedroom and the curtains blowing over me at night. I remember that as being a truly magical feeling. I always felt really warm, protected and very close to God.

For Cassandra Wilson the performance of ancestor songs has cohered around her maternal grandmother, whose spiritual influence grew paramount after her death.

Scholar/poet Joanne M. Braxton (1987) observed the critical role grandmothers play in

the development of their granddaughter's creative consciousness. In Working Paper No. 172, entitled "Black Grandmothers: Sources of Artistic Consciousness and Personal Strength," Braxton's experience of her deceased grandmother mirrors Wilson's. She writes:

Grandmother's presence was very real for us during those days and months that followed her death, and we imagined that we communicated with her quite easily, asking questions and following instructions received. It was a strange and exciting time, and now, years later, I still feel close to Miss Emma though in ways that are far less specific. And today and tomorrow her lullabies, stories and narratives are passed along to yet another generation, forming bonds of tradition.

Speaking to the tradition of acknowledging our ancestors in the present, "forming bonds of tradition"—to borrow from Braxton—Wilson had this to share with journalist Charisse Jones in *The New York Times* article, "In the Studio with Cassandra Wilson; Singing a Song of the South":

"It's really important to keep in touch with them," Ms. Wilson said on a recent sunny afternoon. "There's a line from the film 'Daughters of the Dust,' where the old woman says something like, 'It's up to the living to keep in touch with the ancestors.' It epitomizes how I feel about what we need to do in order to regenerate."³⁶⁴

In 2005, Wilson invited singer/songwriter India Arie to pay homage to her grandmother on a song she wrote entitled "Just Another Parade" from the *Belly of the Sun* album. Not an explicit ancestor song, the following verse nevertheless invokes the wisdom that is passed on from the artist's grandmother and connects the legacy of the living dead to the youngest generation, the singer's own son:

Summer will end and the death begins
Grandma's hands are moving slow

³⁶⁴ Charisse Jones, "In the Studio with Cassandra Wilson; Singing a Song of the South," *New York Times*, September 29, 1994.

She takes the time to let me know
 Winters winds will blow...
 She says, 'Look at your son. He's the golden One'....

It is through this matrilineal lattice of memory—Wilson's own remembrances enjoined with those of her own motherhood and grandmother—that support the idea that ancestor communion represents a crucial aspect of Afrodiasporic spiritual identity.

While Nina Simone never wrote original ancestor songs, her repertoire and autobiography suggest a significant attachment to the idea of the living dead. Quite a disappointment to this author, Simone's autobiography, *I Put A Spell On You*, includes lyrics and anecdotes about songwriting far less than one might imagine, including only a few stories about the development of her original compositions. It is significant then that the several pages are devoted to the song "Alone Again (Naturally)," written by Gilbert O'Sullivan, and for which Simone made slight revision—lines that spoke to her father's death. Simone recorded the song, with her amended lyric on the 1982 Carrère album *Fodder On My Wings*. Like Lincoln, in this song Simone honors her father's life and their relationship despite its tumultuous nature. Simone also recorded Judy Collins's "My Father" on her *Baltimore* album (CTI, 1978).

In a *Newsday* interview with Gene Seymour, Wilson discussed her approach to songwriting, stating that "to write the lyrics [she] had to find something personal inside the music." The following excerpt drives home the degree to which Wilson experiences the creative African trope as a personal artifact, and I would argue that the preponderance of Africanisms and re-memory songs presented in this chapter confirm Lincoln's and Simone's commitment to owning their ancestral lineage and helping others to claim it also. Wilson states: "One thing that

I've been living with is the relationships between jazz and the African aesthetic. I've kind of been obsessed with showing that this music is still very much driven by that aesthetic and that's underlying everything that we do. We don't see it, it's not really apparent but it's very much there. It lives inside the music. Tutu is a Yoruba word for cool—the idea of coolness associated with art and music that is encoded in the Yoruba language through tutu. That's the foundation for the lyric [she put to Miles Davis's composition "Tutu" for her 1999 tribute album, *Traveling Miles*]. That was the way in."³⁶⁵

The non-literal, strictly musical evocations of Africa in the music of these artists constitutes a musicologist's study of its own. This chapter has attempted to guide the reader to/ward Africa through various readings of re-memory songs, including: aural sites of memory, ancestor songs, and mytho-history songs. Borrowing a concept from musicologist Norman Weinstein, I have organized the re-memory songs (Table 5.2) by artist:

Table 5.2 Re-Memory Songs
Re-Memory Songs
 (African themes: bearing witness to Africa & African culture; ancestor songs; mytho-history songs, including African spiritualities.)
 (*indicates an original composition)

Abbey Lincoln	Nina Simone	Cassandra Wilson
* "Africa," <i>People in Me</i> (1973) "African Lady," <i>Straight Ahead</i> (1961) "Afro Blue," <i>Abbey is Blue</i> (1959) "All Africa," <i>We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite</i> (1960) * "I Got Thunder (And It	* "African Mailman," <i>Nina Simone and Her Friends</i> (1959) * "Dambala," <i>It Is Finished</i> (1974) * "Liberian Calypso," <i>Fodder On My Wings</i> (1982) * "Obeah Woman," <i>It Is Finished</i> (1974) * "Return Home," <i>Nina Simone</i>	* "Broken Drum," <i>Glamoured</i> , (2003) * "Dance to the Drummer Again," <i>Dance to the Drums Again</i> (1992) * "Just Keep Thinking of Eubay," <i>Dance to the Drums Again</i> (1992) * "Melanin Song," <i>Dance to the</i>

³⁶⁵ Gene Seymour, "Wilson Feels Miles High," *Newsday*, May 4, 1999, B2.

Rings!),” <i>The World is Falling Down</i> (1990) * “Jungle Queen,” <i>Devil’s Got Your Tongue</i> (1992) * “Talking to the Sun,” <i>Talking to the Sun</i> (1983) “Tears for Johannesburg,” <i>We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite</i> (1960) * “When I’m Called Home,” <i>You Gotta Pay the Band</i> (1991) * “Who Used to Dance,” <i>Who Used to Dance</i> (1996) * “A Turtle’s Dream,” <i>A Turtle’s Dream</i> (1995) * “Bird Alone,” <i>You Gotta Pay the Band</i> (1991) * “Caged Bird,” <i>Golden Lady</i> (1980) & <i>Wholly Earth</i> (1998) * “Evalina Coffey (Legend Of),” <i>Devil’s Got Your Tongue</i> (1993) * “The Story of My Father,” <i>Devil’s Got Your Tongue</i> (1993)	<i>at Town Hall</i> (1959) * “Thandewye,” <i>Fodder On My Wings</i> (1982) * “Zungo,” <i>Nina Simone at the Village Gate</i> (1962) * “Blackbird,” <i>Nina Simone with Strings</i> (1964) * “Fodder On My Wings,” <i>Fodder On My Wings</i> (1982) “Alone, Again (Naturally),” <i>Fodder On My Wings</i> (1982)	<i>Drums Again</i> (1992) * “New African Blues,” <i>She Who Weeps</i> (1990) * “Sankofa,” <i>Blue Light Till Dawn</i> , (1995) * “Run the Voodoo Down,” <i>Traveling Miles</i> (1999) * “Solomon Sang,” <i>New Moon Daughter</i> (1996) * “Memphis,” <i>New Moon Daughter</i> (1996) “Black Crow,” <i>Blue Light Till Dawn</i> (1993) “Blackbird,” <i>Silver Pony</i> (2010)
--	--	---

As the table suggests, some of the titles of compositions are exact descriptions of African realities. However, several songs bear implicit titles such as Lincoln’s “Who Used to Dance,” Simone’s “Return Home,” and Wilson’s “Broken Drum.” Throughout her career Nina Simone recorded seven songs with explicit literal references to Africa and the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. Abbey Lincoln has recorded six explicit and five implicit songs that reference Africa. Cassandra Wilson rings in with six explicit and numerous implicitly African-themed songs if we consider the prevalence of percussion in all of the artist’s recordings. Additionally, the repetition of re-memory songs recorded over multiple albums relays the significance of these songs to the artists’ repertoire. However, more important than the number of African-themed songs recorded by these artists, is the frequency with which these artists have performed re-memory songs. In

recorded dvds and films of live shows, for example, for years Abbey Lincoln began her set with “Talking to the Sun,” and she almost always performs “Who Used To Dance,” including at her career retrospective held at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall in March of 2003, where she was joined by Savion Glover. “Zungo” and “Liberian Calypso” became staples of Simone’s concerts. Increasingly, Wilson has made ‘Africa’ a focal point of her live sets, as the following discussion denotes.

Music possesses the power to mean.³⁶⁶ However, as Christopher Small reminds us, a larger question grows out of this truism: “What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?”³⁶⁷ Nowhere was this more forthrightly revealed than in a review by Nate Chinen. On Friday, September 30th, 2011, Cassandra Wilson performed what would later be dubbed by critics as a “career retrospective,” at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Rose Theater. The idea of a career retrospective was fair as Wilson culled songs from the entire breadth of her Blue Note catalogue. Nate Chinen’s *New York Times Review* “Spanning the Years in One Evening of Jazz” (October 4, 2011) stated: “A few of these were original songs, full of spirit talk and churning, viscous grooves. One was an adaptation of Charley Patton’s “Pony Blues,” soulful and self-assured. There was no demarcation between old and new, no sense of shifting gears. Ms. Wilson presented the songs as points in a continuum, scenes in a story yet unfinished and maybe unfinishable.” As with most reviewers, Chinen was concerned with Wilson’s covers. Further into his review he described the vocalist’s performance of “Lay Lady Lay” (Bob Dylan), and the traditional “St. James Infirmary,” before

³⁶⁶ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 17.

returning to more discussion of “Saddle Up My Pony.” In what was Wilson’s most afrocentric set in a decade, Chinen completely omits from his review the original re-memory songs “Broken Drum,” “Sankofa,” or “Redbone.” He glossed over “Run the Voodoo Down,” in a reference to Miles Davis. Despite Wilson’s conscious choice to invoke Africa in numerous songs, Chinen, and I suspect many others did not experience the concert’s ritualistic components.³⁶⁸ Guthrie Ramsey has stated, “If music is a coherent, signifying system or cultural transaction, then we need to understand more about various specific social settings in order to tease out what this system or transaction might mean.”³⁶⁹ In other words, as Ingrid Monson has observed, music’s message does not lie simply in the form itself but is dependent on the uses to which audience members put them.³⁷⁰ Guthrie Ramsey extends this idea further, reminding us that:

Meaning is always contingent and extremely fluid; it is never essential to a musical figuration. Real people negotiate and eventually agree on what cultural expressions such as a musical gesture mean. They collectively decide what associations are conjured by a well-placed blue note, a familiar harmonic pattern, the soulful virtuoso sweep of a jazz solo run, a social dancer’s imaginative twist on an old dance step, or the raspy grain of a church mother’s vocal declamation on Sunday morning.³⁷¹

Given the location of Wilson’s performance—the multi-million dollar Jazz at Lincoln Center complex, Chinen’s review reflects the aural and cultural experiences that he and most audience members typically bring to a high-priced musical event at Jazz Lincoln Center, a

³⁶⁷ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, 10.

³⁶⁸ Public facebook postings between Wilson, percussionist Lekan Babalola, pianist Jason Moran and the author ensued the weekend of September 30-October 1, 2011 on the subject of the concert’s “ritual” Aspects. The concept of jazz performance as ritual has roots extending to Ralph Ellison (1969); Albert Murray (1970), Christopher Small (1988) and Travis Jackson (2000).

³⁶⁹ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music*, 26.

³⁷⁰ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora*, 348.

demographic largely unfamiliar with African and Afrocentric cultural and spiritual philosophies.

372

Lincoln's, Simone's and Wilson's original and non-original music premised on re-memory, including symbols and practices associated with African spiritual traditions can be understood as a reaffirmation of jazz's connection to Africa, downplaying the need to place it on the same aesthetic level as European classical music, an Afrocentric appreciation and reverence for self and the music. Re-memory songs address a problem unique to the African diaspora: the gaps in memory and history and cultural tradition and transmission that constructs the diasporic cartography of self and world. According to Dionne Brand (2001), this legacy of cultural disruption and dispersal serves both as a site for the erasure and recasting of beginnings, thus positioning the diasporic subject in an interstitial and ambivalent space that she calls the 'in-between.' In this respect, re-memory songs point explicitly to the performative use of music as a medium of cultural reformulation and self-transformation. This chapter has tried to show the degree to which Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson are concerned with uncovering the cultural meanings of the African past for diasporic Africans. Crafting songs that serve as vehicles for accessing the history and memory of an African heritage weighs heavy in the cultivation of a collective memory. The elements of re-memory as heard in ancestor songs,

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² For recent arguments on the elevation of jazz see Gunther Schuller, Billy Taylor and Wynton Marsalis. However, this argument has a long history with both scholars and musicians. For example, Walter Benjamin draws on the analogy of jazz as America's classical music in his 1936 article, "The Work of Art in Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Theodor Adorno drew comparisons between Wagner, Schoenberg and Berg to jazz in his 1937 essay, "Oxford Nacträge." Consider French composer, Darius Milhaud, whose "Creation of the World," stunned early audiences due to its improvisatory nature. And Stravinsky, who was known to have been affected by jazz he heard in Harlem as witnessed in his 1945 *Ebony Concerto*, especially the piece "A Jazz Concerto Grosso With a Blues Slow Movement." This recurring impetus to raise the jazz form seeks to stake the claim that jazz is worthy of aesthetic contemplation and every bit as serious a "high art" as classical music.

drum songs, and mytho-history songs ground the music aesthetically, but the power of this particular body of music derives from its ability to cohere associations and communities locally, nationally, globally by bringing into conversation Africa and her history. Re-memory songs represent the “dramatic saga of a people attempting to remake the world”; and as such, both in recordings and concerts close listeners would have recognized that a significant aim in the performances of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson was to interpret their “plight and their possibilities in global terms.”³⁷³ Performing re-memory songs, these artists invite listeners to return to their history in order to move on with their lives and into the future. These vocalists re-write the African American past, addressing and righting the wrongs of historical amnesia and social oppression, ritualistically reconnecting African Americans to the blood memories and cultural rites of the African past. These songs are given exceptional interpretations by both singer and band. They constantly alert audience members to the complex and nuanced musical qualities of the African diaspora. Each singer possesses such utter individuality and passionate delivery they can leave an audience breathless with the tension of real drama.

³⁷³ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, “Preface,” in eds. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

6

‘LET THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN’:
TO/WARD AFRODIASPORIC ‘VOICING’

That black radicalism cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis is true; it cannot be understood outside that context either. In this sense, black radicalism is like black music. The broken circle demands a new analytic way of listening to the music.

—Fred Moten, *In The Break*

Let the circle be unbroken
Each one reach one
Each one teach one...
We are moving steady onward
—Dianne Reeves, “1863”³⁷⁴

From the outset, this study has hinged on a fine-grained discussion of the stylistic similarities shared between Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson. Following the introduction, in the second chapter I engaged both jazz critics and jazz musicians on the commentary generated by these artists’ singing voices. Chapter Three grew out of work by scholars of black linguistics long interested in articulating the nature of language and sound meaning—in particular phonological style markers—as developed in African American vernacular traditions, a concept I extend to vocal performance in order to offer a more detailed

³⁷⁴ Dianne Reeves: *Bridges*, Blue Note TOCJ 66027, 1999, compact disc.

description of the singing voices of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters explored the central aspects of their authorial voices. Here, I discuss the most prevalent themes, locating two aesthetic practices that taken together comprise the largest portion of their collective original songbooks—Womanist autoethnography and Re-memory. Chapter Four draws on Africana womanist theory to frame my discussion of lyrics as autoethnography. Chapter Five consults current scholarship on (black) cultural memory studies and mines author Toni Morrison’s concept of “re-memory” to highlight the ways in which an Africa-centered imagination, which arises out of the historical circumstances of the Middle Passage, slavery, and Civil Rights (both in the U.S.A. and in Africa), corresponds to a wider scope of creative expression in the musical performances of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson. Thus, the previous chapters sought to analyze significant and dynamic characteristics prevalent in each artist’s original oeuvre. In the process of learning how to listen I became adept at identifying core aesthetic traits and performance practices in other women’s music. However, discussions that grow out of these similarities point to a larger black music culture paradigm. Thus a final task of this dissertation derives from the interest in working toward a comparative theorization of black women’s music, stressing its heterogeneous and diversified yet unifying traits.

Distinguished by a fundamental unity not only of reference but also of vision, I propose the term

Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' to cover the specific corpus of linguistic features and narrative strategies in the music of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson and other black women vocalists-songwriters globally speaking. Thus, the goal of this study takes on a larger, second goal presented in this final chapter, the introduction of a framework for analyzing the rich milieu of messages imbedded in the global musics of black women vocalist-composers.

AFRODIASPORIC 'VOICING'

The recent shift in cultural studies away from 'race' and 'ethnicity' paradigms to heuristic devices that explore social conditions and historical processes at the transnational level has refocused academic attention on the concept of diaspora (see, for example, Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996, 1997; Braziel and Mannur, 2003; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990; Vertovec, 1996). However, as Avtar Brah states in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) the term diaspora can be ill-defined and all-embracing, thus weakening its purchase as a theoretical framework. Diaspora, as I intend it here, refers to the voluntary or involuntary dispersion of any population that results in the construction of a new identity on a world scale. In its most tenuous configuration, diaspora has no fixed point of beginning. For the purposes of this dissertation, diaspora is a useful tool for theorizing about music informed by the geo-social oppression inherent in black transnational communities. That is to say, the subordinate social order experienced by blacks on a global scale represents the connective thread between black expressive cultures.

In black studies, historians (George Shepperson, Colin Palmer, Ronald Segal, Dwayne Williams, Eric Williams) and social scientists (W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James, St. Clair Drake) generally have used the diaspora framework to trace the socio-historical experiences of enslaved people who were forcibly moved. The 1990s signaled a paradigm shift in diaspora studies when Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy gave impetus for application of diaspora theorization to the study of black expressive cultures. Hall's concept of diaspora emerges as a way of rethinking the issue of black cultural representation away from the notion of the essential black subject (Hall, 1992). His work is useful in historicizing ethnic and cultural identity, but does not adequately deal with the importance of class and gender differences, what Brah refers to as "intersectionalities."

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) is arguably the most successful theoretical defense of diaspora as framework. Gilroy produces a history of the West through the work of black intellectuals (W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright) whom he views as inhabiting "contact zones" between cultures and histories. His usage of diaspora sustains his focus on the difference and sameness of culture across variegated national black groups. With an argument rooted in the distinctive forms of black music and performance, Gilroy, like Hall, rejects the notion of an essential black subject and monolithic black culture. Unfortunately, Gilroy also repeats Hall's critical and undeserving omission of women from his discussion of the black diaspora. Both works seem to imply that the ongoing construction of the African diaspora happens without women, or that gender is so insignificant it bears no mention.

While it is a valuable idea, inasmuch as it provides an alternative to the race essentialism that imperils music studies, the African diaspora as framework imperils scholarship that does not adequately investigate the sameness and/or differences among black cultures. Addressing this

point, historian Colin Palmer warns against the tendency to homogenize black populations on the transnational level in his article, “Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora”:

Obviously, the history and experiences of people of African descent in such societies as Jamaica, Haiti, and Barbados where they comprise the overwhelming majority cannot be conflated with those of their counterparts in England, Germany, Canada or the U.S.A. where they form a minority. The differences are too vast. ...We must be careful not to paint a static and ahistorical picture of what was and is a very dynamic set of processes at work, everywhere.

Colin’s insightful observation attends to the reality of social and historical continuities and discontinuities within variegated black cultures. For example, class subordination, a commonality of all black groups at the transnational level—regardless of their population in relation to whites—represents a major role in the articulation of black experience. One such diasporic project that might offer a fluid and historical (as opposed to the “static and ahistorical picture” Palmer rightly warns against) discussion of black women’s experience of class, for example, might include the analysis of blueswomen’s lyrics, the lyrics of the artists presented here, hip-hop lyrics, and a whole range of transnational black music forms including soca and morna. Such an analysis could focus on the articulation of economics over time, or —and this is a sobering yet real possibility— argue that lyrical articulations of class have largely remained static, despite political and cultural change.

Samuel Floyd’s contention that the continuation and reinvention of musical forms is in large part “the power of black music” is first located in the shared elements of African and Black American formations of music in the ring shout,³⁷⁵ which the enslaved Africans carried with them and preserved in the New World, and continues to myriad music forms—jazz, hip hop,

reggae, morna, ska, soca, etc. Despite idiomatic differences, black women's vocal performances within these various musical forms often exhibit common ideological and aesthetic strategies traceable to a particular consciousness, an idea I discovered in the process of describing the ways in which Lincoln, Simone and Wilson negotiate creative identity with the African diaspora. According to Steven Vertovec (1996) 'diaspora consciousness' is a particular kind of awareness generated among contemporary transnational communities; it is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion and positively by identification with an historical heritage.³⁷⁶ Diaspora consciousness is further considered to be the source of resistance through engagement with, and consequent visibility in, public space. My term Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' infers music that reveals the following aspects of African diasporic consciousness:

- 1) a recognition of dispersal;
- 2) an acknowledgment of Africa as the ancestral land;
- 3) dissemination of symbols and transmission of heritage knowledge;
- 4) life history or testimony (inclusive of experiences relating to socio-political disenfranchisement);
- 5.) crossfertilization (performative engagement with other black and non-black musical forms)

³⁷⁵ Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁷⁶ Employing diaspora consciousness to my theoretical framework, this work joins other music studies that treat consciousness as an interpretive tool for black music study, including Graham Locke's *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* (1999) and Eric Porter's *What Is This Thing Called Jazz: African Americans As Artists, Critics, And Activists* (2002). Locke's study integrates cultural, musical and historical analyses as a means of understanding the unique musical consciousness of Sun Ra, Braxton and Ellington. By attending the musicians' individual narratives about their music, he demonstrates their responses to racial exclusion and appropriation. Eric Porter's book focuses on the ideology behind the music of Abbey Lincoln, Charles Mingus, Dizzie Gillespie, Duke Ellington and Wynton Marsalis. By expanding the definition of these artists' music to include "intellectual activity," he asserts that the self-conscious aspects of black musical production both challenge and complicate narratives that ascribe a singular meaning to the history of jazz. Like Locke, Porter's insightful investigation focuses on the "creative consciousness" of his subjects.

These aspects of consciousness emerged naturally during an interview with Afro-German vocalist-composer Tokunbo Akinro of the German neosoul band Tok Tok Tok. Following a brief discussion about her original song “About,” which details the racism Akinro experienced after she moved to Germany, the atmosphere changed dramatically—turned gayer when she drew on another aspect of her diasporic experience:

TA: With “I Could Never Forget,” I was really inspired by the tropical-music atmosphere Morten [band mate] created. It just instantly took me back to these childhood places, places in Lagos, Nigeria. It was one of the easiest songs for me really, which was nice because I just had all of these pictures in my mind—pictures of the Africa I knew, but also the Africa I didn’t know and wanted to bring into the consciousness of others.³⁷⁷

In their work *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*, Perrone and Dunn argue that in South America, African-American musical repertoires have served as symbolic modeling for Brazilian artists’ creative ways to critique race and class issues and forge new identities.³⁷⁸ [make smaller] They assert that the cultural processes related to a transnational diasporic hybridity found in African-American music functioned as a critique for a nation long associated with notions of hybridity (e.g., *mestiçagem*). Thus, “African American popular culture, with its emphasis on racial pride and social protest, served as a symbolic marker for delineating black specificity in Brazil, a society that tended to blur these distinctions.”³⁷⁹ Perrone’s and Dunn’s argument can be extended to the Portuguese island nation Cape Verde, where blacks are the majority yet as a former Portuguese colony off the coast of West Africa, Cape Verdeans have forged new identities. We hear this in the music of Cèsaria Évora, a contemporary of Lincoln

³⁷⁷ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 274.

and Simone who popularized the morna, in particular Afro-flamenco recorded by Buika, and the traditional music of Afro-Peruvian songstress Susanna Baca and black American-by-way-of-Rwanda-and-Western-Uganda, Somi.

The final factor that I must consider in articulating this concept of Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ is the influence of cross-cultural music, or, to borrow from Ingrid Monson, “diasporic crossfertilization,”³⁸⁰ best exemplified in the following quotes taken from my personal interviews with Angélique Kidjo and Somi:

[Interview with Angélique]

LKB: I have noticed that you experiment a lot with different musical forms in your lyrics, like with the song “Bissimilai,” which I love.

Angélique: Yes. This is something I love to do. It’s challenging, and it frees me. “Bissimilai” is composed in the Puerto Rican plena form, but I sing it in fon and have backup by a chorus of Muslim women who I recorded on a trip home to Benin. In the chorus you hear the similarity between traditional Zilin music and gospel music. By bringing all of these forms together, I want to make people feel united.³⁸¹

[Interview with Somi]

LKB: Over the course of your four albums, Somi, I have noticed that you tend to write lyrics in different languages. Talk to me about how this became a part of your musical identity.

Somi: I primarily write in English. But I also write in Swahili and Keneranda and Rutoro. I’m fluent, or close to fluency in Swahili, which I took for eight semesters in college. Kinyarwanda is the language spoken in my father’s native Rwanda and Rutoro is the language of my mother, who is Ugandan. Sometimes I’ll often give my parents credit with the lyrics because they help me with translation. I guess you could say I came to the process of incorporating these African languages because I grew up hearing them, because there is a certain

³⁷⁸ Charles A. Perrone and Christopher Dunn, eds., *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2001), 83.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ingrid Monson, *The African Diaspora*, 7.

³⁸¹ Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 30.

poetry to them that just comes to me organically when I'm writing a song, which is to say I won't hear the song in English, my native language, but the song will present itself to me in Swahili, Kinyarwanda or Rutoro. It is also important for me to remain flexible and yet also versed in other musical traditions. I feel connected to a tremendous wealth of music associated with Africa, and at the same time I feel a responsibility to share those forms with others and to let those forms dialogue with each other within my work.³⁸²

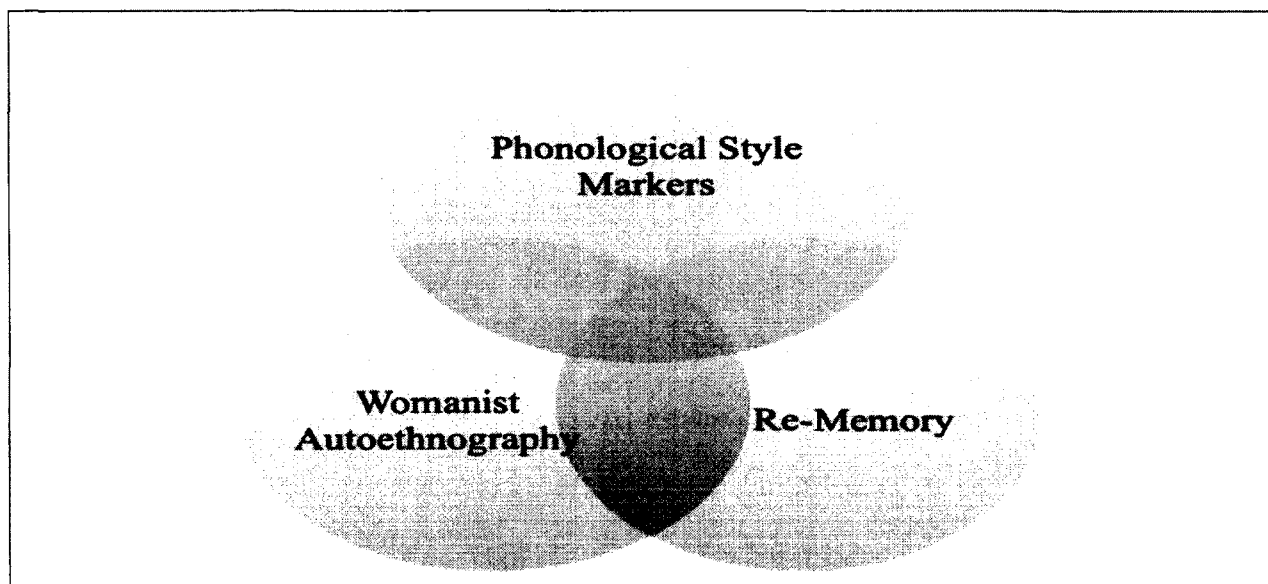
The adoption of the Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' model opens up discussion about performances in which the music does not—on the surface—seem to adhere to these same principles, bringing us closer to Gilroy's challenge to provide analytic status to myriad black expressive culture modes. It also raises questions and begs the analysis of the ways specific aesthetic choices manifest in a given song. As a framework centered around an *aesthetic consciousness* held by black women vocalist-songwriters, Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' is not, in the words of Michael Eric Dyson, "fueled by an effort to foist overdrawn generalizations about individual character onto racial groups,"³⁸³ but rather as a heuristic means to focus on aesthetic commonalities of dynamic musical practices in the African diaspora despite idiomatic difference. Similar to the ways in which Mark Anthony Neal, in *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (1999), links disparate types of black popular music into a broader tradition, largely rooted in the African American desire to create and maintain community, the Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' model presupposes that through a comparative analysis of music there is something to be learned from experiences that unfold(-ed) for different black peoples in different places and times; in so doing it enables us to see global connectedness in music that speaks a consciousness generated in shared cultural, economic, and political

³⁸² Somi. Personal Interview 3 November 2010.

experiences.³⁸⁴ What the Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ framework allows the listener and scholar of Lincoln, Simone and Wilson to find is a way to interpret and integrate the dynamic mutability of their original songs which reveal cultural-philosophic ideas toward singing, songwriting, composing and performing. Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ is not understood as genre nor merely representative of selected thematic commonality but rather the framework invites nuanced, transnational analysis of Afrodiasporic women’s musical articulation of their past, present and future.

Table 6.1 Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ Model

The graph below pulls together the most salient, distinct yet overlapping aspects in original music by Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and Cassandra Wilson, and arguably many black women singer-songwriters who consciously or unconsciously draw on black linguistic practices and Afrocentric philosophies, including spiritual traditions, in music-making.



³⁸³ Michael Eric Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xiii.

SOUNDS OF BLACKNESS: AN ETHNOMEMOIR

One of the great advantages of writing a dissertation in New York City was the numerous opportunities for concert-going and the chance to interview many singer-songwriters.³⁸⁵ I learned to hear among black women singer-songwriters, a similar movement of mind and imagination taking place, a conscious reference to a matrix of expression represented in Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing.’ Beyond Lincoln, Simone and Wilson a striking example of the ADV model at play can be heard in the music of vocalist-composer Dianne Reeves. When Dianne Reeves’ eponymously-titled album appeared on the music scene in 1987, containing what most black women referred to as the grandmother song, but whose correct title is “Better Days,” I was fourteen years old. One of my favorite memories from girlhood includes singing alone (or so I thought) in my bedroom this story song about a girl who becomes a woman, loved, taught and nurtured along the way by her grandmother who dies in the song’s last stanza. “Better Days” had special resonance for me as I shared an extremely close bond to my maternal grandmother. In fact, that summer was the first school vacation I would not spend in Ennis, Texas, my grandmother’s home before she migrated with most of her siblings in search of better employment opportunities to Kansas City. I had remained in the suburbs of Chicago to work my first job and missed my grandmother fiercely. So, there I stood singing as though she could hear me. As the song ended, a whistle startled me. I turned around to see who had intruded on the solo concert, and found my mother standing there clapping. I don’t know if it was thoughts of

³⁸⁴ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 196.

³⁸⁵ Collected interviews with over forty Afrodiasporic women singer-songwriters and instrumentalists can be found in *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters On Their Craft* (NY: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007) and *Off The Record: African-American and Brazilian Women Musicians* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

her mother, the words to the song itself, or my singing, but like the taxi driver who wiped his eyes when hearing Abbey sing “Old Pal,” my mother had been visibly moved.

By the time the album carrying “Better Days” was released, Reeves had already laid the groundwork for an impressive, eclectic and musical career. The Denver native had studied music at the University of Colorado-Denver, moving to L.A. in the late seventies, where she began experimenting with different kinds of music, especially Latin music (she performed with Brazilian composer/guitarist Sergio Mendes) and rhythm and blues (she gained studio work with Earth, Wind and Fire). A significant mentorship with Harry Belafonte developed in the 1980s when Reeves moved to New York. This mentorship helped the vocalist-composer find deeper access to the music, significantly bridging her spiritual and creative philosophies. Reeves, who along with Angélique Kidjo and Lizz Wright, toured in the fall of 2011 with the program “Sing the Truth,” which honored the musical legacies of Abbey Lincoln, Miriam Makeba and Odetta, spoke to me during an interview at New York’s Regency Hotel on Park Avenue:

Well, when I lived in New York and was working with Harry Belafonte, I found myself in the presence of a lot of amazing musicians who were really steeped in African spiritual traditions. One of them, Harry’s percussionist at the time, introduced me to the Yoruba tradition. One day I stopped by his place—we were all on our way out to eat and he invited me in. And he did it on purpose because he knew I was this curious person; I am always searching for answers. He had this whole setup on the floor, and he’s moving things around and saying things I don’t understand, and I thought to myself, What is this man doing? Well, turns out he was communing with his Elegba, his warrior. After that, I started asking all kinds of questions and we would get into these really deep conversations. I would share with him my philosophies on the spirit world, things I’d always felt deeply. He told me I needed to speak with his godmother, so I went to her and I found a whole spiritual philosophy that mirrored what I had always felt and believed in....So finally here I was in this place learning about ancestry and how just like you can look like those who came before you, you can also hold the know-

ledge they held—you can know things and not even understand how you know them. Your ancestors are definitely a part of your being, your soul.³⁸⁶

Reeves' interest and involvement in African spiritual traditions such as Yoruba led to the vocalist composing the re-memory songs "Old Souls," "Ancient Source," "1863," "Olokun," and "Yemanja" (the last two reference two Yoruban orisha)—to name a few. Moreover, our two-hour discussion on her songwriting process revealed a preponderance of womanist autoethnographic lyrics as heard in "Josa Lee," about a preacher's daughter who is led astray by the wrong man; the explosive, growling "Endangered Species," a powerful anthem where Reeves' vocals soar above percussion-only accompaniment, claiming gendered strength and self-affirmation; and "Testify" and "Mista," songs of black women in love and trouble not unlike "Blues For Mama" co-written by Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone, or Cassandra Wilson's "Redbone." The continuity of experience and expression that Reeves' performance style and songwriting practice evince was easy to trace and define in the context of this dissertation's framework.

Performing songs that convey attitudes about the experiences of people of African descent in any given time, place and circumstance, like Lincoln, Simone and Wilson, black women vocalist-composers across the globe answer the call to "say something," to theorize through singing.³⁸⁷ Drawing on the set-lists, observation notes and albums, Table 6.2 (below) addresses a sampling of artists whose particular performance styles and song lyrics reveal a negotiation and dialogue with the past and present Africa and her diaspora. Each draws on that criterion which is the epistemological foundation of Afrodiasporic 'Voicing'—phonological

³⁸⁶ LaShonda Katrice Barnett, *I Got Thunder*, 85-6.

³⁸⁷ For a good overview of black expressive culture as theory *in* practice see Barbara Christian (1987) and Alice Walker (1983).

style markers, womanist autoethnography and re-memory. While it would be disingenuous to subscribe to the notion of essentialism—that all black women singers whose singing demonstrates certain phonological style markers and whose original lyrics and performances adhere to principles of womanist autoethnography and re-memory, the impression of unity and the image of coherence that their music conveys is not factitious; and their transnational conversation calls for a global context found in the concept of Afrodiasporic ‘Voicing’ (Table 6.2):

Table 6.2 ADV Song Matrix
Quantity of Analytical Categories Demonstrated in Original Compositions
by Dianne Reeves, Angelique Kidjo, Buika, Tokunbo Akinro, Somi, Césaria
Évora, Susana Baca

Artists	Phonological Style Markers	Womanist Autoethnography	Re-Memory
Dianne Reeves	Tonal semantics, Polytonality, Microtonality,	1863, Better Days, The Benediction (Country Preacher), Endangered Species, Eyes on the Prize, Josa Lee, Mista, Nine, Testify, Anthem, Lament for a Lonely Child	Ancient Source, Old Souls, Olokun, Yemanja, Come to the River, Freedom Dance
Angelique Kidjo	Tonal semantics, Polytonality, Microtonality,	Aisha, Mama Golo Papa, Papa, We Are One	Africa, Shango, Yemanja, Out of Africa, Kelele, Monfe Ran E (feat. Dianne Reeves), Iwoya, Tumba, Babloa, Cogoleo, Voodoo Child, Voodoo Reprise (feat. Cassandra Wilson)
Buika	Tonal semantics, Polytonality, Microtonality	Mi Niña Lola, Niña de Fuego, Little Freaky Girl, Buika Le Planette	New Afro Spanish Generation
Tokunbo Akinro	Polytonality	When I’m Grown, Damn Good Girl, She & He, Don’t Mess Around With Phillis Jones	It Took So Long, About, What Has Roots, In the Jungle
Somi	Tonal semantics, Polytonality, Microtonality	Girl Child, My Mother’s Daughter, Natural, Jewel of His Soul, Rising, Ulale Malike Wangu (African	African lady, Remembrance, Red Soil In My Eyes, Ingele, Kuzunguka,

		lullaby)	Enganjyani, Mbabazi
Césaria Évora	Tonal semantics	Sabine Larga'm, Desilusão Dum Amdjer, Petit Pays, Barbincour, Amdjer De Nos Terra, Isolada	Africa Nossa; Angola, Caboverdeano N'Angola, Cabo Verde
Susana Baca	Polytonality, Microtonality	Maria Lando, Yana Runa (Black man), Una Copla Me Ha Cantado, Negrito Bonito, Negra Presentuosa	Reine de Africa, Canto A Elegua, Afro Blue/ZumZum, Coco y Forro, El Mayoral, glope E. Tierra (Hablan Los Negros), Lamento Negro, Palomita Ingrata,

CONCLUSION

In the western hemisphere, black women dominate popular and alternative music scenes with their original songs. The ramifications of these songs and their performances are insufficiently recognized for their ability to occlude socio-political oppression and their capacity to promote and maintain the relationship between personal expression and autonomy even beyond the musical experience. The Afrodiasporic 'Voicing' model offers a framework for learning how to listen to their musical designations of experience—linguistic experience, gender experience, race experience.³⁸⁸ Thus, the broader implication of this study proposes future projects that further identify aesthetic values, sensibilities, and the connections between them. In so doing, I call for scholars (and music critics) to take on the hermeneutical task of delineating common features among all forms of black music and to listen to the music with some regard to the cultural values and vernacular practices that vocalist-songwriters of Afrodiasporic consciousness bring to music making. Moreover, the important point is that a

³⁸⁸ Lindon Barrett, "In The Dark: Billie Holiday and Some Sights and Sounds of American Value," *Callaloo* 13, no.4 (1990): 875.

great portion of the world's popular music draws on these important signifiers. The question then remains: what is to be gained from learning how to listen for these important signifiers, embedded in a large portion of the world's popular music? We come closer to an understanding of music's ability to transform, to heal beyond the alienating conditions of social and political marginalization. In the words of Cassandra Wilson, this great transformative power of music remains "then and now, our love, the circle is never broken."³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Cassandra Wilson: *Traveling Miles*, Blue Note compact disc 7243-8-54123-25; 1999.

APPENDIX A**SUBJECT BIOGRAPHIES****ABBIE LINCOLN**

Actress, singer, songwriter, painter, poet Abbie Lincoln was born Anna Marie Wooldridge on August 6, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois. The tenth of twelve children, Lincoln grew up on a farm in the township of Calvin Center, Michigan. In interviews the artist recalls the freedom with which she “picked out melodies” at the family piano where she began to experiment with music at age five. As a youth Lincoln also sang in the choir at the AME church her family attended. At age fourteen she was deeply affected by the recordings she heard of Billie Holiday and Coleman Hawkins. After winning an amateur singing contest in 1949, Lincoln traveled to California with her brother. Following a brief stint as a nightclub performer in Los Angeles, in 1951 she moved to Honolulu, where she sang with The Rampart Streeters at the Trade Winds Club. During this time she met jazz performers Louis Armstrong and Anita O’Day. In Honolulu, Lincoln attended several Billie Holiday performances at the Brown Derby. Reportedly, Holiday also attended two of Lincoln’s shows, though the two never met. Performing under the names Gaby Lee and Gaby Marie at various supper clubs, such as the Moulin Rouge, upon her return to California in 1954, Lincoln joined the company of José Ferrer, Rosemary Clooney, and Mitch Miller, who introduced her to lyricist Bob Russell. Russell later became her manager and suggested the singer change her name to Abbie Lincoln. (The story goes, Russell commented that music was black peoples’ salvation in the USA and that Lincoln

hadn't really freed the slaves, but through her music perhaps Abbey could manumit many enslaved minds.) In July of 1956, *Abbey Lincoln's Affair: A Story of a Girl in Love*, the singer's first recording with the Benny Carter Orchestra, was released on the Liberty imprint of the Riverside label. Lincoln recorded three consecutive albums for Riverside, including *That's Him* (1957), *It's Magic* (1958), and *Abbey Is Blue* (1959). In 1956, the year she landed a singing role in the film *The Girl Can't Help It*, Lincoln moved from California to New York. In New York City she performed regularly at the Village Vanguard and met many leading musicians, including Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, and Charles Mingus. These artists, whose music addressed racial inequality, influenced Lincoln so that she too began to draw on cultural and political content in her songs. However, more important than the reflection of social causes in their music was the fact that these musicians were also composers. In many interviews Lincoln has credited Thelonious Monk with encouraging her to compose, although it would be more than a decade before she fully embraced this aspect of her artistry. Lincoln collaborated with Max Roach and Oscar Brown Jr. on the landmark civil rights recording *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*. The 1960 work featured the piece entitled "Tryptich: Prayer/Protest/Peace," in which Lincoln's vocal obligatos depart from traditional jazz singing and scatting. Here, words are replaced by hums, chants, and sighs, which are followed by screams, roars, screeches, and pants. The performance transformed Lincoln's reputation from supper club chanteuse to "social" singer. That same year, Lincoln also appeared in the off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's absurdist drama *The Blacks*, which boasted the stellar cast of James Earl Jones, Maya Angelou, Billy Dee Williams, Roscoe Lee Browne, and Cicely Tyson. The following year, Lincoln provided vocals and lyrics for two songs,

“Garvey’s Ghost” and “Mendacity,” on Roach’s 1961 Impulse album *Percussion Bitter Sweet*.

She also released her own recording, *Straight Ahead*, on the Candid label, which featured four of her own lyrics, most notably “In the Red,” which spoke to black America’s economic plight.

In 1962, Lincoln married percussion giant Max Roach. She also founded the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage. According to Lincoln, the association was organized for the sole purpose of exploring the cultures of the African diaspora. The group’s activities included promoting African hairstyles (during this time Lincoln herself began to wear an Afro and braids and was quoted in *Ebony* magazine for coming out against black women who straighten their hair), producing Afrocentric fashion shows, and protesting the assassination of Patrice Lumumba at the United Nations. In the mid-sixties, Lincoln’s acting career gained new impetus when she appeared in several films, including *Nothing but a Man* (1964) and *For Love of Ivy* (1966). In 1966, Lincoln published the essay “Who Will Revere the Black Woman?” in the *Negro Digest*, subsequently reprinted in Toni Cade Bambara’s 1970 anthology *The Black Woman*, under the title “To Whom Will She Cry Rape?” Here, Eric Porter’s characterization of Lincoln’s essay bears repeating:

Lincoln spoke to black men in uncompromising terms about negative representations of black women in a culture swept up in the debate over the supposed black matriarchy. She began by talking about the resilience of black men and women in a racist American society. She then expressed her dismay and anger that black men not only had “belittled” black women’s appearances and pursued relationships with white women but had also cast black women as “domineering” and “evil” and blamed them for their own predicaments...If black women were “evil,” Lincoln argued then that perspective should be understood as a healthy reaction to their predicament in society and the backlash against them by black men.³⁹⁰

Following her divorce from Roach in 1970, Lincoln returned to California, where she taught

drama at California State University in Northridge, painted, composed songs, and wrote.

1970 also saw Lincoln's play, *Pig in a Poke*, produced at the Mafundi Institute, a black cultural center in the Watts section of Los Angeles, and Lincoln appeared on several television shows, including *Mission Impossible*, *Name of the Game*, and *The Flip Wilson Show*.

Abbey Lincoln did not record again as a lead until 1973's *People in Me*, the only album the artist made in the seventies, recorded in Japan on the Philips label. However, during this period Lincoln traveled extensively throughout Asia, Europe, and, most significantly, Africa. In 1975, the South African singer Miriam Makeba invited Lincoln to Africa as her guest. For Lincoln, the highlights of the trip involved meeting the leader of Guinea, Ahmed Sékou Touré, who named her "Aminata" (trustworthy), and the Zairean minister of information, who gave her "Moseka" (God's image in the form of a maiden). Lincoln has since commented in many interviews that following her time in Africa "[she] discovered songs coming out of [her]....It was the biggest surprise. I started writing them down when I was about forty-two....In a way it's like catching the rain in your hand. It's everywhere." Her collaboration with tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp culminated in the album, *Painted Lady* (Blue Marge 1980, also reprinted as *Golden Lady* on the Inner City label in 1981). For the German label Enja, Lincoln released *Talking to the Sun* (1983) and three Billie Holiday tribute albums (1987). The latter signaled a comeback for the singer, and in 1989 she returned to New York where she was signed by Verve at the behest of French record producer Jean-Philippe Allard and cast by Spike Lee to appear in his 1990 jazz drama *Mo' Better Blues*. (Lincoln appears briefly in the opening scene as the mother of the young trumpeter protagonist, Bleek Gilliam.) In what many would consider

³⁹⁰ Eric Porter, *What is this Thing Called Jazz?*, 187-8.

a late flowering of her career, Lincoln recorded ten albums of primarily original compositions: *The World Is Falling Down* (1990); *You Gotta Pay The Band* (1991); *Devil's Got Your Tongue* (1993); *When There Is Love* (1994); *A Turtle's Dream* (1995); *Who Used to Dance* (1997); *Wholly Earth* (1998); *Over The Years* (2000); *It's Me* (2003) and *Abbey Sings Abbey* (2007).

The recipient of several honorary doctorates, in 2001 Lincoln was the subject of Columbia University's two-day symposium "For Love of Abbey," which gathered critics, musicologists, musicians, writers and scholars for panel discussions and other events devoted to the artist's work. In 2002, her original compositions were honored by Jazz at Lincoln Center with a three-evening concert program. *Abbey Lincoln: Over the Years—An Anthology of Her Compositions and Poems* featured Freddy Cole, saxophonist Joe Lovano, and tap dancer Savion Glover. The recipient of the Best Actress Award from the Federation of Italian Filmmakers (1965), the First World Festival of Negro Arts (1966), and the Most Prominent Screen Person Award from the All American Press Association (1969), Lincoln was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1975. In 2003, the recipient of numerous honorary doctorate degrees received the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master Award, the nation's highest honor for a jazz artist. In 2007, Lincoln underwent open-heart surgery, but continued to live in her upper west side apartment filled with her own oil paintings, drawings and homemade Africa-inspired dolls. But by February of 2009 she was admitted to Amsterdam House, a nursing home where she died a week after her eightieth birthday in 2010.

NINA SIMONE

Classically trained pianist, singer-songwriter and activist Eunice Kathleen Waymon was born in Tryon, North Carolina, on February 21, 1933. The sixth of eight children and a child prodigy at the piano by age four, Simone's musical talent blossomed at the AME church where her mother was a minister and where Simone played piano and sang in the choir. With the help of her music teacher and local supporters who set up the Eunice Waymon fund, Simone continued her musical education and studied classical piano at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, where she prepared for entrance into the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. When she was denied entrance into Curtis as a matriculating student, Simone attributed her rejection to racism. By this time, her family had moved from Tryon to Philadelphia, and to support them as well as to finance private music lessons, Simone worked as an accompanist. In the summer of 1954, the classically-trained pianist Eunice Waymon took a job at the Midtown Bar and Grill in Atlantic City where she slowly cultivated a fan base as Nina Simone. By 1957, Simone had found an agent, and in 1958 her first album, *Jazz as played in an Exclusive Side Street Club*, (later known as *Little Girl Blue*) was issued on the independent label, Bethlehem Records. The single "I Loves You Porgy" from *Porgy and Bess* sold over a million copies. From the outset it should be noted that charting Simone's recording career is a dubious undertaking, for while an "official" discography exists, which credits the artist with thirty-five albums, numerous unauthorized or bootlegged recordings of her performances have been released in large quantities over the years.³⁹¹ Still, we can track Simone's legitimate recordings

³⁹¹ According to Sylvia Hampton and David Nathan, authors of *Nina Simone: Break Down & Let It All Out*, there are approximately sixty unauthorized Simone albums distributed worldwide.

after Bethlehem and group them into three periods according to record labels: Colpix (1959-1964); Philips (1964-1967); and RCA (1967-1974). Simone briefly married Don Ross in 1958, and divorced him the next year. A second marriage to Andy Stroud, a former police detective who became her recording agent and with whom she had a daughter, Lisa Celeste, lasted from 1960-1970. Following her second album on Bethlehem, *Nina Simone and Her Friends* (1959), she signed with the national label Colpix (Columbia Pictures Records) who released nine albums, among them several important live ones including, *Nina Simone at Town Hall* (1959), *Nina Simone at The Village Gate* (1962) and *Nina Simone At Carnegie Hall* (1963). In 1964, Simone left Colpix for the international Philips, where she recorded seven albums that housed her well-known protest songs. Like Abbey Lincoln, who often traveled in Simone's circle of artist friends James Baldwin, Langston Hughes and Lorraine Hansberry—significantly, all writers—Simone's musical repertoire shifted away from show tunes and ballads to original songs about America's racial problems. During this period she engendered negative press by dint of her refusal to accept rude audiences. Simone's 1964 album *In Concert* featured "Mississippi Goddam," written after the assassination of Medgar Evers in Mississippi (June 1963) and the bombing of a Baptist church in Alabama that killed four black girls (September 1963), and was banned from radio. Other popular songs penned by Simone during the Civil Rights Movement are "Old Jim Crow," "Four Women" and "To Be Young, Gifted and Black." The latter was composed in honor of playwright Lorraine Hansberry (who was writing a play with the same title at the time of her death) and became an anthem for the growing black power movement with its line, "To be young, gifted and black is where it's at!" As a welcomed

departure from the frustration, tragedy and injustice of the Civil Rights Era, Simone also performed a plethora of songs that explicitly named sexual desire, such as ‘I Want a Little Sugar In My Bowl,’ “Gimme Some,” “Take Care of Business,” and “Don’t Take All Night.”

Simone’s recordings of sexual blues bear significance in that they draw on and expand upon the musical tradition of the early blues of the Jim Crow and great migration era with a decidedly female bent. By revising old blues imagery and combining it with the social themes of her time, Simone represented a different kind of black female symbol—sexual, nurturant, authoritative, and committed to racial uplift. The era of the sixties also witnessed a physical transformation in Simone. Like Lincoln and folk singer Odetta, Simone was one of the first artists to reject beehives and supper-club gowns, wearing instead short, natural hair, often cornrowed or braided, and African clothes—what she considered a symbolic representation of her racial pride. Her song, “Four Women,” in which she creates stark representations of black womanhood throughout American history by describing each woman’s skin tone in relation to her objectification, reflected the exclusion of black women from dominant Eurocentric concepts of beauty. In 1967 Simone was awarded the Female Jazz Singer of the Year award by the National Association of Television and Radio and became the first woman to win the Jazz Cultural Award. But her close identification with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements cost her dearly. In the 1970s American record companies expressed no interest in working with her. In 1973, following an IRS investigation that led to the artist’s arrest and the seizure of her Mount Vernon, New York home, Simone renounced the U.S. as her homeland. Embittered by racism, over the next two decades Simone lived in Barbados, Liberia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, Trinidad and the Netherlands. As a result, Simone’s discography of the seventies and

eighties reflects recordings for multiple labels including CTI and the Swiss label Carrere. Fashion conglomerate Chanel's adoption of the single, "My Baby Just Cares For Me"—for a British commercial in 1987—garnered new public interest in Simone. A sold-out live performance at Ronnie Scott's in London in 1988, alongside many European dance-club disc jockeys' adoption of Simone's music, returned the artist to the spotlight. Joining a tradition of African-American artists such as Josephine Baker, Sidney Bechet, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and Richard Wright, Simone adopted France as her home in 1991. That same year she published her autobiography, *I Put A Spell On You*, in which she recounted severe depression and several suicide attempts. And her music was featured in the film *Point of No Return*, generating a new listening audience. For years Simone battled with record companies over her royalties. Finally, in March of 1995 a U.S. court granted her ownership of fifty-two recordings. In 1998 she became involved in the Ivory Coast's Afromusiques project, receiving the honorary title of Ambassador of the Ivory Coast. The last years of her life Simone battled diabetes. When this author saw her at Carnegie Hall in 2001 (—the artist referred to her birth country as the "United Snakes of America"—), she used a wheelchair and had to be helped to the stage. An indication that Simone might have continued to record in a vein similar to Lincoln's (original songs laden with emotional power) had her emotional and physical health not diminished is reflected in the following excerpt taken from Stephen Holden's *New York Times* review of the singer's last album, *A Single Woman* (Elektra 1993): "At its finest, Ms. Simone's first major-label album in many years has an emotional power that reconfirms the singer as the high priestess of soul." On April 21, 2003, ten years after Elektra released her last album, Simone,

recipient of numerous honorary doctorate degrees in music and humanities, died at her home in Carry-le-Rouet, France.

CASSANDRA WILSON

Cassandra Wilson is a world-renowned jazz vocalist, songwriter, painter and producer with an extraordinary following, rooted in her unusual approach to jazz singing, an approach whose roots begin somewhere between the artist's first memory of hearing jazz—Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*, and her first record purchase at age ten, The Monkees's 1966 eponymously-titled album. The fifth generation of Mississippians and the youngest of three children, Cassandra Marie Fowlkes was born on December 4, 1955, in Jackson to an elementary schoolteacher mother, Mary Fowlkes, who eventually obtained a PhD and taught Spanish at Jackson State University, and a postman/musician (bassist) father, Herman Fowlkes. She has two older brothers. Growing up in the midst of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to which her musical foremothers Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone's participation laid claim, Wilson recalls a vibrant childhood in which her tomboy self preferred the outdoors to the ranch style house at 3610 Albemarle Road where she climbed trees and made sure not to walk in the road—especially when Jackson neighbor, Eudora Welty, was behind the wheel. “She was the *worst* driver.” However, Jackson's winds weren't always sweet magnolia-scented. In 1963, Medgar Evers was murdered a few blocks from her home when Wilson was seven years old. Wilson studied piano from the age of six to thirteen and with the encouragement of her father, at age twelve taught herself acoustic guitar. She also played clarinet in the concert and marching bands of junior high school. Between the ages of eleven and fifteen she wrote twenty songs. By the time Wilson entered ninth grade at Starkville High School in 1969, Mississippi high schools

were desegregated. Still, the artist recalls the first two years of high school as difficult.

However, she adjusted and by the eleventh grade she had landed the leading role as Dorothy in the school's production of *The Wizard of Oz*, piquing her interest in theater and folk music. To the heavy doses of jazz and Motown music she got at home, Wilson added Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, James Taylor, and Bob Dylan. That year she formed a trio with two young white men and began performing in school and around town, hoping to stem the tide of uneasy race relations. "For all the negative aspects, experiencing things that were different from what I knew was also exciting," Wilson said in a 1997 interview for *The Oxford American*. After graduation Wilson attended the small, liberal arts-centered Millsaps College "to investigate white people and study their habits, almost like a National Geographic expedition." However, she dropped out and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she could be found performing folk songs behind an acoustic guitar, or singing with a large funk band or blues band. Long-noted for embracing the blues, and even criticized among the jazz police for incorporating blues in her repertoire, Wilson told John Lewis in the *Time Out* article (July 2002), "Songs Sung Blue": "There is still a stigma about the blues among African Americans. Upwardly mobile black people have wanted to escape the stigma of the environment that created the blues. I have too much respect for the form to pronounce myself a blues singer. But it's a responsibility for us to revisit this music, to reclaim it, to play variations on its themes and motifs." Wilson returned to Mississippi in 1978 and eventually received a degree in Mass Communications from Jackson State University (where she pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.) in 1980. Wilson's jazz trajectory began with a 1981 move to New Orleans where she honed her chops with the collective, Black Arts Music Society (BAMS), and performed with Earl Turbinton and Ellis Marsalis while working as

an assistant public affairs director for the local television station, WDSU. In 1982, a fortuitous move to East Orange, New Jersey, brought her closer to the jazz mecca, New York City. Wilson approached a jazz singer she revered, Betty Carter, requesting to study with her. Carter refused, even going so far as to question the point of such an apprenticeship. Wilson's responded with: "How then does a young woman become a jazz vocalist?" To which Carter replied, "Just do it." Soon Wilson was contributing her bebop vocals to Henry Threadgill's trio New Air. She subsequently met Steve Coleman, leader of the avant-garde funk-jazz collective M-Base (an acronym for Macro-Basic Array of Structured Extemporizations), comprised of Geri Allen, Jean-Paul Bourelly, Lonnie Plaxico, Graham Haynes and Teri Lynn Carrington. Wilson's association with Coleman was fated to be a significant one as she reflected:

Things turned around for me when I met Steve Coleman at a Bob Cunningham gig I sat in on in 1983, on the anniversary of Charlie Parker's birthday. I got up and did 'Cherokee.' Steve was really impressed. He couldn't believe a singer was checking out Charlie Parker, 'cause he was really into Bird at one time. But he kept telling me, 'Look, you're gonna have to break out of this type of standards gig to make a mark for yourself.' He was the first one that really encouraged me to write my own material, to do original music, and to just spot a direction of my own—not disregarding the tradition by growing out of it.³⁹²

In 1985 her debut album *Point of View* was released on the German jazz label JMT. Five albums with JMT: *Days Aweigh* (1987), *Blue Skies* (1988), *Jumpworld* (1990), *She Who Weeps* (1991), *Cassandra Wilson Live* (1991), and *After the Beginning Again* (1992). However, the nine albums recorded since signing with Blue Note Records in 1993, distinguished by their innovative arrangements and textures and an extraordinarily eclectic choice of material from sources as diverse as Robert Johnson, Joni Mitchell, Sting, Abbey Lincoln, Neil Young, Hoagy Carmichael, James Taylor, Bob Dylan, and Antonio Carlos Jobim, are her most well known.

These albums are: *Blue Light Til Dawn* (1993); *New Moon Daughter* (1995) —for which she was the first jazz singer of her generation to win the Grammy for best jazz vocal performance; the Grammy-nominated *Traveling Miles* (1999); *Belly of the Sun* (2002); *Glamoured* (2003); *Thunderbird* (2006); another Grammy-winner, *Loverly* (2008); *Closer to You: The Pop Side* (2009), and *Silver Pony* (2010). Wilson has appeared as a singer in the films *Junior* (1994) and *The Score* (2001). Notably, Wilson also contributed her vocal talent to Wynton Marsalis's three-and-a-half hour jazz oratoria³⁹³, *Blood On The Fields*, commissioned by Lincoln Center and winner of the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for Music, which earned Wilson her third Grammy nomination for best vocal performance. In 2000, Wilson married actor Isaach de Bankolé, who directed her in the concert-film, *Traveling Miles: Cassandra Wilson*. (Previous marriages to Anthony Wilson, Kidd Jordan, Henry Threadgill and Bruce Lincoln, with whom the artist has one son, Jeris Lincoln, ended in divorce.) The year 2000 also witnessed the establishment of Wilson's Ojah Media Group. Ojah, a Yoruba word meaning, "the marketplace," is an independent multi-media entity dedicated to documenting and marketing the unique sounds emanating from Mississippi's fertile soil, and its multicultural influences. Wilson was initiated into the Yoruba tradition in early nineties, and is a priestess of Oshun. The most prominent jazz vocalist of her generation, whom *Time* magazine called America's greatest singer, divides her time between Mississippi and New York.

³⁹² Kevin Whitehead, "A New kind of Jazzsinger-A New Kind of Song," in *Downbeat* (1988): 29.

³⁹³ *Blood On the Fields* premiered at New York's Lincoln Center in the spring of 1994, and later spawned a recorded version. The jazz oratorio tells the story of two Africans, Jesse, a prince (Miles Griffith) and Leona, a commoner (Cassandra Wilson) who are captured, brought to the United States and sold as slaves. The music courses the couple's move from slavery toward freedom.

APPENDIX B**SELECTED SOUND RECORDINGS****Lincoln, Abbey. *That's Him*. Riverside 251 (1957)**

- . Abbey Lincoln: Sessions, Live. Calliope 3009 (1958)
- w/Max Roach. We Insist!-Freedom Now Suite. Candid 9002 (1960)
- . Golden Lady. Inner City 1117 (1970)
- . People In Me. Inner City 6040 (1973)
- . Abbey Is Blue. Riverside OJCCD-069-2 (1987)
- . Talking to the Sun. Enja 4060 (1987)
- . Abbey Sings Billie, Volume 1. Enja 79633 (1987)
- . Abbey Sings Billie, Volume 2. Enja 7037-2 (1987)
- . Straight Ahead. Candid CCD-79015 (1989)
- . It's Magic. Riverside OJCCD-205-2 (1990)
- . The World is Falling Down. Verve 843-476-2 (1990)
- . You Gotta Pay the Band. Verve 314-511-110-2 (1991)
- . Devil's Got Your Tongue. Verve 314-513-574-2 (1992)
- . When There Is Love. Verve 314-519-697 (1992)
- . Affair...a Story of a Girl in Love. Capitol Jazz CDP-0777-7-91199-2-0 (1993)
- . A Turtle's Dream. Verve 314-527-382-2 (1995)
- . Painted Lady: In Paris. EPM 70176 (1996)
- . Who Used To Dance. Verve 314-533-559-2 (1997)
- . Abbey Lincoln: Live at the Iridium. Private Recording (1997)
- . Wholly Earth. Verve 314-559-538-2 (1998)
- . Over the Years. Verve 314-549-101-2 (2000)
- . It's Me. Verve B000126802 (2003)
- . Abbey Sings Abbey. Verve B000PC1QNI (2006)

Simone, Nina. *Nina Simone And Her Friends*. Bethlehem BCP 6041 (1959)

- . Forbidden Fruit. Colpix CP-419 (1961)
- . Nina Simone in Concert [live]. Phillips PHM 200-135 (1964)
- . Folksy Nina. Colpix CP-465 (1964)
- . Pastel Blues. Phillips PHM 200-187 (1965)
- . Let It All Out. Phillips PHM 200-202 (1966)
- . Wild Is The Wind. Phillips 200-207 (1966)
- . High Priestess of Soul. Phillips PHM 200-219 (1967)
- . Silk & Soul. RCA LSP 3837 (1967)
- . 'Nuff Said! RCA LSP 4065 (1968)
- . To Love Somebody. RCA LSP 4152 (1969)
- . Gifted and Black. Canyon 4032 (1969)
- . Black and Gold. RCA Victor LSP 4248 (1970)

- . *Emergency Ward*. RCA LSP 4757 (1972)
- . *It Is Finished!* RCA APL 1-0421 (1974)
- . *Baltimore*. CTI 7084 (1978)
- . *Live at Ronnie Scott's*. UK-WHCD 006 (1987)
- . *The Best of Nina Simone: The Colpix Years*. Blue Note CDP-0777-7-98584-2-2 (1992)
- . *A Single Woman*. Elektra 7559-61503-2 (1993)
- . *The Essential Nina Simone, Volume 2*. RCA 07863-66428-2 (1994)
- . *Verve: Jazz Masters 17, Nina Simone*. Verve 314-518-198-2 (1994)
- . *Porgy*. Laserlight 12616 (1995)

Wilson, Cassandra. *Point of View*. JMT 834-404-2 (1985)

- . *Days Aweigh* JMT 834-412-2 (1987)
- . *Blue Skies*. JMT 834-419-2 (1988)
- . *Jump World*. JMT 834-434-2 (1989)
- . *She Who Weeps* JMT 834-443-2 (1990)
- . *After the Beginning Again*. JMT 514-002-2 (1992)
- . *Dance to the Drums Again* CK 53451 (1992)
- . *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*. Blue Note CDP-0777-7-81357-22 (1993)
- . *New Moon Daughter*. Blue Note CDP-7243-8-32861-26 (1995)
- . *Cassandra Wilson Songbook*. JMT 697-124-097-2 (1995)
- . *Rendezvous, with Jacky Terrasson*. Blue Note 7243-8-55484-20 (1997)
- . *Traveling Miles*. Blue Note 7243-8-54123-25 (1999)
- . *Belly of the Sun*. Blue Note 7243-5-35072-20 (2002)
- . *Cassandra Wilson Sings Standards*. Verve 314-589-837-2 (2002)
- . *Glamoured*. Blue Note 7243-5-81860-24 (2003)
- . *Thunderbird*. Blue Note 7243-8-63398-2 (2006)
- . *Loverly*. Blue Note 5076992 (2008)
- . *Closer To You: The Pop Side*. Blue Note 9856942 (2009)
- . *Silver Pony*. Blue Note 3244523 (2010)

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY OF BASIC MUSICAL TERMS

Call-and-Response: refers to “solo-and-circle” wherein, “the leader receiving solid rhythmic support from the metrically accurate rolling, repetition of phrases by the chorus, is free to embroider”. This process is seen as a level of “perfected social interaction” (Thompson, 1974).

Ciret: means to “start high and proceed with downward *glissando*. The *Ciret* vocal melody is often connected to a cadence. The term is derived from Cira, tail (Kebede, 1995).

Cradle songs: describe the role of song texts that usually reference typical life situations, mainly children and family. They also convey matters of personal interest—such as strained relationships and envy—and are used for reflection and commentary (Nketia, 1974).

Duration: the length of time for which the tone is sustained.

General songs: refer to the role of song texts that deal with philosophical and religious themes, or with specific problems of man’s existence, in a general way. They reflect on social order in general, instead of on the actual conflicts and stresses that a given social order generates. They also refer to symbols and manifestations of nature as well as to ritual symbols (Nketia, 1974).

Hidet: “Gradually getting faster and louder. Sing each syllable distinctly. Equivalent to *accelerando*, *crescendo*, and *portamento* at the same time” (Kebede, 1995).

Historical songs: refer to the role of song texts that remind people of the past and of the values of a society. They are usually called “the songs of the elders” and in a larger view, they manifest the past as a force in the present” (Nketia, 1974).

Intensity: is determined by the amplitude, or height, of the sound wave and is perceived as loudness.

Musical tone: whether vocal or instrumental, consists of five essential properties: pitch, duration, intensity, timbre, and sonance.

Pitch: or frequency is determined by the rate of vibration of the source of the tone in the case of the voice, the vocal chords.

Register: is achieved when the vocal cords are acted upon by three forces: air flow, longitudinal tension (to produce the correct pitch), and muscular action which opens and closes the cords. During singing, voices which have not been trained to make the transition often “crack” as they change registers (Vennard, 1967).

Repetition sense: refers to, “the intensifying of one movement, one sequence, or the entire work. Intensification is not static, it goes by repetition from one level to another until ecstasy, euphoria, possession, saturation, and satisfaction have been reached” (Welsh Asante, 1985).

Ring Shout: refers to the sacred, circle dance that is typically danced in a counter-clockwise movement wherein participants shuffle their feet, sing and shout. At times the circle is halted and the participants acknowledge the present in terms of their long past—they face southward and revere the ancestors and the spirit world (Stuckey, 1988).

Sonance: refers to fluctuations in intensity, timbre, or pitch, which form a pattern.

Sprechtstimme: termed by composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), a style of vocalization, which lies between speaking and singing.

Timbre: the quality or color of the tone and is determined by the number and intensity of harmonics.

Vibrato: fluctuation in pitch, or in some cases in pitch and intensity.

Vocal Tract: includes the oral cavity (lips, teeth and tongue), the nasal cavity, the pharyngeal cavity (including the larynx, the source of the vocal tone and responsible for a phenomenon called **register**), the trachea, bronchili, lungs and diaphragm.

Vocality: special vocal effects or vocally inspired devices including guttural effects, falsetto, blue notes, Afro-melismas, lyric improvisation, and vocal rhythmization, all attributes of African vocality used to emotionalize vocal and instrumental performances in Afrodiasporic music.

APPENDIX D

SELECTED LYRICS FOR SONGS WRITTEN BY ABBEY LINCOLN,
NINA SIMONE AND CASSANDRA WILSON

A Heart Is Not A Toy (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Children need a game to play to while away the hours
Winning, losing, games of conquest, demonstrating powers
But if you play a game of love
You always have to lose
Brokenhearted lovers
The story of the blues

A heart is not a toy that's made to play with
A heart is made of skeins of purest gold
A heart is not a toy, a child's amusement
I'll need my heart to keep me from the cold

Have you ever known a lonely heart that's broken
A lonely heart with no more dreams to share
A heart that doesn't love anybody
That turned itself to stone, not to care

Broken hearts are always blamed on lovers
But it wasn't love that broke a heart in two
It was over long before it ended
With stolen dreams that never did come true

So be careful when you tell yourself a story
It's better not to tell yourself a lie
Life is full of wonder there is glory
You don't have to wait until you die
Hearts of gold were made to touch the sky
Hearts of gold were made to touch the sky

A Turtle's Dream (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Often I think when I'm all alone
 and no one can see me but me
 I think and I wonder what I am
 and how it came to be
 I can swim the ocean and it's deep and wide,
 and in the house above me abide

Maybe one day I'll fly like an eagle
 Fly like a bird and go and go
 Soar like an eagle, walk like a lion
 Although it won't be I know
 But I can swim the ocean and it's deep and wide,
 and in the house above me abide.

I guess the time has come for me to go
 And look around for something old
 Just moving in my house you know...

Moving slowly is not really bad.
 Moving slowly you see
 the wonders of the deep
 Just waiting there for me.
 And I can swim the ocean and it's deep and wide,
 and in the house above me abide.
 And in the house above me abide.

A Wedding Song/Prelude (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

A hint of faint excitement when at first I saw him there
 The nearest comprehension of a solemn, somber stare
 The pain that was apparent as the blackness of his hair
 Until a precious, devil smile that seemed to say, I dare
 The sounding of my heart was heard to carry through the air
 I held my breath a moment as I spoke a tiny prayer

The way it was to hear his lusty laughter overspill (Oh my spirit)
 A face that told of living much that made my eyes to fill
 Was veiled as though anticipating faithless fortune still
 And then he took my hand and led me to the highest hill
 Where shining stars and yellow moons did cause my heart to thrill
 And all my life with all my love his bidding I'll be willing.
 And all my life with all my love his bidding I'll be winning.

And It's Supposed to Be Love (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Body slam you to the ground
 Messaging a chill.
 Curses make the head go 'round,
 Brings a certain thrill.

Send you to another world
 Mesmerize your brain
 It's the jewel of a pearl
 Makes you go insane.

Chorus:
 And it's supposed to be love,
 Yes, it's supposed to be love,
 Say 'cause it's all 'cause of love.

It's a sad and lonely song
 Sour grapes and tears.
 Something dark is going on,
 Going on for years.

Body slam your lover down
 Up against the wall.
 It's a sad and scary scene
 With no grace at all.

Chorus.

Wonder how it came to be,
 Things with me and you,
 How we lost the way to love,
 How we got so blue.

Body slam your partner down,
 Fill 'em with regret
 Who knows what the end will be,
 It ain't over yet.

Chorus.

Angel Face (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

A smile you're always willing to show
 And eyes that tell of a message I know
 Messages of summer
 Grow in springtime wonder
 Flowers of love

And lips with gentle words that you speak
 That tell of so many thoughts that you keep
 Thoughts you have of others
 Wishes for a lover
 Music you hear

Angel Face (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI) *cont.*

Did you come from far away or near
 Did you see the milky way
 Was the traffic heavy in the stratosphere
 Are you here for just a while
 Did you come to stay

The stars of wonder shine in your eyes
 In contemplation they tell me you're wise
 A wise and angel face
 And in your sweet embrace
 The power of love
 The power of love
 The power of love

A Part of Me (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

A natural fool, another race
 Holding court right in my face
 With a spacy toothy grin
 Sayin' ain't nobody in.
 Just a pure and natural waste.
 Have you seen her any place?

This is only for your ear.
 I'm supposed to keep her here.
 Unlucky little hapless sprite
 She'd be lost out in the night
 Don't even know enough to fear
 And suddenly she'll just appear

Like a catch, a snag a hitch
 Leave you standing in a ditch
 I keep sayin' to myself, it's over, that's the end.
 But it's so long, she's like a friend
 Like an old familiar itch
 And as a fool, she's really rich.

Although I'm unaware
 Now and then I know she's there
 Living, gazing through my eyes
 The fool in me, I realize
 A part of me that helps me be
 The part of me that's really free.

Blue Monk (Abbey Lincoln/ © Moseka Music BMI)

Going alone, life is your own
 But the cost sometimes is dear
 Being complete, knowing defeat
 Keepin' on from year to year
 It takes some doing
 Monkery's the blues, you hear
 Keepin' on from year to year

Blue Monk (Abbey Lincoln/ © Moseka Music BMI) cont.

Life is a school, less you're a fool
But the learning brings you pain
Knowing at once, you're just a dunce
Trail and error, loss and gain
It takes some doing
Monkery's a slow, slow train
Trail and error, loss and gain

Finding your one place in the sun
Doesn't come the easy way
Shallow ain't deep, nothing is cheap
Measure by the dues you pay
It takes some doing
Monkery's a blue highway
Measure by the dues you pay

It takes some doing
Monkery's the blues you hear
Keepin' on from year to year
Keepin' on from year to year

Bird Alone (Abbey Lincoln/ © Moseka Music BMI)

Bird alone flying high
Flying through a clouded sky
Sending mournful, soulful sounds
Soaring over troubled grounds

Bird alone with no mate
Turning corners, tempting fate
Flying circles in the air
Are you on your way some where

Gliding soaring on the wind
You're a sight of glory
Flying way up there so high
Wonder what's your story

Bird alone flying low
Over where the grasses grow
Swinging low then out of sight
You'll be singing in the night.

Being Me (Abbey Lincoln/ © Moseka Music BMI)

All along the way there were things to do.
 Always some other someone I could be
 Other things to know
 Other ways to go
 To fly a spirit for the stage, the show.

It wasn't always easy learning to be me.
 Sometimes my head and heart would disagree.
 Times I walked away,
 Other times I'd stay
 To see the drama of my life, the play.

Being me, I dared to be myself alone.
 Sometimes I loved the things they said,
 Some things were cold as stone.
 It was lonely sometimes
 Sometimes it was blue,
 The lights were brilliant sometimes.
 Sometimes there was you.

Being me I laugh seeing now and then.
 So many things have changed and yet somehow
 There will always be a stage, a song for me
 Hold the curtain open, it's time to take a bow.

Caged Bird (Abbey Lincoln/ © Moseka Music BMI)

The birds who live in cages
 never spread their wings.
 They sit with ruffled feathers
 on the tiny swings,
 and speculate bird seed
 and while away the day,
 and tuck their heads in feathers
 of a colorful array.

The birds who live in cages
 feel the morning sun,
 Shining through the window,
 where the captor lives by gun,
 and stretches forth its body
 and warbles for the day,
 looks around from side to side,
 And listens for the way.

Chorus:
 I know why the caged bird sings
 A sweet and soulful song.
 I know why the caged bird sings
 When ev'ry thing seems wrong.
 I know why the caged bird sings
 and flaps its tethered wings.
 Birds were made to fly away,
 and birds were made to sing.

Conversation With A Baby (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

We're really very lucky that you got here.
Nowadays they slay them at the door,
Wish that you could tell us where you came from,
But no one can remember from before,
If you could talk I'll bet you'd tell me.
Yes I know you gathered in the womb,
but where do all the little babies come from?
Do they tarry over there in the tomb?

It's only holy magic that could send you,
make you with that precious little face,
Look just like your daddy, like an angel,
Living in this sad and lonely place.
I wonder if you've been to other planets;
Other worlds with other dreams to share?
Maybe in a twinkling of a moment,
Of a sudden you'll remember being there.

There's something else I'd really like to ask you,
Does the shining spirit reappear?
Does it travel further through the distance?
Is it all by chance our being there?
They say that life is fleeting and we vanish.
Living here's not all that it could be.
But is it like a circle? A dimension?
a calculation measured by degree?

You're holding heaven's secretes little darling.
Never mind I saw that precious smile.
Maybe through, perhaps one day you'll tell us
exactly where you've been all the while.
So where do all the little babies come from?
Were you really sent here on the run?
Did you ride a mighty beam of lightning?
You little rascal you, you came here
from the sun.

Devil's Got Your Tongue (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Long ago, the falling shadows send you on the run,
And you learned to hide and sneak,
Running from the sun,
Many many things have changed,
Many songs were song,
But today it's sad to say,
The devil's got your tongue,

Dancing with the devil,
Quiet as it's kept,
In a new direction, around a turn, a step,
Everything in motion, moving in a whirl,
Running, leaping, spinning in another world,

Dancing with the devil,
Following the lead,
Living for the moment, sowing devil seed,
Living for a moment, something you can feel,
Lonely little robot, learning how to steal,

Trigger Happy's got a gun,
Buster, he's a pistol,
Send your brother on the run,
Money by the bushel,
Sally Walker went to town,
Riding on a pony,
Shakes her body all around,
It's a testimony,

Tell a dirty story,
Of a lowly jerk,
Even though the joke's on us it's supposed to work,
Tell a dirty story, show it on the screen,
That's the combination for a jelly bean,

Dancing with the devil,
Drawin' from the lip,
Curses for your mama, getting' down is hip
Dancing with the devil, curses for the sun,
Got yourself a partner, devil's got your tongue

Devil's Got Your Tongue (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI) *cont.*

Devil's got your tongue oh, devil's got your tongue,
Always there's tomorrow and the seasons come,
Love is made forever, ever is the sun,
You got holy magic, but the devil's got your tongue.

Down Here Below (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Down here below
The winds of change are blowing
Through the weary night
I pray my soul will find me shining
In the morning light,
Down here below

Down here below
It's no so easy just to be.
Sometimes I'm really all at sea.

You made me when the world was new
And skies were blue,
And I am here because there's you

They say I'll never see your face
And we're all banished from your grace.
The one you fashioned with your hand
And scattered all across the land.
But I am happy just to know
That you will go where I must go,
And you will send me, this I know,
Living here, down here below

Down here below
The setting sun is shining
On a melancholy moon.
I hear the distant thunder
And the crying of the loon,
Down here below.

I'm yours alone,
The only one to call my own,
The only one I've ever known.

Down Here Below (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI) *cont.*

Sometimes I see you standing there.
 Sometimes I'm free,
 And you are here,
 Down here with me.

You made me just the way to be,
 A heart with feeling, eyes to see,
 A strong embrace, a simple hand,
 A spirit free that says I can.

And I am happy just to know
 That you will go where I must go,
 For there are wounds and scars to show,
 Living here, down here below.

Evalina Coffey/The Legend Of (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Evalina Coffey made the journey here,
 Traveled in her spaceship from some other sphere,
 Landed in St. Louis, Chicago and L.A.
 A brilliant, shining mother ship
 From six hundred trillion miles away,

Evalina Coffee lived and labored here,
 And her vessels multiplied, one for every year,
 When the number of the ships descending from the one
 Came to number eighty-four,
 She knew her work was done,

Then Evalina Coffey did a spin or two,
 While a courting nightingale sang the whole night through,
 Then just like the morning, in a blaze of light,
 She spread her wings of miracles
 And disappeared from sight,

Evalina Coffey, in your shiny ship,
 Sailing through the heavens on another trip,
 I expect to see you on another day,
 Living in another light,
 And in another way,

Evalina Coffey, in my mind I see,
 For as long as there is life you will always be,
 In my heart forever,
 Lighting up the way,
 Evalina Coffey Wooldridge Davis,
 You're the light of day.

First Came A Woman (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

First came a woman
To get the child
And carry it all the way home
Make it and carry who's ever conceived
And carry them all the way home
They say we live alone we die alone
That everyone here is born alone
But there was a woman who carried the child
And carried them all the way home

First there's a woman
All through the night
Who prays and delivers the sun
One who's made ready to enter a world
And live until everything's done
Another soul to bear a cross we share
And now and then somebody with a crown we wear
But first there's a woman
Who carries the child and carries them
All the way home

First came a woman
Who follows the man
And lives for the light in his eyes
Usually willing she dreams to fulfill
The great prophecies of the skies
And so with everything
Given to see
She wants to be what he wants to be
First there's a woman
Who follows the man
First there's a woman
Who follows a man
And follows him all the way home
First there's a woman
Who follows the man
And follows him all the way home

Hey Lordy Mama (Abbey Lincoln © Moseka Music BMI w/ Nina Simone)

Hey Lordy Mama heard you wasn't feelin' good.
 They spreadin' dirty rumors around the neighborhood.
 They say you're, you're mean and evil,
 and don't know what to do.
 And that's the reason that's he's gone,
 and left you black and blue.

Chorus:

Hey Lordy Mama (Hey Lordy Mama)
 What you gonna' do?
 What you gonna' do?

They say he left you all alone
 to weather this old storm.
 He's got another woman now
 a-hangin' on his arm.
 He's telling everybody,
 He's sick and tired of you
 Hey Lordy, lordy Mama (Lordy, lordy Mama)
 What you gonna do?

Chorus

They say you love to fuss and fight.
 And bring a good man down.
 And don't know how to treat him
 when he takes you on the town.
 They say you ain't behind him,
 and just don't understand.
 And think that you're woman acting like a man

Chorus

Well a man can hate a woman.
 A man can hate his life.
 And learn to live with sorrow,
 struggle with the strife
 A man can hate a woman,
 a woman hate a man
 And live without redemption
 Anyway they can

Well the wheels of life keep turnin',
 and they bring about a change.
 Sometimes the fruit is bitter.
 Sometimes life is strange.
 Wheels of life keep turnin'
 Beginnings bring an end
 There's always a tomorrow,
 and one day he'll need a friend.
 Chorus.

I Could Sing it for a Song (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

When the life you live is crazy
In the circus you're the clown
And the funny house of mirrors
Tears you up, brings you down
Tell it to the moon
Pray it won't be long
Nothing is forever
You can sing it for a song

I could write a song about the life I live
In a world of trouble lotta take and give
Now and then a lesson
There will be a test
Hoping when the wagon comes
I'll be at my best

I could write a song about the things I see
Wonder where it's going like a ship at sea
Rockin' and a-rollin'
And its stormy weather
I could write it for a song
We could sing it all together

I could write a song about the way I feel
Well it wasn't easy and I got a dirty deal
Broken shoes for walkin', wings that never fit
I could write it for a song
And it would be a hit
I could write it for a story and tell you what it is
I could tell it for a story
Sing a song.

I Got Thunder, And It Rings (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Some folks talk about my power.
Some folks say I'm wild and strong.
Others say my style of living makes a man go wrong.
I'm a woman hard to handle, if you need to handle things.
Better run when I start coming, I got thunder and it rings.

Chorus:

'Cause love is an emotion.
It'll move you to do things.
Do things. Do things.
Love is an emotion. It'll move you to do things.
I got thunder and it rings.

Some folks talk about the love they're feeling.
Talk about the love they need.
Others say that love is waiting.
In the meantime watch my speed.
I got love for climbing mountains, love for sailing over seas.
I got love there is no stopping, love for sending like the breeze.

Chorus.

When my life on earth is over and the struggle here is done.
I will find a new dimension in the rising sun.
In the place that is forever, I will spread my wings and fly.
If you see a streak of lightning, I'll be passing by.

Chorus.

I'm Not Supposed to Know (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

I'm not supposed to know you need me
 How much you need to show that you don't care
 I'm not supposed to know how close you follow
 Or understand the meaning of the stare
 How much you need to hold me close to kill me
 How much you need to take my breath away
 I know I'm not supposed to really love you
 But still and all I love you anyway

I'm not supposed to know the load is heavy
 That everybody does the best they can
 I'm not supposed to know there is a difference
 In being just a woman or a man
 How much it takes to really climb the mountain
 Bending low sometimes to follow through
 I'm not supposed to know you really love me
 I'm not supposed to know it but I do

I Sing A Song (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

I sing a song of winter,
 I sing a song of spring.
 I sing a song of new love,
 Songs that the seasons bring.

I awaken with a feeling,
 Sometimes weary at a glance,
 Looking at my life's condition
 In the mirror of by chance.
 Sometimes demons come to visit.
 I can see them in the trees
 Or an elephant with thunder
 Rolling gently through the breeze.

Sometimes thoughts of love come sailing
 And I see you, see your face,
 And I hear a voice that whispers,
 That calls to bring me grace.
 One that bids me sing another world
 And helps me when I dare
 To gather, in the darkness,
 Golden beads for my hair.

So the mornings bring the sunshine
 Sometimes they bring the rain,
 And when a feeling comes to me,
 I sing the song again.

Jungle Queen (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

I'm the Jungle Queen
Know what I mean

The original Jungle Girl
Whose wonderful jungle world
Is filled with everything
Don't you worry

Life has always been the same
Just like a dawning day
And the people come and go
But what it is is is is

I'm the Jungle Lady with the Jungle Rep
In the jungle there are secrets
Better watch your step
I got a house that's a round house
With a spiral stair
When you get your business done
We can visit there

I'm the Original Jungle Queen
Better grab your britches
There's a monster on the scene
Coming with the witches
Don't you dawdle, don't you dare
There's a path right over there

I'm the Jungle Queen
Know what I mean
Gotta go now
'Cause the Jungle King is waiting.

Learning How to Listen (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Life is like a song to sing
 With measured beats and phrases
 With bended notes and some repeats,
 Music through the ages.
 That brings the highs, the lows, the swells,
 Sometimes it's for an ending,
 Bringing other songs to sing
 Ascending, descending.

Chorus:

I'm Learning how to listen,
 How to hear a melody,
 How to hear the song I'm singing,
 How to feel and let it be,
 And listen for the song,
 Knowing how it goes,
 And listen for the melody that flows.

Music is a lover
 With shiny golden wings
 That whispers in the lover's ear
 And dances when it sings,
 And sends a variation
 On an everlasting theme,
 It's either love or sorrow on the scene.

I'm learning how to listen
 For the songs I name and sign,
 And claim as a possession,
 And say that they are mind.
 'Cause everybody knows
 That songs come from out of the blue,
 And I'm learning how to hear the changes too.

I'm learning how to listen,
 To the rhythm of the night.
 How to keep it simple,
 How to make it sweet and light.
 Smooth and free and easy
 Or slammin' in a jam
 And know for just a moment
 the music that I am.

I'm learning how to listen
 how to holler, sing the blues.
 I'm learning how to rise above
 and wear somebody's shoes
 Learning how to listen
 for the song was given me.
 I'm learning how to listen and be free.
 Chorus.

Look To The Star (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Although the sky is falling
 And old midnight brings a tear,
 I look beyond the shadows of my dreams.
 Ride a cloud to heaven,
 Contemplate the stars
 And listen for the melodies, the themes.

Chorus:

And know that the morning will come,
 That the rivers will run
 And we'll be here.
 Here beneath the sun

And look for a way to a star.
 Calculate that we are
 Looking behind.
 To see how far.

And follow the road,
 The curve of the bend,
 and look for the light,
 the treasure within,
 And look to the star
 that shines there above,
 Knowing for always
 There will be love.

And fly with your heart on your wings
 Angels know of such things,
 It's been said,
 And someday so will we.

Love What You Doin' (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Chorus:

Love, what you doing down there
 Love, what you doing down there
 Love, what you doing down there
 Love, what you doing down there

Did you go all the way just following the stream
 Did you run to capture something from a dream
 I'm coming for to get you
 Never mind the tears
 'Cause you've always been my darling through the years

Chorus.

There you are, in the dark,
 All by yourself alone.
 Hold on while I carry
 You and me on home.
 Being lost is scary.
 Yes I know you do,
 Just like I love you,
 You little rascal, you.

Love how'd you get way down there
 Love how'd you get way down there
 Love how'd you get way down there
 Love how'd you get way down there

Love Has Gone Away (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Love has gone away
heaving a sigh
with no regrets for yesterday
breathing a sigh,
love said goodbye

Through with sad and low
love walked away
a spirit child
love had to go
love has to play
love went away

Away from a place
all frozen in pain
with teardrops and heartache
all over again
only a game of hatred and love,
all thrown in together, a kiss or a shove

Reaching for my hand, love walked away
sighing to leave, but ready to stand,
love walked away, love walked away
love walked away and I
walked away with love.

Natas/Playmate (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Well I find me a sly little playmate,
when I was just a knee-high
who always came 'round when I needed
especially when I cried.

I found me a sly little playmate,
who grew up with me as I grew
And always came 'round when I needed,
and helped to do things I do.

Then one day I learned how to hide her.
I learned how to see and not tell.
I put her away in my bosom.
Thinking folks wouldn't like her so well.

Then I found me a wise little playmate
and she goes and she comes as she will,
and she teaches me voodoo and magic,
and she talks to me high on the hill.

Yes, I found me a wise little playmate,
and she helps me to win when I lose.
She always comes 'round when I need her,
and changes the gray skies to blue.

Not to Worry (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Not to worry, never mind.
 Life will fix it every time.
 Give a balance, fill a need.
 Bring a flower from a seed.

Hold you head up, raise your chin.
 It wasn't you invented sin.
 Shake your shoulders, do a dance.
 Never mind a sad romance

Chorus:
 A time has come, a corner turned.
 It's clearer now, the lessons learned
 And time will tell, and fires burn.

Not to worry, fill your head
 Think of other things instead.
 Not to worry, skies are blue.
 And everything imagined is you.

Chorus

Not to worry, wear a smile.
 There'll be changes after while.
 Not to worry, dreams come true.
 'Cause everything imagined is you.
 Everything imagined is you.

People On The Street (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Lovely little child growing fast and wild
 Lonely children living in despair
 Left out in the cold with the love you hold
 On a sidewalk living anywhere

Woman on the street, Lady on the move
 Ragged, tattered picture in a frame
 Holding paper bags, it's a tragic setting
 Hear the people whisper, What a shame

Mister, what's your name? Standing in the rain
 Sleeping on a bench out in the park
 Hold your body tight somewhere in the night
 Money matters moving in the dark

People on the street, taking all the hit
 Here's a little ditty of a song
 Ding, dang, dong, sing a simple song
 'Cause the people in the houses ain't got long
 (2x)

Ding, dang, dong, sing a simple song
 'Cause the people in the houses ain't got long.

Should've Been (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

There's a sound that comes from living
Somewhere in the past
When the grass was greener
And we found true love at last.

It's the sound of sorry
Looking yonder with regret.
Sorry 'cause of what you got
And what you didn't get.

Chorus:
Could've been another song.
Would've been a sing along.
Could've been, would've been, should've been.

Could've been another world
Where true thoughts of love unfurl.
Could've been, would've been, should've been.

But here we are. We are here
Here's to life, give a cheer.
Here am I.
Here are we,
Here's to you.
Here's to me.

After all is said and done,
there was laughter
We had fun.
It was life.
It was love.
Should've been.

Story of My Father (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Do we kill ourselves on purpose?
 Is destruction all our own?
 Are we dying for a reason?
 Is our leaving on our own?
 Are the people suicidal?
 Did we come this far to die?
 Of ourselves are we to perish,
 For this useless, worthless lie?

My father had a kingdom,
 My father wore a crown,
 They said he was an awful man,
 He tried to live it down,

My father built us houses,
 And he kept his folks inside,
 His images were stolen,
 And his beauty was denied.

My brothers are unhappy,
 My sisters they are too,
 My mother prays for glory,
 And my father stands accused,

My father, yes my father,
 A brave and skillful man,
 He fed and served his people,
 With the magic of his hand,

My father, yes my father,
 His soul was sorely tried,
 'Cause his images were stolen,
 And his beauty was denied

Sometimes the river's calling,
 Sometimes the shadows fall,
 That's when he's like a mountain,
 Rising master over all,

This story of my father,
 Is the one I tell and give,
 It's the power and the glory,
 Of the life I make and live,

My father has a kingdom,
 My father wears a crown
 And he lives within the people
 In the lives he handed down,

My father has a kingdom,
 My father wears a crown,
 And through the spirit of my mother, Lord,
 The crown was handed down.

Storywise (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Fairytales are told to children
tucked away to rest.
Stories for the trusting spirit
fantasized in jest.
By the time we learn to reason
life has lost its cheer.
And now and then I wonder
at the fate of being here.

There's a song, a hallelujah.
There's a dancin', movin' thing.
It begins and then it's ended.
It's a drama happening.
There's a sigh that is eternal,
and a lonely, lonely song.
And a love that is abiding.
And a torch to carry on.

In the twinkling of a moment
there are dreams that fade away
And you never know what's comin'
as you live from day to day.
There are stars that shine and sparkle.
There's a moon that pulls the sea.
There is love for ever after,
and there's love for you and me.

In the twinkling of a moment,
there will come some other times
that will set your head to spinnin'
as the story still unwinds.
There are stars that shine and sparkle.
There's a moon that pulls the sea.
There is time for ever after,
and there's love for you and me.

There is time for ever after,
and there's love for you and me.

Talking to the Sun (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

I'm a world away it seems from the one who haunts my dreams
Like the distance that the earth is to the sun
And he holds me in his love like the light that shines above
And he's everywhere, and everything to me

He makes the day begin just like the rising sun,
an elemental fellow who gets the job done.
He's supple and he's supper
Oh, and what I wouldn't do for
just a smile from the early rising sun.

He gathers pretty flowers.
And he hums sometimes he sings.
His melody is mellow,
and around the world it rings.
He is my world's delight,
and in the evening out of sight.
He is starring in the night,
the rising sun.

Hum

Sometimes I run to meet him, and I tell him of my dreams,
His gaze is steady on me, and I'm blushing from his beads,
His conversation's fine, and I love to dance and dine
With the movin', groovin' early rising sun.

He brings the many colors for the faces that I wear.
His face is like a diamond and it's shining everywhere.
He is a central figure and it makes the world grow bigger
just because he is the early rising sun.
Just because he is the early rising sun.

The Merry Dancer (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Mama told me of a beauty that is made of purest gold,
One the weather will not tarnish, one that never will grow old,
She said beauty comes from understanding,
Looking at the things we see,
Beauty of the human spirit, beauty that will set us free,

In a house with shuttered windows lives a dancer tall and fair,
Like the rainbow's many colors, crowned with scarlet purple hair,
It's been said the merry dancer had been never ever seen,
That in the house there lives a wretched soul who's old and mean,
But the merry, merry dancer always makes its presence known,
When you stand before the mirror in the secret of the throne,

There is a golden mirror,
On the temple wall,
Lighted by a candle,
Shining through the hall,
Red and purple colors flaming with desire,
Dance before the mirror reflecting holy fire,
See the spirit, merry spirit, in the mirror standing there,
When you stand before the mirror, you will see the golden stair,

Free from care and worry,
Images of grace, dance before the mirror,
Whirl in time and space,
Whirl and shine and shimmer,
Purple, green and blue, dance before the mirror, aurora borealis hue,

Dance before the mirror,
Dance the night away,
Dance before the mirror 'til the light of day,

There is an ancient mirror,
Made of purest gold,
When you stand before the mirror you will see the dance unfold,
When you stand before the mirror, see the dance, see the dance unfold.

The Music Is the Magic (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

The music is the magic of a secret world,
Secret world, secret world,
The music is the magic of a secret world,
It's a world that is always within,

The music is the magic and the hiding place,
Hiding place, hiding place,
The music is the magic and the hiding place,
It's a place where the spirit is home,

The music is the magic of a secret world,
Secret world, secret world,
The music is the magic of a secret world,
It's a world that is always within,

The music is the magic through the raging storm,
Raging storm, raging storm,
The music is the magic through the raging storm,
The storm is over again,

The music is the magic of a secret world,
Secret world, secret world,
The music is the magic of a secret world,
It's a world that is always within.

It's a world that is always within.
It's a world that is always within.

The River (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

A space traveler on a mission to scout the earth
landed where the four winds blow
And when she went to make her report
This is what she said.

There's a river on the freeway where the four winds blow
From the city to the country side, winding to and fro
in the morning and the evening, the tide begins to swell
And the river runs and races, and it's signaled by a bell...

A hollow metal vessel...and it bivrates and it rings
and the river runs and races to bring the many things
it carries on the surface of a running racing tide
there's a river on the freeway, you can take it for a ride...

All you have to do is enter from some designated lande
And you ride until your off-ramp signals that you're home again
Then the river starts receding and it murmurs now and then
in the lull before the coming of the tide that's rushing in.

There's a river on the freeway and the river has a song
and it's based upon a ditty and it's murmured by the throng
There's a river on the freeway and it's signaled by a bell
There's a river on the freeway

Sometimes the night is silent...for a moment there's no sound
Except perhaps a cricket, beepin' on the ground,
or a fumin', zoomin' motor, an engine now and then
doin' ninety miles an hour, breakin' limits getting in.

There's a river on the freeway and the river has a song
And it's based upon a ditty and it's murmured by the throng
There's a river on the freeway and it's signaled by a bell
There's a river on the freeway underneath a magic spell.

The World Is Falling Down (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

There are some folks
I used to know
Who used to smile
And say hello
And spin the world
And turn the page
Entertaining
From the stage

Father time
Forever true
Love his own
And me and you
Disappear just like the sun
When the day is done
Chorus:
The world is falling down
Hold my hand
It's a lonely sound
Hold my hand
We'll follow the breeze
And go like the wind
And look for a place
Where the willows bend
The world is falling down
Hold my hand, hold my hand
Hold my hand, hold my hand

Summer's gone
And winter's here
We had a lot of rain last year
The news is really very sad
The time is late
The fruit is bad
Mornings come
And roosters crow
And people have no place to go
And disappear
Just like the sun
When the day is done

Chorus.

They Call It Jazz (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

They call it jazz, a soulful sound
A melody the spirit found
Within the heart, the human breast
A song of love, of happiness
They call it jazz, a-razz-a-ma-tazz
They call it jazz.

They call it jazz, spirit beguiled
That rides the rails, the orphan child
That stands alone and filters down
A sound told, a feeling found
They call it jazz, a-razz-a-ma-tazz
They call it jazz.

They call it jazz and call it cool
And some folks say, the devil's tool
The music that the devil got
And call it sweet and call it hot
And call it jazz, a-razz-a-ma-tazz
They call it jazz.

Through the Years (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Through the years the sounds of love and music come
Come and go,
Some faces of some people we know

Who bring a haunting melody
and play a simple song,
who live to bring a sound a thrill
that lives and lingers on

Chorus:
The sounds that we hear
when earth and heaven are near,
a muted trumpet or a soulful saxophone,
a wail and singer's note

Throw It Away (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

I think about the life I live,
A figure made of clay,
And think about the things I lost,
The things I gave away,
And when I'm in a certain mood
I search the halls and look.
One night I found these magic words
In a magic book.

Chorus:

Throw it away. Throw it away.
Give you love, live your life,
Each and every day,
And keep you hand wide open.
Let the sun shine through,
'Cause you can never lose a thing
If it belongs to you.

There's a hand to rock the cradle
And a hand to help us stand,
With a gentle kind of motion
As it moves across the land,
And the hand's unclenched and open.
Gifts of life and love it brings,
So keep you hand wide open
If you're needing anything.

Chorus.

There's a natural obligation,
To what we own and claim,
Possessing and belonging to,
Acknowledging a name.
So keep your hand wide open,
If you're needing love today.
'Cause you can't lose it even if you
Throw it all away.

Chorus.

What Will Tomorrow Bring (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Over the years longing to see into night what is to be
Never knowing what's really ahead
A world of illusion and fires to be fed

When the mournful old winter finally turns to spring
Will there be something to guide us
What will tomorrow bring

What will become of the people here
Wounded and covered with shame
Will there be blossoms to heal us
Will they become in the rain

The tower of Babel is leaning
Everything scattered in thought
Here in a world full of trouble
The scene is very distraught

Will the sad stories be ending
Will someone come from the blue
Will they be coming to save us
Will it be me and you

There will be always tomorrow
There will be something ahead
There will be others to follow
And other fires to be fed

Will there become understanding
Will we be knowing all things
Will we be beginning to know love
What will tomorrow bring

When I'm Called Home (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

When I'm called home
I will bring a book
That tells of strange and funny turns
And of the heart it took
To keep on living in a world
That never was my own
A world of haunted memories
Of other worlds unknown.
I'll tell them of the trouble here
When they call me home.

When I'm called home
I will sing a song
And tell them of a beggar's life
Where everything goes wrong
Where everybody's hopes and dreams
Are shattered by the wind
I'll tell them of a ghostly world
Of us and they and him.
I'll tell them how the shadows fall
When they call me home.

When I'm called home
I will tell the stars
Of the battles that were lost
In a world of wars.
I will tell the rivers
Of the children lost at sea
Of how a soul is bartered
And what it costs a spirit free.
Hallelujah tell a story, oh
When they call me home.
Hallelujah tell my story
When they call me home.

Who Used to Dance (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

It was very long ago
but I remember still,
the house with many many rooms
that stood upon a hill.
The life that was surrendered
Comes to haunt us from the grave,
all in pieces, torn asunder,
like the body of the brave.

Who used to dance
with spreaded wings
and wore a bangle, an earring,
who used to dance.

Who used to dance
and do a show
and tell a story of long ago.
And sing and dance.

And run a mile
in hot pursuit
and charm a serpent with a flute,
and build some monuments of stone,
the ones no longer called our own.

Who used to dance
and now who grinds
a way of life, a road that winds
Who used to dance.

Who used to dance
and play a drum
and send a message on the one,
Who used to dance.

Who used to dance
and measure time
and look to heaven for a sign
Who used to dance.

And calculate the river's flow
and build a chariot to go;
the ones who carried staffs and rods
and wrote some stories of the Gods.

Who used to dance and call the rain,
but nowadays,
who rides the train
Who used to dance.

Wholly Earth (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Oh the holy earth's a mural,
 Seen from way up high.
 Abstracted, natural, bas relief,
 Witnessed from the sky.
 Clouds that cast a single shadow,
 drifting, moving on the ground,
 creating an illusion as the world goes round.

Places where the folks inhabit
 have a geometric grace,
 Circled, squared, sometimes triangled,
 ruled with lines and space.
 Water ways and craggy mountains
 Seemingly reveal a plan,
 Just as if somebody drew it
 With a great big giant hand.

Life's a repetition, it's an action of repeat;
 Act of doing, act of saying
 Something bitter, something sweet.
 Acts of life that keep occurring,
 Ghosts appearing through the sound,
 Waving at us from the distance

Chorus:
 'Cause the whole wide world is round
 and round and round and round
 Yes the whole wide world is round.

Generations generating bring the people here in mass.
 Living in a World where everybody's second class;
 Forming, moving in a circle,
 Ghosts appearing through the sound,
 Waving at us from the distance
 Chorus.

People live before us leave a memory behind;
 Actions done, actions written,
 Acts impressed upon our mind,
 Forming, moving in a circle,
 Ghosts appearing through the sound,
 Waving at us from the distance
 Chorus.

You Gotta Pay The Band (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Oh it really isn't easy just to let the good times roll
Everything is measured at a cost.
Everybody living pays their share of dues
And sometimes what you think
You got you lost.
So ring a ding ding
Do your thing
But remember darling

When you give a dance
You gotta pay the band
The band that played your song
The whole night through,
When you give a dance
It's better if you plan
To pay the piper
What the piper's due.

The moves were free and easy
As we danced across the floor,
The turns and the exchanges
Being what the music's for
But, when the ball is over
And the revelry is done
You gotta pay the band
That played your song.

Chorus.

The music brought the magic
And we found each other's arms,
We danced until the morning
And we knew each other's charms.
But when the party's over
And the people are all gone
You gotta pay the band
That played your song
You gotta pay the band
That played your song
Well, you gotta pay the band
That played your song.

You Made Me Funny (Abbey Lincoln/© Moseka Music BMI)

Ah you made me funny
You made me crooked
Twisted, like a pretzel,
A ziltch, a twitch,
A wink in somebody's eye.
You made me funny,
A naught, a sigh,
You made me sappy
Aw, you made me funny.
You made me wacky,
You made me nervous,
You made me swallow
And breathe...swallow
And breathe.
You made me shaky,
You made me funny,
You made me frightened
And alarmed, frightened
And alarmed.
You made me flaky
You made me shaky
You made me freaky
You made me sneaky
You made me funny.
Aw, you made me funny.
You made me shallow
And deep,
You made me waken to sleep.
You sent me, a stranger,
To go everywhere,
To labor and wander
And live with a stare.
Oh, you made me for
All ways
Design of the master,
You made me to shine
And to know the disaster,
You made me on purpose.
With that a point of view,
Ah you made me perfect.
And you made me funny too.

Blackbird (Nina Simone)

Why you wanna fly blackbird?
 You ain't ever gonna fly.
 No place big enough for holding
 All the tears you gonna cry.

'Cause your mama's name was lonely,
 and your daddy's name is pain.
 And they call you little Sorrow,
 'cause you'll never love again

So why you wanna fly blackbird?
 You ain't ever gonna fly.
 You ain't got no one to hold you.
 You ain't got no one to care.

If you'd only understand dear.
 Nobody wants you any where.
 So why you wanna fly blackbird?

Be My Husband (Nina Simone)

Be my husband, man, I be your wife
 Be my husband, man, I be your wife
 Be my husband, man, I be your wife
 Love and honor you the rest of your life (yeah)

If you promise me you'll be my man (yeah)
 If you promise me you'll be my man
 If you promise me you'll be my man
 I will love you the best I can (yeah)

Stick to the promise man you made me (papa)
 Stick to the promise man you made me (yeah, yeah, yeah)
 Stick to the promise man you made me
 That you'll stay away from Rosalee (yeah)

Oh daddy love me good
 Oh daddy now love me good (oh)
 Oh daddy love me good
 Oh daddy now love me good

If you want me to cook and sew
 If you want me to cook and sew
 If you want me to I cook and sew
 Outside of you there is no place to go

Please don't treat me so doggone mean
 Please don't treat me so doggone mean
 Please don't treat me so doggone mean
 You the meanest man I've ever seen

Oh daddy now love me good
 Oh daddy love me good (yeah)
 Oh daddy love me good (yeah)
 Oh daddy love me good

Color Is A Beautiful Thing (Nina Simone)

Color is a beautiful thing
 I know, I know
 Color is a beautiful thing
 I know, Oh yes I know
 Color is the ichi-ching
 For sure ding, ding
 Color is a beautiful thing
 I know, I know
 (2x)

Come Ye (Nina Simone)

Come ye
 Ye who would have peace
 Hear me
 What I say now
 I say come ye
 Ye who would have peace
 It's time to learn how to pray

I say come ye
 Ye who have no fear
 Tomorrow brings child
 Start praying
 For a better world
 Of peace
 And all good things

I say come ye
 Ye who still have hope
 That we can still survive now
 Let's work
 Together as we should
 And fight to stay alive

I say come ye
 Ye who would have love
 It's time
 To take a stand
 Don't mind
 The dues that must be paid
 For love of your fellow man

I say come ye
 Come ye
 Who would have hope
 Who would have peace
 Who would have love
 Who would have peace

Consummation (Nina Simone)

And now we are one
 Let my soul rest in peace
 At last it is done
 My soul has been released
 For thousands of years
 My soul has roamed the earth
 In search for you
 So that someday I could give birth

To know joy, joy, joy, joy
 Joy and peace is mine
 Peace divine
 And now we give thanks
 Give thanks for each other
 At peace forever
 For it is done

At peace forever
 For we are one

Dambala (Nina Simone)

Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala
 Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala
 Think of the wings of a three-toed frog
 eat weeds from the deepest
 part of the sea
 Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala
 Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala
 On the seventh day
 God will be there
 On the seventh night
 Satan will be there
 On the seventh day
 God will be there
 On the seventh night
 Satan will be there

You slavers will know
 What it's like to be a slave
 Slave to your mind
 A slave to your race
 You won't go to heaven
 You won't go to hell
 You'll remain in your graves
 With the stench and the smell
 Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala
 Oh Dambala
 Come Dambala

Do I Move You? (Nina Simone)

Do I move you, are you willin'
 Do I groove you, is it thrillin'
 Do I soothe you, tell the truth now
 Do I move you, are you loose now
 The answer better be (Yes, yes)
 That pleases me

Are you ready for this action
 Does it give you satisfaction
 Are you hip to what I'm sayin'
 If you are then let's start swayin'
 The answer better be (Yes, yes)
 That pleases me

When I touch you do you quiver
 Form your head down to your liver
 It you like it let me know it
 Don't be psychic or you'll blow it
 The answer better be (Yes, yes)
 That pleases me

Fodder In Her Wings (Nina Simone)

A bird fell to earth reincarnated from her birth
 She had fodder in her brain
 She had dust inside her wings

She flitted here and there
 United States, France, England, everywhere
 With fodder in her wings
 And dust inside her brain

Oh how sad
 Oh how sad
 Oh how sad

She watched the people, how they lived
 They had forgotten how to give
 They had fodder in their brains
 Dust inside their wings

She watched the people, how they live
 They had forgotten how to give
 They had fodder in their wings
 Dust inside their brains

They'll pay (ee)
 They'll pay (ee)
 They'll pay (ee)

Four Women (Nina Simone)

My skin is black, my arms are long
 My hair is woolly, my back is strong
 Strong enough to take the pain
 Inflicted again and again.
 What do they call me?
 My name is Aunt Sarah
 My name is Aunt Sarah, Aunt Sarah.

My skin is yellow my hair is long
 Between two worlds, I do belong

My father was rich and white
 He forced my mother late one night
 What do they call me?
 My name is Safronia.

Oh Daughter, dear Daughter,
 Take warning from me
 And don't you go marching
 With the N-A-A-C-P.

Go Limp (Nina Simone, with Alex Comfort)

For they'll rock you and roll you
 And shove you into bed.
 And if they steal your nuclear secret
 You'll wish you were dead.

[Chorus]

Singin' too roo la, too roo la, too roo li ay.
 Singin' too roo la, too roo la, too roo li ay.

Oh Mother, dear Mother,
 No, I'm not afraid.
 For I'll go on that march
 And I'll return a virgin maid.

With a brick in my handbag
 And a smile on my face
 And barbed wire in my underwear
 To shed off disgrace.

My skin is tan, my hair is fine
 My hips invite you, my mouth like wine
 Whose little girl am I?
 Anyone who has money to buy
 What do they call me?
 My name is Sweet Thing
 My name is Sweet Thing.

My skin is brown, and my manner is tough
 I'll kill the first mother I see, my life has been
 rough
 I'm awfully bitter these days
 Because my parents were slaves.
 What do they call me?
 My name is Peaches!

Go Limp (Nina Simone, with Alex Comfort), *cont.*

[Chorus]

One day they were marching.
A young man came by
With a beard on his cheek
And a gleam in his eye.

And before she had time
To remember her brick...
They were holding a sit-down
On a nearby hay rig.

[Chorus]

For meeting is pleasure
And parting is pain.
And if I have a great concert
Maybe I won't have to sing those folk songs again.

Oh Mother, dear Mother
I'm stiff and I'm sore
From sleeping three nights
On a hard classroom floor.

[Chorus]

One day at the briefing
She'd heard a man say,
"Go perfectly limp,
And be carried away."

So when this young man suggested
It was time she was kissed,
She remembered her brief
And did not resist.

[Chorus]

Oh Mother, dear Mother,
No need for distress,
For the young man has left me
His name and address.

And if we win
Tho' a baby there be,
He won't have to march
Like his da-da and me.

If You Knew (Nina Simone)

If you knew how I missed you
You would not stay away today
Don't you know I need you
Stay here my dear with me

I need you here my darling
Together for a day a day
Together never parting
Just you just me my love

I can't go on without you
Your love is all I'm living for
I love all things about you
Your heart your soul my love

I need you here beside me
Forever and a day a day
I know whatever betides me
I love you I love you I do

I Sing Just to Know That I'm Alive (Nina Simone)

I sing just to know that I'm alive
I play just to feel that I'll survive
And this birth that's taken place
Well, holiness is just the case!
I sing just to know that I'm alive

Well the mountains they won't move no they don't
And the people they can't dance and they won't
Je chanterai et je swing
I sing and I swing
I sing just to know that I'm alive.

Liberian Calypso (Nina Simone)

1974 that was the year I went straight home
'Cause I had so much to fear
I had dreamed for oh so long
That one day I'd be going home

There's so much gossip in the town
Nobody knows what's really going down
Stench, smelled, I couldn't stand it
The dirtier you are the more you're a hit

When I first got to Africa I was glad
I thought at first I wouldn't be had
So I went to a disco tech one night
And danced myself quite out of sight

What I mean is this, I went with a friend
And sat through the night, right to the end
The music was American and oh so good
So I jumped up just where I could

The party started moving all around
I was happy to be in town
And as I slowly began to strip
Everyone thought I was so hip

I danced all over the place you know
All over the ceiling, all over the floor
Up in the balcony, all around
I felt so good just being in town

My joy was so complete, you know
My friend was happy. He said, Go, go.
I danced for hours, hours on end
I said, Dear Lord, you are my friend
You brought me home to Liberia.

Marry Me (Nina Simone)

You should marry me
 I know you don't agree
 There's no two ways about it
 I should marry you
 But I haven't a clue
 Of just what to do about it

I know I'm tired of sleeping all alone
 Oh you and I should really make a home
 Or two, or three, or four, or more

You should marry me
 I know you don't agree
 There's no two ways about it
 I should marry you
 But I haven't a clue
 Of just what to do about it

It's not for old folks like I used to say
 Oh baby, baby, don't leave me this way
 Marry me
 Marry me
 Marry me
 (2x)

Mississippi Goddam (Nina Simone)

(The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam, and I mean every word of it.)

Alabama's got me so upset
 Tennessee made me lose my rest
 And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam (repeat)

Can't you see it? Can't you feel it?
 It's all in the air
 I can't stand the pressure much longer
 Somebody say a prayer.

Alabama's got me so upset
 Tennessee made me lose my rest
 And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam.

Mississippi Goddam (Nina Simone) *Cont.*

(This is a show tune but the show hasn't been written for it yet.)

Hound dogs on my trail
 School children sitting in jail
 Black cat cross my path
 I think every day's gonna be my last.

Lord have mercy on this land of mine
 We all gonna get it in due time
 I don't belong here, I don't belong there
 I've even stopped believing in prayer.

Don't tell me, I'll tell you
 Me and my people just about due
 I've been there, so I know
 They keep on saying "Go slow!"

But that's just the trouble (too slow)
 Washing the windows (too slow)
 Picking the cotton (too slow)
 You just plain rotten (too slow)
 You're too damn lazy (too slow)
 You're thinking's crazy (too slow)
 Where am I going, what I am doing?
 I don't know, I don't know.

Just try to do your very best
 Stand up, be counted with all the rest
 Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam.

(I bet you thought I was kidding, didn't you?)

Picket lines, school boycotts
 They try to say it's a communist plot
 All I want is equality
 For my sister, my brother, my people, and me.

Yes, you lied to me all these years
 You told me to wash and clean my ears
 And talk real fine just like a lady
 And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie.

Mississippi Goddam (Nina Simone) *Cont.*

Oh, but this whole country is full of lies
 You all gonna die and die like flies
 I don't trust you anymore
 You keep on saying, "Go slow. Go slow."

But that's just the trouble (too slow)
 Desegregation (too slow)
 Mass participation (too slow)
 Reunification (too slow)
 Do things gradually (too slow)
 Bring more tragedy (too slow)
 Why don't you see it, why don't you feel it?
 I don't know, I don't know.

You don't have to live next to me
 Just give me my equality
 Everybody knows about Mississippi
 Everybody knows about Alabama
 Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam. That's it!

Obeah Woman (Nina Simone)

Gotta take my time getting this one together
 Gotta take my time getting this one together
 Gotta go home now
 Gotta go home (yeah)

Obeah woman
 Yes I'm the obeah woman
 Do you know what one is?
 Do you know what an Obeah woman is?

I'm the obeah woman from beneath the sea
 To get to satan you gotta pass through me
 'Cause I know the angels name by name
 I can eat thunder and drink the rain
 (Been through enough)

They call me Nina
 And pisces too
 There ain't nothing I can't do
 If I choose to, if you let me

Obeah Woman (Nina Simone), *cont.*

I'm the obeah woman of pain
I can eat thunder and drink the rain
I kiss the moon and hold the sun
And call the spirits and make 'em run

You hear me?
You hear me?
'Cause I ain't playing?
Never.
Just waiting for my time.
Just waiting for my time.
Have to learn patience
Have to learn patience (oh yeah)
Obeah
Obeah
Obeah now

I'm the Obeah from beneath the sea
To get to satan baby gotta pass through me
I know the angels name by name
I can eat thunder and drink the rain
(How you think I lasted this long?)

I kiss the moon and hold the sun
Oh yeah
Obeah
Obeah
Obeah woman

You people from the islands, you know
About the Obeah woman
I didn't put that name on myself
And I don't like it sometimes
The weight is too heavy.
Let's finish.

Old Jim Crow (Nina Simone)

Old Jim Crow
Where you been, baby?
Down the Mississippi and back again
Old Jim Crow, don't you know
It's all over now.

Old Jim Crow
What's wrong with you?
It ain't your name
It's the things you do
Old Jim Crow, don't you know
It's all over now.

Old Jim Crow
You know it's true
When you hurt my brother
You hurt me too
Old Jim Crow, don't you know
It's all over now.

Old Jim Crow
I thought I had you beat
Now I see you walking and talking up and down my street
Old Jim Crow, don't you know
It's all over now.

Old Jim Crow
You've been around too long
Gotta work together
'Til you're dead and gone
Old Jim Crow, don't you know
It's all over, all over
Oh Lord, it's all over, all over
It's all over, it's all over
It's all over now.

Real Real (Nina Simone)

I say real real
Our love is real to me
It thrills me
With perfect liberty
When you tell me you love me
And you hold me and kiss me
Then I know it's real real
It's so real to me

I say real real
Our love is real to me
Please thrills me
With your kisses sweet
Tell your papa and your mama
One day soon we're gonna
Have a great weddin' day
It's so real to me

I say real real
Our love is real to me
It gives me perfect liberty
When you tell me you love me
And you hold me and kiss me
Then I know it's real
It's so real to me

I say real now, real
It's so real to me
Please thrill me
With your kisses sweet
Tell your papa and your mama
One day soon we're gonna
Have a great weddin' day
It's so real so me
So real so real
It's so real to me

Revolution (Nina Simone)

Now we got a revolution
Cause I see the face of things to come
Yeah, your Constitution
Well, my friend, its gonna have to bend
I'm here to tell you about destruction
Of all the evil that will have to end.

(It will, oh yes it will)
(And it will end) All right...
(It will end) All right
Well all right

Some folks are gonna get the notion
I know they'll say I'm preaching hate
If I have to swim the ocean
well I would just to communicate
It's not as simple as talkin' jive
the daily struggle just to stay alive

Singin' 'bout a revolution
because were talkin' about a change
its more than just air pollution
well you know you got to clean your brain
the only way that we can stand in fact
is when you get your foot off our back

See Line Woman (Nina Simone)

See line woman (see line)
She drink coffee (see line)
She drink tea (see line)
Then she go home (see line)
See line woman

See line woman (see line)
dressed in red (see line)
Wear a rag (see line)
On her head (see line)

See line woman (see line)
Dressed in green (see line)
Wear silk stockings (see line)
with golden seams (see line)
See line woman (see line)
See line

See line woman (see line)
dressed in red (see line)
Wear a rag (see line)
On her head (see line)

Wiggle, wiggle (see line)
Purr like a cat (see line)
Wink at a man (see line)
He wink back (see line)
Empty his pockets (see line)
Wreck his days (see line)
Make him love her (see line)
She'll fly away (see line)

See line woman (see line)
See line woman (see line)
Dressed in blue (see line)
Watch out fellas (see line)
She gonna get you (see line)

See line woman (see line)
Dressed in yellow (see line)
Watch out girls (see line)
She'll get your fellow (see line)

See Line Woman (Nina Simone) cont.

See line woman (see line)

See line woman

Dressed in white (see line)

Sleep all day (see line)

Ball all night (see line)

See line woman (see line)

See line woman (see line)

Dressed in green (see line)

Wear silk stockings (see line)

with golden seams (see line)

Empty his pockets (see line)

Wreck his days (see line)

Make him love her (see line)

She'll fly away (see line)

See line woman

dressed in red (see line)

Wear a rag (see line)

On her head (see line)

Empty his pockets (see line)

Wreck his days (see line)

Make him love her (see line)

She'll fly away (see line)

See line woman (see line)

Dressed in green (see line)

Wear silk stockings (see line)

with golden seams (see line)

See line woman (see line)

Dressed in black (see line)

Sleep all day (see line)

On her back (see line)

To Be Young, Gifted & Black (Nina Simone, w/Weldon Irvine)

To be young, gifted and black,
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black,
Open your heart to what I mean

In the whole world you know
There's a billion boys and girls
Who are young, gifted and black,
And that's a fact!

You are young, gifted and black
We must begin to tell our young
There's a world waiting for you
Yours is the quest that's just begun

When you feel really low
Yeah, there's a great truth you should know
When you're young, gifted and black
Your soul's intact

Young, gifted and black
How I long to know the truth
There are times when I look back
And I am haunted by my youth

Oh but my joy of today
Is that we can all be proud to say
To be young, gifted and black
Is where it's at
Is where it's at
Is where it's at

You Took My Teeth (Nina Simone)

You took my teeth
You took my brains
You try to drive me so insane
And now you're trying to take my eyes
But it is finished
Because I'm too wise

That is why Bob Marley died
That is why Bob Marley died
That is why Bob Marley died
You took his eyes
Boo boo boo boom
Boom

A Little Warm Death (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

A little warm death, a little warm death won't hurt you none
Come on relax with me
Let me take away your physicality
One little warm death come have
one little warm death with me tonight

A little sweet death,
Moon and tarry, breathlessness
Feels like eternity
There's nobody here just you and me
One little warm death come have
One little sweet death with me tonight

In and out of stages
Like the phases of the moon
We can shine so brightly
Let the fullness soon come, soon come, soon
But now I feel you near me
See you much more clearly
I can hardly wait to feel you
Moving through my world yeah my world
Is empty without you

**A Little Warm Death (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music
SESAC) Cont.**

One little warm death come have it
One little warm death come have it
One little warm death come have
One little sweet death with me tonight (hey)

In and out of stages
Like the phases of the moon
We can shine so brightly
Let the fullness soon come, soon come, soon
Now I feel you near me
See you much more clearly
And can hardly wait to feel you
Moving through my world yeah my world
Is empty without you
One little warm death come on
Just one little death
One little warm death come have
One little warm death with me tonight

Die in my arms tonight
Die in my arms tonight
Don't, um don't, don't be afraid, don't be afraid
Don't! Don't be afraid
I'll never hurt you
I wanna love you
(hum) One little warm death, oh one
One little warm death, oh one (uh)
One little warm death come have
One little warm death with me tonight (oh)

One little warm death come have
One little warm death with me tonight (hey)
One little warm death come have
One little warm death with me tonight
Hey hey hey ya hey hey ya
Hey hey hey ya hey hey ya (x3)

Blue Light 'Til Dawn (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

The music slows and everybody starts the game,
Honey, what's your name?
And even though he doesn't know
I like his style
Wanna dance with him a while

'Cause I been giving him eyes all night long
Wanna whisper this song in his ear
What do I say while he's walking my way

Let's get together for a midnight thrill, honey
And everybody's in the house
Nothing can stop us from feeling good tonight
under a blue light til dawn

Above the noise I hear his laughter
Sweet refrain, melody unchained
I have no choice
I can't avoid this destiny
Save your sweetest dance for me

Blue Light 'Til Dawn (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC) *cont.*

'Cause I been giving him eyes all night long
Wanna whisper this song in his ear
What do I say while he's making me sway

Let's get together for a midnight thrill, honey
And everybody's in the house
Nothing can stop us from feeling good tonight
We've got a blue light til dawn

Swinging, loving you until dawn
Under a blue light til dawn
Blue light til dawn
Wrapped up in your arms
Blue light til dawn

Broken Drum (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Nobody knows where the shadows go
into the night
Soft as a whisper
I think they climb to the sky
And when the evening comes,
and the moon is on the wane
They laugh at the people who believe
that the moon will never rise again

Chorus:

Shadow people know that the darkest hour is yet to come
You can hear them singing and saying
that even a broken drum can save the moon
Even a broken drum can save the moon

La la la di di la da di di dum dum

Come if you will to the water's edge
and drink the stars
falling from heaven
to the drummer's call
When your belly's full of the shimmering stream
that feeds the land
We'll dance to the rhythm of the drummer
till the moon rises again

Chorus

Climb That Road (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Seven steps to heaven lord
help me climb that road
steady but uneven lord
help me climb that road

We're so unbelievably strong yet so ill at ease
we ascend as we please
we'll be standing at those gates
seven steps create

Dancing in Dream Time (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Dancing in Dream Time
We live forever
one mind one soul
from the beginning

Constantly flowing
into creation
suns grow
moons die
world without ending

All of god's creatures
alive with the spirit of the sun
Cycles and seasons abide
by the spirit of the sun
All of god's creatures
alive with spirit of the sun
cycles and seasons abide
by the spirit of the sun

Domination Switch (Cassandra Wilson © Ardnassac Publishing Co.)

I don't want your institutions
they won't give me a solution
to the many problems of the poor and homeless
dying babies, people acting crazy

You build your world nine miles high
think you gonna touch the sky
you might think you see the face of God in all its glory
but the story is not ended

Kind and gently, what is that?
while some are starving you get fat
you might think "a thousand points of light" will save this
situation, no
Domination Switch is on.

You build your world nine miles high
think you gonna touch the sky
you might see the face of God in all it's clouds of glory
but the story is not ended

Domination Switch
Domination Switch
Domination Switch
Domination Switch

Drunk As Cooter Brown (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

He was drunk as Cooter Brown
Words fell from his tongue
With a slurring silver sound
He'd come this way from the other side of town
He was drunk as Cooter Brown
And his coat hung 'round his shoulders
With a gangsta's tote
A stylish man no woman leave alone

He blamed the warmth of the evening
I blamed the circle 'round the moon
We spoke as if in solitude
While the world was spinning around us
And people started to stare
But I just didn't care
I just couldn't move
I was flirting on air
I knew we two were drunk as Cooter Brown

He blamed the warmth of the evening
I blamed the circle 'round the moon
We spoke as if in solitude
While the world was spinning around us
I just didn't care
I couldn't move
We were floating on air (yes)
I knew I too was drunk as Cooter Brown

I was just one step away
From that drop to the floor sound
A lady's grace, I claimed to hold my ground
But I was drunk as Cooter Brown
While he poured the cup of his hand
'round my elbow just to be sure
I wouldn't fall for a man I can't enjoy

Chorus

Electromagnolia (Cassandra Wilson w/Olu Dara © Ardnassac Pub. Co.)

I fell in love with you 'neath the old magnolia tree
When a firefly flew past your eyes I, I said,
I'm gonna catch it, put it in a jar
My love for you has gone that far
I'm gonna have your soul
I'm gonna take control

Electromagnolia
Come on with me now
No, no sweet lady
Hmmm...got an apple pie, cook it now
No, I gotta go to New York City
Will you go away?—Throw my love away?
I'll be back
Hmmm...no don't leave me standing here
Baby I gotta go
Hmmm...but I gotta have your soul
You got me moving too slow

Electromagnolia
Don't go away from me
You need my sweet inspiration
If you go away, my love, today
Yes, I will, I'm gonna get you anyway I can
I'm gonna have that man
I'm gonna have your soul
I'm gonna have control

Find Him (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Jewel told me, Go get Joe
Where is he?
Dying slow
But I bet I can find him
Through the clouds that fill his mind
I can find him
In the darkest part of the night
Oh enslavement, damnation, destruction,
dysfunction, decimation,
I can find him.

I told Jewel, girl, settle down
When it's clear, Joe comes back 'round
And he will find us
When morning prays for love
He will find us
When the moon drinks up the night
In music, in madness, salvation,
passion, sweet celebration
When he finds us.

Loving was so easy when instinctively we knew
Now everything has changed
Stumbling through the pain of
something powerful and new
without a clue

Joe told me, Prepare a space
full of love and God's sweet grace
And he will find me
when the devil's days unwind
He will find me
even broken down and blind

The choices are simple
Living them ain't easy
The fearful will tremble
Just keep on believing

He will find him
He will find him
You will find him
Find him.

Go To Mexico (Cassandra Wilson © Electromagnolia Productions Inc. /SESAC)

Yellow sun in the distance
Turnin' me a pretty golden brown.
Smoke and run is my mission
Happiness is all I need right now.

There's gonna come a time
There's gonna come a time when
I can go to Mexico (uh uh um uh)

I believe in the here and now
I believe in the here and now
Tomorrow's pain will melt away.

Itchy hands on the trigger
Saw the latest story on TV
Bluebird flow past my window
This helicopter's too damn close to me.

And there's (there's)
There's gonna come a time
There will come a time, we'll be just like Mexico (uh uh um uh)

When I go there
When I go there, I'll be wearin' purple ribbons when I go there
When I go there, I'll be dancin' in the street when I go there
When I go, when I go, when I go, when I go
Cuando voy buscaré un pistolero
Buscaré un pistolero, un hombre grande
Come on ya'll let's go... We can go to Mexico

Heaven Knows (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

I know how to climb the mountain range,
the rough terrain inside of you.
Complicated paths that twist and wind,
I know I'll find my way in you.
Even when you groan and frown,
I hear the sound of pure delight in you
Let me be the one who feeds your soul.
Let me be your heaven knows.

I know how to sing the song of trees,
and city streets that flow through you
Cold and discontent, I smell the scent
of everlasting spring in you.
Even when you turn away,
I know the play is just beginning.
I could be the one who feeds your soul,
I could be your heaven knows.

If at first we don't know where we're going
when the journey starts our way is glowing
by the light of the moon that shines within.

I know how dance in secret rooms
while cameras zoom right in on you.
Frame by frame defusing space and time,
I'll be the rhyme that centers you.
When the world is far away,
and no one sees the pain you're going through
let me be the one who soothes your.
I could be your heaven knows.

I Am Waiting (Cassandra Wilson © Ardnassac Pub. Co.)

Why play the fool forever
Dancing in the distance
So fiendishly clever
A carnival creature gone mad

Chorus:

Heart of my hearts I am waiting
Walk me to the light
Darker days are passing now

There is a dream that binds us
Hidden in our hearts
There's a thing to remind us
In spite of our demons we will fly

Love of my loves I am waiting
Open up your eyes
Look we're so much closer now

Why play the fool forever
Dancing in the distance
So fiendishly clever
We're carnival creatures gone mad

Chorus

Jump World (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

we come from a place on the planet
where crystal create subatomic sound
the mother lode is raw with the rhythm, rhythm
quantum music goes up and down on
jump world, jump world

psychomusicians gather together
to sing their songs on the square
why don't you come to jump world?
you can beam here from anywhere

why don't you jump to jump world?
phase jump into an other reality
phase jump into an other reality
phase jump into an other reality
phase jump into an other reality
phase jump into an other reality

let's go, we don't have much time
but I'ma take you in this rhyme
to a place where you can live in bliss
with a groove that moves like this
cause it's time we had our own
king with a kingdom and his throne
now jump world is that place I'm talking about

yo wes, we gotta check it out
we been dreaming for far too long
and someone else has been singing our song
that ain't right, it's got to be wrong
and that ain't where we belong

so our leader led us into a better place
so we could get away from the face of danger
and now we're free we can be what we want to be
since we jumped into reality
jump world has set us free
this joint is jumping, the bass is thumping

**Jump World (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC),
*Cont.***

jump into jump world, jump jump into jump world

we come from a place on the planet
where crystal create subatomic sound
the mother load is raw with the rhythm, rhythm
quantum music goes up and down on
jump world, jump world

move your funky feet to the funky beat
the rhythm ain't hard to keep
if you got soul let it take control
and jump world as good as gold
a little rhythm a little rhyme
will take you there each and every time
what's mine is yours and what's your is mine
cause we live in harmony
and we all are family
if you want to be free
you better come on and jump with me
into jump world

**Just Another Parade (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music
SESAC)**

Yesterday's news is tomorrow's blues
But today I'm alive
Today I did much more than survive

I learned to live by the love I give
It's the only thing I own
Shadowed valleys that I've known
helped me build my home

So tell me why
Why should I be afraid (Why should you be afraid)
We've seen brighter,
We've seen darker days
Tell me why (Tell me why)
Why should I be afraid (Why should you be so afraid)
Sitting here watching
It's just another parade
Just another parade

Summer will end then the death begins
Grandma's hands are moving slow
She takes the time to let me know
Winter's winds will blow (will blow)

She said, Look at your son
He's a golden one
Makes you turn your pages slow
Is life more precious than we know
Every day unfolds (every day)

So tell me why
Why should I be afraid (Why should you be so afraid)
I've seen brighter,
I've seen darker days
Tell me why (Tell me why)
Why should I be afraid? (Why should I be afraid? Why should you be afraid?)
Sitting here watching
It's just another parade
Just another parade
Just another parade

Justice (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Give me a bottle of justice
I'll take that bottle of justice
I hear it sets you free
You can be just who you want to be
Who you want to be
I think I'll have some of that
Now wrap it up real nice for me, please

Pass me a slice of opportunity
I'll have that slice of opportunity
I hear it fills you up
Makes you shine just like summer buttercups
Summer buttercups
I think I'll have some of that
Wrap it up real nice for me, please

I could act as if I just don't care
But some of that could take me anywhere
In a universe that's still unknown, I'd be home
Some of that is all I'm asking for
Some of that and nothing less, nothing more
Some of that is all a body needs
To be free, to be free

Give me a box of reparation
I'll take that box of reparation
No not the little one
I want the big one that matches my scars
It's such a pretty thing
Something I've needed since I came here from afar
So very far
I think I'll have some of that (yeah)
Wrap it up real nice for me, please

Some of that
You know I need it
Gotta have it
You know I want it
Gotta have it
Gotta, gotta have it
You know I need it
I want it
Some of that

Memphis (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

I was locked inside a prison of my own design
Every wall was painted gray
Then the walls dissolved,
the sky collapsed
I heard him whispering my name

With a voice so warm and tender
He reached out and helped me to remember
With a sweet complexion of a pharaoh
Dark as a delta night

I said, won't you, won't you carry me back to Memphis
We can dance along the Nile
Dance along the Nile.

Dance with me along the Nile
Water wash over me
Dance with me along the Nile
Water wash over me
Water wash over me

Now history had been arranged
To hide us from our secret names
But God knows who we are
And I'm content to watch him
slowly come to meet me
Moon river to my heart

Moving slowly, pour into my veins
Bring me water
And wash away my pain

With a sweet complexion of a pharaoh
Dark as a delta night
I wanna, I wanna go back to Memphis
And we will dance along the Nile
Go dance along the Nile

I wanna go, I wanna go, I wanna go
And we can dance, dance
(oh will you remember me?)
Water wash over, wash over me yes

New African Blues (Cassandra Wilson © Ardnassac Pub. Co.)

It's time for everyone to move up
 Moving to the other side of town
 Come on everybody move up
 Move up to the other side of town
 Pack your razors and your guns
 Come on move up
 You gotta move on up
 Move up to the other side of town
 You gotta pack your razors and your guns
 Somebody's calling before the night is done. (2x)

Never Broken (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Over tones over waves of laughter
 under hues, deepest blues hereafter
 We touch souls and the moment glows
 Here and now, we are far more than our senses

Every year brings us near to heaven
 Every breath drawn in pain and pleasure
 We embrace through the nights and days
 Here and now our love
 circle is never broken.

Out Loud/Jeris' Blues (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Mama used to sing in church out loud
 She would hold her head straight and proud
 Amazing grace, lean on the everlasting arm,
 Safe in the hands of God and free from harm

Spirits weave around my head
 They can make the sound
 loud enough to raise the dead
 Wake the dead
 Wake the dead
 Wake the dead
 Oh, wake the dead

Out Loud/Jeris's Blues, cont.

Mama used to sing in church out loud
 She could sing a song
 and wake the dead
 She could sing a song
 to wake the dead
 Out loud
 Out loud
 Out loud

Mama used to sing in church out loud
 She would hold her head up straight and proud
 Mama used to sing in church out loud
 She would hold her head up straight and proud

Piper (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

With soulful wit and gestures sleek
 He completes every waking wish
 From deepest sleep we travel home
 On his tone with our hopes adrift

Piper play me a song
 Piper play me a song
 Piper play me a song
 To last all day long

The marketplace is filled with schemes
 and it seems they will never end
 I've been here since light of day
 seen each play, now's my time to win

Chorus.

We're floating on your sweetest melody
 And traveling through life's greatest mystery

See how the night is on the run
 from a sun that our hearts reclaim
 between the silence and the sound
 we are bound by the same refrain

Chorus.

Redbone (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Oh, I heard the women at the church say just the other day
You know she live too hard
Um yes, I heard the women at the church say just the other day
You know that girl live too hard

They say redbone girl's got a problem
She stayed up all night
She drank whiskey
She got in a fight
Redbone.
Redbone girl's got a problem
She stayed up all night
She drank whiskey
She got in a fight
Redbone.

Well now, redbone girl's got a problem
Never work too hard
She got lazy dancing in the dark
Redbone girl's got a problem
She never work too hard
She got lazy dancing in the dark
Redbone.
Redbone.

Um now, Redbone girl's got a problem
She cut men folk
With a razor
She don't play (no, no)
Redbone girl's got a problem
She cut men folk
With a razor
She don't play (oh no)

Hey now, redbone girl's going to heaven
She loves her God
She prays every night
'Cause she live real hard now
Redbone girl's going to heaven
She loves her God
She prays every night
'Cause she live real hard

Redbone.
I say, redbone.

Resurrection Blues/Tutu (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

The cool clear night
stillness before the light
The blues move through
resurrecting the old to new
The songs slept inside us
until we called them out!

A baby cries
And a soldier prepares to die
The world spins by
as the stars cross the evening sky
and spirits move mountains
when you call them out.

Rock This Calling (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

this world may be so unkind
blindness abounds, deaf to the sounds
sweeter than angels' voices
calling from beyond the water

black child break wild
move this world, no need to fear
all the tears and the pain
will dissipate like clouds in summer
after rain that rings with thunder

spirits move through you
day by day, day by day
now is the time for redesigning a mind
you will need to rock this calling
and send the mighty swiftly falling
swiftly falling, falling

Run The VooDoo Down (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

I got high john in my pocket
and mud on my shoes
walked all the way from Mississippi
just to spread the news
don't care for idle conversation
I'm not your girl about town
but when it comes to making music
I run the voodoo down

And here in this quiet place I own
worlds are born

The night of my conception
the stars were fixed
conjure woman told my mother
she's gonna turn and twist
don't have to worry 'bout her learning
she's gonna get around
and when it comes to traveling
she'll run the voodoo down

Destiny is my deliverance
I walk this road alone
I take my pleasure in remembering
I'm just a rolling stone
and I don't mind some company
if you want to stay around
but when it comes to my loving
I run the voodoo down

And here in this quiet place I own
worlds are born.

Sankofa (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Oh sankofa high in the heavens you soar
My soul is soon to follow you
Back to yesterday's moon
Will it remember me?
Back to yesterday's sun
It will rekindle me
Rekindle the spirit
Into tomorrow and high on the wind
Sankofa flies again and again
(3x)
hum

Sleight of Time (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

He holds the mirror to my soul
A beautiful mystery
He is too young
I am too old
Yet we fit perfectly

How could you feel
Emotions I could never reveal
Sleight of hand or of sleight of time
Tell me why can't he be mine

Am I a pawn in someone's game
And some grand illusion
Sent here to taunt him without shame
Causing confusion

How could he know I had nothing;
no where else to go
Sleight of hand or Sleight of time
Tell me why can't he be mine

I cried a river of regret
Indulged in misery
Why long for something I can't get
When I get it eventually

How could he see
That our love was always meant to be
Sleight of hand or
Sleight of hand or
Tell me why can't he be mine
Why can't he be mine
Why can't he be mine

Solomon Sang (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

He had silver and gold
Riches untold
And the beast of the field lay at his feet

Everybody bowed
He wondered why or how
It all came to be

No one understood his sorrow
No one saw his pain
He way praying for grace
Ravens pray for rain

And when he stood before the altar
Solomon sang
Solomon sang

Wisdom was his calling
Pride sent him falling
Love was blissful misery

When the days grew dim
Life begin again
In the questions of the Queen

Did she understand his sorrow
Did she see his pain
Vanity and precious stones
Weigh you down the same

But when he laid down with Mekeda
Solomon sang
Solomon sang

Love for woman
Love for God
Not so simple
Not too hard
For the spirit
Pleasure is sweet
And surrender set him free

**Solomon Sang (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC),
*cont.***

Set him free

When our time is ended
How will we have spent it
Did we see the beauty in each day

Was it God's devotion
Behind each emotion
Or did it all just slip away

Can you understand his sorrow
Can you see his pain
Nothing lives forever
But the love that bears your name

And when he stood up in the temple
Solomon sang

Solomon sang
Solomon sang
Solomon sang

Subatomic Blues (Cassandra Wilson © Ardnassac Pub. Co.)

We are merely actors in a play
That unfolds each day
Changes the way we live
Everything's in motion

We are shadows dancing on the walls
That adorn the halls
Of my father's house
House of many mansions

You may try to control the flow of life
But it's only allusion
Patterns in your eyes

We are like the islands in a stream
So alone it seems
Till the day we die
Rolling on forever

You may try to control the flow of life
But it's only allusion
Patterns in your eyes
In your eyes

We are like the islands in a stream
So alone it seems
Till the day we die
Rolling on forever

Tarot (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

I went to the tarot woman yesterday
She looked at my card and told me what they say
In your future I see fortune and dreams fulfilled
You are such a restless soul and you always will

(fold on hearts)
Um, there's no way to deny it
I can see in your eyes the loneliness
(raise on kings)
You've been searching forever
For a lover that suits you the best

Chorus:
Don't give up (don't give up)
Don't walk away (don't walk away)
You're just a little bit closer than you were yesterday
Eyes on the prize (eyes on the prize)
Don't look away
You're just a little bit closer than you were yesterday

Than you were yesterday...

Gentle motion makes you wonder if the river's deep
Why the ocean sounds like thunder while you sleep
The ace of cups and seven swords came up again
The light on your horizon seems like it's growing dim

Um, um, you don't have to believe it
You don't have to believe it but it's true
(sun will rise)
The sun will rise it's the natural order
And the cards have revealed this to you.

Chorus.

Until (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

How can I change your mind?
Unravel the mystery that confines us
Silence is hiding the pain
But deep in your soul
You must know
You gotta take a chance
And let our spirits flow
Love is an elusive thing
Into every heart it sings.

Chorus:
Whatever it takes to make it right
No matter how hard I will fight for you
I swear that it's true
I want the sweetness in life with you
Until this life is through

Such a bizarre twist of fate
Something so simple still escapes us
while anger and pride cloud your eyes
This is a vision for two

There's no one else to tell my deepest secrets to
And I don't want to live alone
'Cause it would be a lonely song

Chorus x 2

Woman On The Edge (Cassandra Wilson © Ardnassac Pub. Co.)

She walks along the city streets as if no would dare
follow the path that she has chosen to take her anywhere

She walks beneath the city lights, no other way
until she captures every eye and makes the pavement sway

Woman on the edge
something to behold
her happiness
is simple and clear
like a spot of shade or
a bottle of beer
coolin' the day away

She looks at the moon and laughs then away she goes
until a stranger passes by that she might want to know
He's got a penny in his pocket he wants to give away
she looks at him dead in the eye, spits on the street and says

"Hoe, I don't need your money
I don't need your time
I'm on my way to another world
where the people play
like clouds in the sky."

Clouds in the sky, clouds in the sky
why don't you stop and ask her
how she feels about the life she's living?

You Move Me (Cassandra Wilson © Onakomaya Music / Warner Bros. Music SESAC)

Remembering moments so precious and rare
the thought of you kissing me there
You know my secrets
You know the curve and the line
One touch and I know you are mine

Rain falls down on me
and I can hardly see
for the water in my eyes
Love comes down on me
and I can hardly breathe
for the trembling in my thighs
You move me

REFERENCES

- Addison, Gayle Jr., ed. 1971, 1972. *The Black Aesthetic*. Anchor Books: Garden City.
- Alleyne, Mervyn C. 1993. "Continuity Versus Creativity in Afro-American Language and Culture" in *Africanisms in Afro-American Language Varieties*, ed. Salikoko S. Mufwene. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Ani, M. 1994. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.
- Asante, M. 1998. *The Afrocentric Idea* (Rev. ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- . 1992. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- . 1992. *Afrocentricity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Asante, M. & Welsh Asante, K., eds. 1985. *African Culture: Rhythms of Unity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Baker, David N. et al., ed. 1977. *The Black Composer Speaks*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.
- Baker, Houston, Jr. 1984. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baraka, Amiri. 1998. *Black Music*. New York: DaCapo Press.
- , ed. 1995. *The Black Public Sphere : A Public Culture Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , et al, ed. 1991. *Workings of The Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Barlow, William. 1989. *Looking Up At Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Barrett, Lindon. 1998. *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baugh, John. 1983. *Black Street Speech: Its History, Origin, and Structure*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bebey, Francis. 1975. *African Music: A People's Art*. London: Harrap.

- Blassingame, John. 1979. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bratcher, Melanie E. 2007. *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone: Sound Motion and Blues Spirit*. London: Psychology Press.
- Browder, Laura. 2000. *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Brooks, Daphne A. 2006. *Bodies In Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1919*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Brown, Scot. 2005. *Fighting for US: The US Organization and Black Cultural Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Campbell, James T. 2006. *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005*. New York: Penguin Press, HarperCollins.
- Cartwright, Keith. *Reading Africa into American Literature*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Carruth, Hayden. 1993. *Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Related Topics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993).
- Chernoff, John. 1979. *African Rhythm and Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cohodas, Nadine. 2010. *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone*. New York: Pantheon.
- Coontz, Stephanie. 2000. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Corbett, John. 1994. *Extended Play: Sounding Off From John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cromwell, Adelaide M. 1987. *Dynamics of the African/Afro-American Connection: From Dependency to Self-Reliance*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Danahay, Deborah Reed. 1997. *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. New York: Berg Publishers.

- Darling, Marsha. 1994. "In The Realm of Responsibility: A Conversation with Toni Morrison" in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, ed., Danielle Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson, MS: University of Press of Mississippi.
- Davis, Angela. 1983. *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage Press.
- . 1998. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Dent, Gina, ed. 1992. *Black Popular Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press.
- Diawara, Manthia. 1998. *In Search of Africa*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Douglas, Susan J. 1995. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up With the Mass Media*. New York: Three Rivers Press/Crown Publishing.
- Dunn, Leslie C. and Nancy A. Jones, eds. 1994. *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dupont, D. 1992, May. Review: Nina Simone—Moon over Alabama. *Cadence*, 18, 79.
- Dyson, Michael Eric. 1993. *Reflecting Black: African American Culture Criticism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Edwards, Walter F. 1998. "Sociolinguistic features of Rap Lyrics: Comparisons with Reggae," in P.G., et al. (eds) *Studies of Caribbean Language 2: Papers from the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Society of Caribbean Linguistics*, 1992, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: Society for Caribbean Linguistics, 128-46.
- Enstice, Wayne and Janis Stockhouse. 2004. *Jazz Women: Conversations with Twenty-One Musicians*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Epstein, Dena J. 1976. *Sinful Tunes & Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War*. Champagne-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Erlmann, Veit. 1999. *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fabre, Geneviève and Robert O'Meally. 1994. *History and Memory in African American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Feld, Steven. 1994. "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style (Uptown Title); or, (Downtown Title) 'Lift-Up-Over Sounding': Getting into the Kaluli Groove," in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, eds. Charles Kiel and Steven Feld. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Floyd, Samuel A. 1995. *The Power of Black Music. Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Friedwald, Will. 1990. *Jazz Singing: America's Great Voices from Bessie Smith to Bebop and Beyond*. New York: Collier Books.
- Frith, Simon, Ed. 1988. *Music For Pleasure*. London: Routledge.
- Fuller, Hoyt W. 1972. "Towards a Black Aesthetic," in Addison Gayle, ed., *The Black Aesthetic*, pp. 3-11. New York: Anchor Books.
- Gabbard, Krin. 1995. *Jazz Among The Discourses*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 1995. *Representing Jazz*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 1996. *Jammin at the Margins: Jazz & the American Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gabbin, Joanne V. and Sterling A. Brown. 1985. *Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Gaines, Kevin Kelly. 2007. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 1996. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Garrett, Charles Hiroshi. 2008. "Sleights of Time in the Music of Cassandra Wilson" in Steven Baur, Raymond Knapp, and Jacqueline Warwick, eds, *Musicological Identities: Essays in Honor of Susan McClary*, pp. 107-120. London: Ashgate.
- Gates, Henry Louis. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1990. *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Penguin/Meridian Press.
- Gaunt, Kyra D. 2006. *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop*. New York: New York University Press.
- Gennari, John. 2006. *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz And Its Critics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- George, Nelson. 1988. *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*. New York: Penguin Books.

- Gilroy, Paul. 1994. "Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a 'Changing' Same." *Black Music Research Journal*, 11 (2), 111-136.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- Green, Mildred Denby. 1983. *Black Women Composers: A Genesis*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. 2001. *If You Can't Be Free, Be A Mystery: In Search of Billie Holiday*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Griffith, Marie and Barbara Dianne Savage. 2006. *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power & Performance*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Guridy, Frank Andre. 2010. *Forging Diaspora: Afro Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hampton, Sylvia and David Nathan. 2004. *Nina Simone: Break Down & Let It All Out*. London: Sanctuary Publishing.
- Harley, Sharon. 1989. "Research Priorities for the Study of Women in Africa and the African Diaspora" in Terbor-Penn and Harley, eds, *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, pp. 209-222. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2007. *Lose your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.
- Hartmann, Charles O. 1991. *Jazz Text: Voice and Improvisation in Poetry, Jazz, and Song*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hebdige, Dick. 1987. *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music*. London: Methuen.
- Hentoff, Nat. 1992. *Jazz Is*. New York: Limelight.
- Hine, Darlene Clark and Jacqueline McLeod, eds. 1999. *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1998. *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*. New York: New Press, 1998.

- Hountonjin, Paulin. 1996. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2nd ed.
- Holiday, Billie with William Dufty. 1992. *Lady Sings The Blues: The Searing Autobiography of an American Musician Legend*. New York: Penguin, 3rd ed.
- Holloway, Joseph E. 1990. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Hudson-Weems, Clenora. 1995. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Troy, MI: Bedford Publishers, 3rd ed.
- Irele, F. Abiola. 1990. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2001. "The landscape of African Music." *Research in African Literatures*, 32 (2), 1-2.
- Jackson, Irene V., ed. 1985. *More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Jackson, Travis. 1998. *Performance and Musical Meaning: Analyzing "Jazz" On the New York Scene* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University).
- James, Joy and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds. 2000. *The Black Feminist Reader*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers.
- Jones LeRoi. 1963. *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it*. New York: Morrow, Quill.
- . 1972. "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" in A. Gayle, ed., *The Black Aesthetic*, pp. 112-125. New York: Anchor Books.
- Kanneh, Kadiatu. 1998. *African Identities: Race, Nation And Culture In Ethnography, Pan-Africanism And Black Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Keil, Charles. 1966. *Urban Blues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. and Earl Lewis. 2000. *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. 2009. *Thelonious Monk: the Life and Times of an American Original*. New York: The Free Press.
- . 2002. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.

----. 1994. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press.

----. 1997. *Yo' Mama's DisFunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kelley, Robin D.G. and Sydney J. Lemelle. 1995. *Imagining Home: Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*. London: Verso Books.

Kebede, Ashenafi. 1995. *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.

Kernfeld, Barry. 1995. *What to Listen For in Jazz*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kubik, G. 1986. "Stability and Change in African Musical Traditions." *The World of Music*, 23, (1), 44-69.

Lambert, David Brun. 2009. *Nina Simone: The Biography*. London: Aurum Press.

Laver, John. 1980. *The Phonetic Description of Voice Quality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lemelle, Sidney J. and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds. 1994. *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*. London/New York: Verso.

Lepperts, Richard and Susan McClary, eds. 1987. *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levine, Lawrence W. 1977. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lincoln, Abbey. 1970. "Who Will Rever the Black Woman?" in *Black Woman*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara. New York: New American Library.

Lionnet, Françoise. 1989. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

----. 1995. *Post Colonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Lomax, Alan. 1993. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York: The New Press.

Machine, Jim. 1997. "Abbey Lincoln: 'My Songs are Scripts.'" *Down Beat*, July 1997, 26-29.

- Magubane, Bernard Makhosezwe. 1987. *The Ties That Bind: African-American Consciousness of Africa*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc.
- Makoni, Sinfrey, et al., ed. 2003. *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, And Politics in Africa And The Americas*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Maultsby, Portia K. 1999. "The Impact of Gospel Music on the Secular Music Industry" in G.D. Caponi, ed, *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin' & Slam Dunking*, pp. 172-190. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- . 1991. "Africanisms in African-American Music," in J.E. Holloway, ed, *Africanisms in American Culture*, pp. 185-210. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . 1985. "West African Influences and Retentions in United States Black Music: A Sociocultural Study" in I.V. Jackson, ed, *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, pp. 25-57. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Meriwether, James H. 2002. *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Meyer, Leonard. 1996. *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, D. 1985. "The Moan Within the Tone: African Retentions in Rhythm and Blues Saxophone Style in Afro-American Popular Music." *Popular Music*, 14, (2), 155-174.
- Mitchell-Kernan, Claudia. 1983 [1972]. "Signifying, Loud Talking and Marking," in Thomas Kochman, ed., *Black and White Styles in Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Monson, Ingrid. 2010. *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz & Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1997. "Abbey Lincoln's Straight Ahead: Jazz in the Era of the Civil Rights Movement," in *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protests*, eds. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 1999. "Monk Meets SNCC," *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2, 190-204.
- . 1997. *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation & Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2000. *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

- Morrison, Toni. 1988. *Beloved*. New York: Random House Publishers.
- Moten, Fred. 2003. *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mudimbe, Vumbi Yoka. 1994. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mufwene, S, et al., ed. 1998. *African American English: Structure, History and Use*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Murray, Albert. 1999. "Playing the Blues" in G.D. Caponi, ed, *Signifying(), Sanctifyin' & Slam Dunking*, pp. 96-109. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusestts Press.
- . 1976. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- . 1970. *The Omni-Americans*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey.
- Mutere, Malaika N. 1995. *The Oral-Aesthetic: An African-Centered Perspective of Music* (Doctoral dissertation, Temple University).
- Neal, Mark Anthony. 1998. *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Nelson, Angela, ed. 1999. *This Is How We Flow: Rhythm in Black Cultures*. Columbia: SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Neimark, Philip Oluwo. 1993. *The Way of the Orisa: Empowering Your Life Through the Ancient African Religion of Ifa*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Nketia, J.H. Kwabena. 1966. *Music in African Cultures: A Review of the Meaning and Significance of Traditional African Music*. Accra, Ghana: Institute of African Studies/University of Ghana Press.
- . 1974. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton.
- . 1996. "National Development and the Performing Arts of Africa," in *The Muse of Modernity: Essays on Culture as Development in Africa*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Salah M. Hassan. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Northrup, David. 2007. *Crosscurrents in the Black Atlantic, 1770-1965*. New York: Bedford, St. Martin's Press.

- Nwezi, M., Anyahuru, I. & Ohiauraumunna, T. 2001. "Beyond Song Texts: The Lingual Fundamentals of African Drum Music." *Research in African Literatures*, 32, (2), 90-104.
- O'Day, Anita with George Eels. 2007. *High Times, Hard Times: The Autobiography of Anita O'Day*. New York: Limelight, 4th ed.
- Olájubù, O. 1997. "The Influence of Yorùbá Command Language on Prayer, Music and Worship in African Christianity." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 14, (2), 173-180.
- O'Meally, Robert, ed. 1999. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Perrone, Charles A. 2001. *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization*. New York: Routledge.
- Porter, Eric. 2001. *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians As Artists, Critics, and Activists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Roach, Hildred. 1992. *Black American Music: Past and Present*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing.
- Ramsey, Guthrie P. Jr. 2003. *Race Music: Black Cultures From Be-bop to Hip-Hop*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rickford, J.R. and Rickford, R.J. 2000. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Roach, Hildred. 1973. *Black American Music: Past and Present*. Boston: Crescendo Publishing Co.
- Roberts, John Storm. 1972. *Black Music of Two worlds*. New York: Praeger.
- Roberts, John Willie. 1990. *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Robinson, B. J. 1991. "Africanisms in the Study of Folklore," in J. E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture*, pp. 211-224. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Robinson, Cedric J. 1997. *Black Movements in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Robnett, Belinda. 1997. *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Greenwood, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

- Saakana, Anton S. 1995. "Culture, Concept, Aesthetics: The Phenomenon of the African Musical Universe in Western Musical Culture." *African American Review*, 29, (2), 329-340.
- Scherzinger, Martin. 2001. "Negotiating the Music-Theory/African-Music Nexus: A Political Critique of Ethnomusicological Anti-formalism and a Strategic Analysis of the Harmonic Patterning of the Shona Mbira Song Nyamaropa." *Perspectives of New Music*, 39 (1), 5-117.
- Schuller, Gunther. 1968. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Seeger, Charles. 1990 [1956]. Singing Style. In *Musical Processes, Resources, and Techniques*, edited by Kay Kaufman Shelemay. New York: Garland Press, pp. 109-17.
- Sidran, Ben. 1971. *Black Talk*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Simone, Nina (with Stephen Cleary). 1991. *I Put A Spell On You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Singh, Nikhil Pal. *Black Is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Small, Christopher. 1987. *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music*. London: John Calder.
- . 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. 1998. *Women, Autobiography, Theory*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Smith, Suzanne E. 2000. *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Smitherman, Geneva. 1986. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- . 2000. *Talkin That Talk: Language, Culture and Education in African America*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Snead, James. 1999. "Repetition As A Figure in Black Culture," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. Robert G. O'Meally, ed. New York: Columbia University.

- Southern, Eileen. 1997. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Spears, Arthur K. 1998. "African-American Language Use: Ideology and So-Called Obscenity," in S. Mufwene, J.R. Rickford, G. Bailey, and J. Baugh (eds.) *Africanisms in African American Language Varieties*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. 1995. *The Rhythms of Black Folk: Race, Religion, and Pan-Africanism*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.
- . 1996. *Re-Searching Black Music*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Spradley, James P. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stearns, Marshall. 1967. *The Story of Jazz*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, Baxter, D. 1985, December. Record Reviews: Nina Simone sings the Blues. *Jazz Journal International*, 38, 30.
- . 1983, November. Record Reviews: A Portrait of Nina Simone. *Jazz Journal International*, 36, 32.
- Stuckey, Sterling. 1988. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sundberg, Johan. 1987. *The Science of the Singing Voice*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Thompson, Robert Ferris. 1974. *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act*. Los Angeles, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1984. *Flash and the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*. New York: Vintage/Random House Publishers.
- Tracey, Hugh. 1957. *African Music Within Its Social Setting*. *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 11: 23-4.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing The Past: Power and The Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Uya, Okon Edet, ed. 1971. *Black Brotherhood: Afro-Americans and Africa*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.

Vennard, William. 1967. *Singing, the Mechanism and the Technique*. New York: Carl Fischer, 1967.

Von Eschen, Penny M. 1997. *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Itaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

----. 2004. *Satchmo Blows Up The World: Jazz Ambassadors Play The Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walker, Sheila S. 2001. *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in The Creation of the Americas*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Wallace, Michele. 1990. *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. London & New York: Verso.

Ward, Brian. 1998. *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weheliye, Alexander G. 2005. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Weinstein, Norman C. 1992. *A Night In Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Welch, David B. 2001. *Voice of Thunder, Eyes of Fire: In Search of Shango in the African Diaspora*. Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing.

Wilson, Olly. 1992. "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African American Music" in Josephine Wright and Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., eds, *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, pp. 327-38. Warren, MI: Harmonie Park.

Wright, Michelle M. 2004. *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

VITA

LaShonda Katrice Barnett

Born to Brenda Jean Long and Jerome Richard Barnett in Kansas City, Missouri, on May 27, 1974, LaShonda Katrice Barnett graduated from Rich East High School in June 1992. Barnett attended the University of Missouri—Kansas City (1995), where she received a B.A. in English Language & Literature and Sarah Lawrence College (1998), where she received her M.A. in Women's History.

In August 1998, Barnett matriculated at the College of William and Mary as a Southern Regional Education Board doctoral scholar in the American Studies Program. While in residence at William and Mary from 1998 to 2001, she specialized in African American Studies, specifically history and literature, and took courses in museum studies and material culture. Doctoral Qualifying Exams were passed in four fields: African American History (slavery-present); African American Literature (slavery-present); African American Performance Studies; and U.S. Women's History (Colonial period-present). Barnett will defend her dissertation in 2011.

After moving to New York City, Barnett gained experience in a variety of teaching settings, including educational consulting positions with Columbia University's The Teacher's College Reading & Writing Project, Jazz at Lincoln Center, and Ventures Education Systems Corporation. Barnett's teaching experience in both English and History, always within an Afrodiasporic context, includes faculty positions at the University of Richmond, Hampton University, and Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies,

where she was an invited Visiting Scholar (2002-2003). From 2003 until 2010, she was invited guest history faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, where she shared a joint appointment in the Africana Studies Program. At SLC, Barnett developed and taught three yearlong seminars: African American Women's History: Demarginalizing Race & Gender; African Diasporas: Negotiating Dispersion in the Americas and Europe; and Whose Body Is It Anyway?: A Cultural History of the Twentieth Century. Semester-long courses created and taught included, The Museum in African America; The 'Family' in Black Literature; The 'City' in Black Literature, African American Male Writers, 1945-2000; and Mapping Jazz: The Geography & Ethnography of an American Music. Additionally, Barnett facilitated SLC's Senior Thesis workshop (which met biweekly for students working on a range of topics) and advised the theses of several M.A. candidates in the U.S. Women's History Graduate Program. In 2010, Barnett joined the African & African American Studies faculty at the City University of New York as adjunct Assistant Professor at two branches, Hunter College & Lehman College, where she teaches literature of the African diaspora.

Additionally, Barnett has hosted her own jazz radio program on WBAI (NYC); recorded two independent CDs; taught 'Women in Jazz' courses at Jazz at Lincoln Center; and presented her research at numerous academic conferences both domestically and internationally in Austria, Brazil, France, Germany and South Africa.

LaShonda Katrice Barnett is the author a collection of short stories, *Callaloo* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1999) and editor of the volumes, *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters On Their Craft* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007) and *Off The Record: Conversations with African American & Brazilian Women Singers & Songwriters* (Lanham,

MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Scarecrow Press, forth, December 2012). Comprised of forty interviews with the world's prominent black female singers these volumes devoted to creative process are without precedent. *I Got Thunder* was reviewed by numerous print publications, including *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, the *Austin Chronicle*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Chicago Sun Times*, *Orlando Weekly*, *New York Post*, *Baltimore City paper*, *Paste Magazine*, *Alarm magazine*, *Harp Music Magazine* and was the subject of feature stories on NPR's "News and Notes," WNYC's "Soundcheck," KALW's "Upfront" and ABC Radio Network's "The Touch." Barnett also contributed entries for two of her dissertation subjects, Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone, to The Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora edited by Carole Boyce Davies (Oxford, UK: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008). Winner of the College Language Association's Margaret Walker Award for Short Fiction and the New York Money for Women/Barbara Demming Memorial Grant for Short Fiction and a former Advanced Fiction fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown (2008) and Tennessee Williams Scholar in Fiction at the Sewanee Writers Conference (2009), Barnett has literary representation with Gail Hochman, president of the Brandt & Hochman Literary Agency (NYC), and recently sold her debut novel, an historical family saga wherein the protagonist launches a black newspaper in the Jim Crow Midwest. Barnett lives on Manhattan's upper west side.