

# AMERICAN MUSIC REVIEW

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*Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York*

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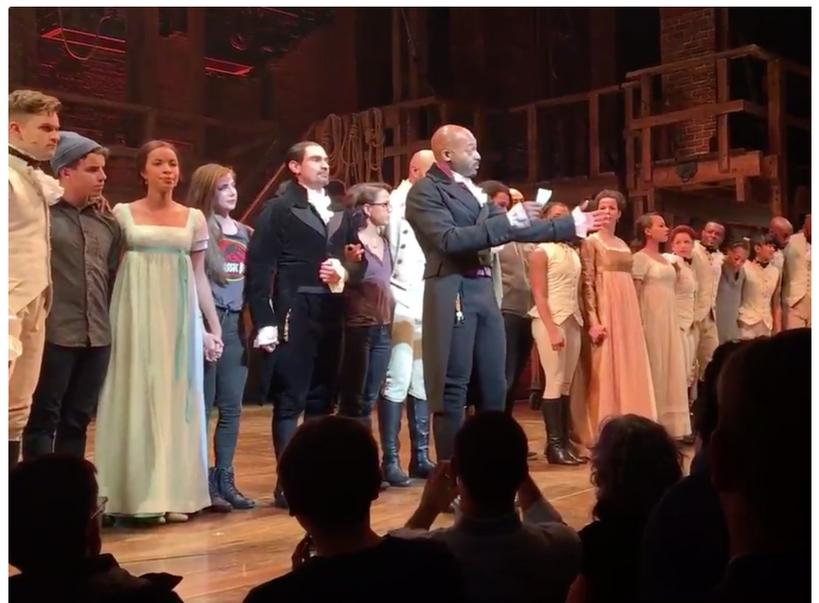
## ***Hamilton*: Diverse America and the Second Generation Advantage**

Philip Kasinitz, Graduate Center, CUNY

Of all the bizarre news stories to permeate social and mainstream media in the days following the election of Donald Trump, few were as surreal as the “Twitter war” surrounding the controversy between the incoming president and the cast of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*. The dispute started on the evening of 18 November when Vice President elect Mike Pence attended the hit show with his children. Knowing Mr. Pence would be in the audience, the creator of *Hamilton* and original star, Lin-Manuel Miranda, wrote a short address to him on behalf of “diverse America” expressing fears about the Trump administration.

The address was delivered during the curtain call by one of the show’s stars, Brandon Victor Dixon, who portrays Pence’s ill-fated predecessor Vice President Aaron Burr. Pence, who had been booted upon entering the theater, left while the address was being given although he later insisted he had not walked out in protest and had listened to the short speech in the lobby (leaving during the curtain call to avoid crowds is common practice for celebrities and secret service protectees). Pence never responded directly to the concerns raised and, perhaps unwilling to get into a debate with a fictional character, diplomatically insisted that he had not been offended by the remarks and that he had enjoyed the show and its “talented” cast.

Pence’s boss showed no such restraint. Within hours he had unleashed one of his famous Twitter rants, accusing the show’s cast and audience of “lecturing” and “harassing” the future Vice President, demanding an apology and describing the most popular Broadway show in years, which he had never seen, as “over rated.” Soon there were more tweets and counter tweets which ate up the better part of a news cycle and took a fairly parochial New York dispute national, which was probably not unwelcome as *Hamilton* was about to open in Chicago and with productions planned for several other cities. There was even



*The Cast of Hamilton addresses Vice-President Elect Mike Pence, 18 November, 2016*

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## *Hamilton* (cont.)

a call to boycott the New York production, although it was already sold out for more than year in advance.

That a popular Broadway musical, one celebrating an American historical figure usually seen as a conservative champion of finance capital should become a symbolic flashpoint in America's ongoing culture wars is remarkable, yet not unpredicted. More than a year earlier, shortly after the show's Broadway opening, *New York Times* cultural critic Wesley Morris described Trump as "the presidential candidate for anyone freaked out by the idea of a show like 'Hamilton.'"<sup>1</sup> And while Miranda's claim to speak for a vaguely defined constituency known as "the diverse America" was perhaps uncharacteristically inelegant, I know what he meant. Part of Donald Trump's appeal is the unease many Americans, particularly older white rural and suburban Americans, feel about the nation's demographic transformation. *Hamilton* is among the most powerful and influential artistic expressions of that transformation that young, multi-racial, urban America has produced to date. The fact that it concerns the most American of stories—the founding of the Republic—and that it puts forward a hip hop reimagining of the most American of themes—who we are as a nation—makes the confrontation with the new President seem oddly appropriate.

*Hamilton* is the largely hip hop-based retelling of the tragic story of Alexander Hamilton and his long rivalry with Burr, which culminated in the Weehawken New Jersey duel in which the Vice President killed the former Treasury Secretary (as the fictional Hamilton tells his son in the play: "Everything is legal in New Jersey"). Miranda, its creator, composer, lyricist, and original star, is hardly new to musical theater. His earlier Broadway hit *In the Heights*, a show that blended hip hop and Latin music with more conventional Broadway fare, won him the Tony award for best musical at age twenty-eight—a remarkable accomplishment in an increasingly geriatric genre. Yet while *In the Heights* was a hit, *Hamilton*'s impact on the New York theater scene has been nothing short of revolutionary. When it debuted at the Joseph Papp

Public Theater in January 2015, word spread so quickly that the run was sold out before the reviews went to press. The following July, a revised and restaged version moved to the larger Richard Rodgers Theatre, where even at Broadway's exorbitant ticket prices it quickly sold out. The score was soon released as an album and in striking reverse crossover broke out of the tiny Musical Theater ghetto to reach the top of the hip hop charts. It dominated the Tony awards with a record sixteen nominations. Yet the score also received a Grammy and the show's opening scenes were featured in the televised Grammy ceremonies, reaching a wider, younger, and more diverse audience than Broadway had seen in years. In the summer of 2016, in what may be the musical theater community's ultimate tribute, a spoof of the musical by satirist Gerard Alessandrini opened off Broadway. *Spamilton* depicts Miranda as a revolutionary in an epic struggle to save Broadway from stagnation, while every star from Beyoncé to Barbra Streisand competes over who will be in *Hamilton: the Movie*.

In this most political year of 2016 a musical about a politician quickly becomes a political symbol. The Obamas saw it. Bernie Sanders saw it. Hilary Clinton saw it. Yet its champions included more than liberal politicians and hip hop fans who suddenly found a new appreciation for the founder of America's financial system. It was also celebrated by at least some conservative pundits including *Times* columnist David Brooks and Wall Street tycoons who suddenly announced their newfound appreciation of hip hop.

What is the appeal? Part of Miranda's genius has been to unearth the hip hop side of the founding fathers. The nation, Miranda reminds us, was founded by brash young men whose revolutionary idealism was mixed with outsized personal ambition, not to mention passionate love lives, and a lot of ego and swagger. Like a rapper, Hamilton, the author of more than half of the Federalist Papers and founder of the *New York Post*, used words as weapons—although, as history shows, he was not shy about settling scores with real weapons as well. "The Ten Duel Commandants,"

## *Hamilton* (cont.)

a recurring motif in the play, is a direct quote from late rapper Notorious B.I.G.'s "The Ten Crack Commandments" that can't help but remind the audience of the fates of each man. As *New York Times* critic Jody Rosen writes, *Hamilton* makes "the link between hip-hop and the world of eighteenth-century politics seem like the most obvious thing in the world—not a conceit imposed upon the history but the excavation of some essence with it."<sup>22</sup> The rapping founding fathers never come off as a gimmick, nor does the multi-racial cast. Most of the major parts are played by young people of color (King George and the Tories are played by White actors). The diverse ensemble includes Latinos, African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Asian Americans. Thus *Hamilton's* America looks like today's—and certainly tomorrow's—young urban America: "Just like my country," Hamilton raps, "I'm young, scrappy, and hungry!"

This diverse cast lays claim to the most American of stories—the revolution, the founding of the Republic, the struggles over the Constitution and battles over the emerging American identity during the Presidencies of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. Although some historical events have been rearranged and some characters have been merged in concessions to dramatic structure, for the most part, Miranda takes remarkably little license with the show's primary source material—historian Ron Chernow's 2004 *Hamilton* biography (Chernow was a consultant on the show).

Musically, for all of its freshness in approach, *Hamilton* is also in many ways closer to the best works of the Broadway musical genre than it appears at first glance. The description of *Hamilton* as a hip hop musical is really only half true. While completely immersed in the world of hip hop—Miranda is a virtuoso rapper and the show quotes, or perhaps samples, a long list of rap classics—*Hamilton* draws at least as much from traditional musical theater with knowing references to Gilbert and Sullivan, Rodgers and Hammerstein and Steven Sondheim. Indeed, like Sondheim, the Broadway composer that in many ways he most resembles, Miranda understands the importance of lyrics

in the modern musical theater that deepen and advance the drama, separating the modern musical from those earlier reviews whose flimsy plots were basically vehicles for strings of pop tunes. And Miranda is a truly superb lyricist. Here again, he has unearthed a marvelous if unexpected affinity. Great lyrics are all about the interplay



*Lin-Manuel Miranda (right) in Hamilton*  
Photo by Joan Marcus

between the sounds of words, the meanings of words, meter, and rhythm. So is great rap.

*Hamilton* is reminiscent of the classic Broadway musical in another respect. The modern Broadway musical theater emerged in New York during the mid-twentieth century. New York has long been known for its demographic diversity, and the idea that the city's role as a center of cultural innovation is connected to its diverse population figures prominently in its self-image. In *Hamilton*, when the young orphaned Alexander arrives in the polyglot streets of Manhattan from the West Indies, the chorus sings, "In New York you can be a New Man." To the Broadway audience that is a familiar sentiment. The mid-twentieth century was a period in which the children of immigrants were emerging as the city's demographically and culturally dominant group, a fact which is also true today. This second generation often had little use for efforts to preserve their parent's cultural forms. Yet their ambivalent embrace of all things American was informed by an outsider's perspective, something

## *Hamilton* (cont.)

roughly akin to the double consciousness W.E.B. Du Bois described among America's permanent insiders/outsiders: African Americans.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed engagement with African-American music is another way in which Miranda, the New York-born son of Puerto Rican migrants, is reminiscent of the earlier second generation that made up the bulk of the creators of the mid-twentieth century musical. A remarkable number of the popular musicians and Broadway composers who absorbed the influence of jazz and other African-American forms and brought them, admittedly in watered down form, to popular audiences were the children of immigrants. These semi-outsiders—swing musicians like Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman, and Broadway composers like George Gershwin and Jerome Kern—were decidedly less squeamish about mining African-American sources than most of their mainstream American contemporaries. To be sure, they also appropriated African-American innovations for their own ends and profited far more than the African-American innovators. Yet by bringing the expressionism of jazz to popular audiences they also, in the words of the demographer Charles Hirschman, “created a style that did not represent assimilation but rather a distinctive ‘American’ genre of musical performance.”<sup>4</sup> These children of immigrants, occupying a social and cultural space between American society and that of their immigrant parents, were uniquely situated to selectively combine elements of both cultures, as well as to absorb African-American cultural forms, in new and often innovative ways. Conversant in all yet taking none for granted, the second generation, then and now, occupies a position that, if not always comfortable, is well suited to artistic innovation. It is a situation that in a large study of the contemporary children of immigrants my colleagues and I termed the “Second Generation Advantage.”<sup>5</sup>

We are familiar with this situation in concert music. No composer before, or arguably since, has celebrated self-consciously American themes and images more than Aaron Copland, the child of Russian Jewish

immigrants. American source material dominates his work, from cowboy tunes and folk music to Shaker hymns. As Copland himself noted, “When I wrote ‘Appalachian Spring’ I was thinking primarily about Martha [Graham] and her unique choreographic style ... (S)he’s unquestionably very American: there’s something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American.”<sup>6</sup> Copland was well aware of how improbable his celebration of rural “American” landscape seemed to others. Asked how he could so successfully capture the West in his ballet *Billy the Kid*, he noted “It was just a feat of pure imagination.”<sup>7</sup>

Although we are often not aware of it, the mid-twentieth century Broadway musical was replete with similar feats of imagination. The children of immigrants set shows like *Oklahoma*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and *Carousel* in an imaginary American heartland far from any world they actually knew. Then as now, the efforts of these crass newcomers were not always well received. In 1935, writing in the *New York Times*, the eminent composer and music critic Virgil Thompson dismissed George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* as “... straight from the melting pot. At best it is a piquant but highly unsavory stirring-up together of Israel, Africa and the Gaelic Isles.” “I do not like fake folklore,” Thompson continued, “nor bittersweet harmony, nor six-part choruses, nor fidgety accompaniments, nor gefilte-fish orchestration.”<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Gershwin got the last laugh, albeit posthumously. Within a few decades, calling a work of art “straight from the melting pot” would no longer be an expression of derision. In this regard Gershwin’s triumph was part of a larger cultural shift. The mid-twentieth century emergence of the United States as a world leader in theater, popular, and classical music occurred at the same time that the United States was fully absorbing the influences from the great immigration of the turn of the twentieth century—and perhaps more importantly, when those immigrants’ American-born children were coming of age. They would go on to produce some of the

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most self-consciously American art, music, and theater ever created—despite the fact that self-appointed guardians of American high culture such as Thompson decried the foreign (or worse, “Negro”) influences they saw just below the surface. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Broadway musical, whose largely New York-based second generation creators told stories about Mississippi show boats, Oklahoma cowboys, and carousels in rural Maine; stories that both celebrated these imagined locales and brought to them a critical edge as only an outsider could.

Despite the fact that the musical is usually thought of as light, middle-class, and middle-brow entertainment, Broadway has actually not been shy about facing issues of racial and ethnic conflict. Yet its composers and authors have rarely done so in ways that had much to do with their own lives or the lives of their largely second-generation audiences. One of the earliest, the 1927 musical *Show Boat* by Jerome Kern (the son of German-Jewish immigrants) and Oscar Hammerstein (a grandchild of Jewish immigrants) dealt with the tragic effects of segregation on a mixed-race woman passing for white in distant Mississippi. *Show Boat*'s depictions of blacks were certainly stereotypical—and, for later audiences, cringe-inducing. Yet by the standards of its day it took on the issue of race surprisingly directly. Hammerstein's later work with Richard Rodgers (original family name Abrahams) continued to deal with race, although usually far from home; Americans needed to go to the *South Pacific* to confront their biases. The closest Rodgers and Hammerstein came to telling their own story may have been in *Flower Drum Song*, a 1958 musical in which the conflict between immigrant elders and the desires of a young, hip, second generation is set in San Francisco's Chinatown. Based on a novel by the Chinese American author C.Y. Lee, the musical version of *Flower Drum Song* transforms the book's dark tale of immigrant displacement and exile



Angela Renée Simpson as Queenie and the company of *Show Boat*  
Photo by Scott Suchman

into an upbeat love story among the younger generation. Rodgers and Hammerstein made little attempt to accurately depict life in Chinatown. Indeed, beneath its sometimes crude stereotypes the musical might be seen as a 1950s New York Jewish assimilation story in Chinese drag. For this reason many Chinese American critics have objected to the play and the even more stereotypical 1961 film version. Others, however, have seen *Flower Drum Song* as a guilty pleasure, which, for all of its faults, cast articulate and attractive young Asian-American actors in leading roles. About the same time as *Flower Drum Song* premiered, ethnic conflict on the streets of New York—albeit not involving the author's and composer's own ethnic group—finally came to the Broadway musical stage with the 1957 production of *West Side Story*. Not until the early 1960s did Broadway's eastern European-Jewish roots truly come out of the closet in *Fiddler on the Roof*, a show which sentimentalized the Jewish *shtetl* and proved immensely popular with what was, by then, a largely third-generation audience.

In today's New York, once again the children of immigrants dominate the city's younger population demographically and increasingly culturally. And while they are probably less self-conscious about their immigrant roots than their predecessors, they, along

## *Hamilton* (cont.)

with the African Americans with whom they share workplaces, schools and neighborhoods, are often less interested in preserving their parents' musical forms than creating new takes on American society that reflect their own diverse lives. It was out of this meeting of young African Americans and the children of Caribbean immigrants that hip hop was born. From its origins in the South Bronx in the late 1970s, hip hop's combination of music, dance, poetry, clothing styles, and graffiti has become a leading cultural expression for youth throughout the world. Many of its most prominent artists have been the children of immigrants. Like the children of Jewish and Italian immigrants who brought jazz to Broadway, these second generation West Indian and Latino artists came together with African-American youth to create something new and very American. As Baz Dreisinger notes, "Hip-hop is a classic American rags-to-riches saga, yes, but it is also a postcolonial immigrant story—as much Henry Roth as Horatio Alger."<sup>9</sup> And with *Hamilton* that cultural nexus has come of age and taken ownership of such quintessentially American stories as the revolution and the conflicts between Jefferson and Hamilton over the direction of the new Republic—portrayed on stage as a rap battle. Miranda, with one foot squarely in hip hop, the other firmly planted in American musical theater, makes this all seem natural, even unsurprising.

But doesn't bringing hip hop to Broadway risk being merely another example of the dreaded "cultural appropriation?" Many in the hip hop world were initially skeptical of *Hamilton*—but most have been won over. Indeed, in perhaps the clearest endorsement the hip hop community could provide, in December 2016 Miranda collaborated with a number of leading hip hop artists including The Roots, Nas, Alicia Keys, Chance the Rapper and K'naan (whose contribution, taken from a line in the play, is entitled "Immigrants get the Job Done!") as well as the soul singers Usher and John Legend on the *Hamilton Mix Tape*, a collection of pieces from the musical reworked, extended, and reimagined by some of the same artists who

inspired it. And once again, the unlikely engagement of today's hip hop artists with material about eighteenth-century politics and early American economic policy seems, strangely not at all strange, even oddly appropriate. If anything it is the story of the founding fathers that is being appropriated, and rightly so, as newcomers and outsiders assert that this story belongs to them as much as to anyone.

Which brings me back to Donald Trump. Reflecting on the 2016 election the novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen, herself the child of immigrants, notes that conflicts over "real" American identity are sometimes "a matter of storytelling." "The struggle over the direction of our country is also a fight over whose words will win and whose images will ignite the collective imagination."<sup>10</sup> The nostalgic call to "make America great again" stands in contrast to Miranda's "diverse Americas" and its efforts to reimagine the nation and its history.

As of this writing it is not at all clear how that struggle will be resolved. In the meantime *Hamilton* now faces its own challenge not to be a victim of its own success. How does the musical keep its edge night after night with the mostly affluent white, middle-aged audience that can afford to pay hundreds of dollars for a ticket? In an effort to ensure at least some audience diversity, the production has given away record numbers of low-cost and free tickets to school groups and via a nightly lottery. Still, how it will travel once companies in other cities open remains to be seen. For now, however, if you are looking for a vision of diverse America that, for all of its flaws, is capable of reinvention, an America that tears down walls rather than builds them, a vision of America Donald Trump considers "overrated," I can offer no better advice than to listen to *Hamilton*.



NOTES

1. Wesley Morris, "The Year We Obsessed Over Identity." *New York Times*, 6 October 2015.
2. Judy Rosen. "The American Revolutionary," *New York Times Style Magazine*. 19 July 2015: 54-58.
3. On the outsider/insider origins of the musical, see David Savran, *High Brow/ Low Down: Theater, Jazz and the Making of the New Middle Class* (University of Michigan Press, 2009). On immigrant assimilation and the remaking of mainstream culture more generally see Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Assimilation: Remaking the Mainstream* (Harvard University Press, 2005).
4. Charles Hirschman, "The Contribution of Immigrants and Their Children to American Culture," *Daedalus*, 142 (3) Summer: 27, 2013.
5. See Philip Kasinitz, John Mollnekopf, Mary C. Waters and Jennifer Holdaway, *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age* (Harvard University Press and the Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).
6. Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (Henry Holt, 2000), 388.
7. Ibid, 325.
8. Jeffrey Melnick, *A Right to Sing the Blues: African Americans, Jews and American Popular Song* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 73.
9. Baz Dreisinger, "Ready or Not," *New York Times Book Review*, 21 October 2012.
10. Viet Thanh Nguyen, "Trump's Story and Our Own" (op ed), *New York Times*, 11 December 2016.

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## Institute News

Though we all had our share of distractions this fall, the Institute was able to move ahead with both short- and long-term projects. The term began, at least figuratively, in the 1920s and 1930s, as we hosted band leader and bass instrument virtuoso **Vince Giordano** in a screening of *There's A Future in the Past*. The documentary explores his crack band The Nighthawks and their role in preserving and performing arrangements from the early decades of jazz, as well as their work on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*, Woody Allen's *Café Society* and a host of other projects. Giordano was joined by director/producers **Amber Edwards** and **David Davidson** in a question-and-answer period after the screening. Make sure to catch this fascinating film if it appears at a movie house near you! The Nighthawks can be heard weekly at Iguana in Manhattan ... **Reba Wissner** presented "I Know Who it is That Doesn't Belong Among Us: Scoring Paranoia in The Twilight Zone," looking at the Cold War context of Rod Serling's influential TV show and its music ... Motivated by the unfortunate violence at the Sept. 2016 J'Ouvert celebration prior to Brooklyn's West Indian Carnival parade, the Institute collaborated with the Center for Caribbean Studies in "Brooklyn J'Ouvert - Reckoning with Brooklyn Carnival's Past, Present and Future." The panel consisted of **Joshua Guild**, Professor of History at Princeton University, **Jumaane Williams**, Council member for the 45th District of the New York City Council, **Michael Manswell**, Artistic Director of *Something Positive*, **Kendall Williams**, steel pan arranger and composer, and **Yvette Rennie**, President of J'Ouvert City International. Much of the discussion centered on the importance of maintaining an important cultural tradition while working with NY law enforcement and community leaders ... Finally, on 14 November **Leann Osterkamp** gave a preview of the excitement that will accompany Leonard Bernstein's 2018 centenary with "Leonard Bernstein and the Piano," a lecture and performance featuring several of Bernstein's solo piano works, including the rarely-heard *Piano Sonata* from 1938. Osterkamp was assisted by Distinguished Professor **Ursula Oppens** on

several pieces. Osterkamp has completed a recording of all Bernstein's piano music (including some unpublished works) that will be released later this year on the Steinway label.



*Leann Osterkamp And Ursula Oppens perform music by Bernstein  
Photo by Jeffrey Taylor*

This fall brought a change in HISAM's personnel, as our previous College Assistant **Evan Moskowitz** moved on to other projects. **Whitney George**, who had worked for many years as our Graduate Assistant, has now taken over Evan's position. We welcome our new Graduate Assistant, composer **Nicholas R. Nelson**, who brings his considerable computer skills to this journal. Nick, who works primarily in electro-acoustic music, is a familiar presence at Brooklyn College's Center for Computer Music, and we are delighted to have him onboard.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of **Samuel A. Floyd, Jr.**, a scholar, founder of The Center for Black Music Research, and member of the Institute's Advisory Board. He was a staunch supporter of our enterprise, and those of us lucky enough to know him personally feel the loss profoundly. Our thoughts are with his family. Guthrie P. Ramsey provides a closer look at this remarkable man in the current issue.

Research Associate **Arturo O'Farrill** recently received his fifth Grammy and second Latin for the album *Cuba: The Conversation Continues*. He and his Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble performed at the Blue Note Madrid, the Havana Plaza Jazz Festival, and a variety of other venues. He is currently preparing for

## Institute News (cont.)

a concert and recording with pianist and composer Chucho Valdés at the end of January 2017 ...

Our new College Assistant **Whitney George** was commissioned by the Lykos Quartet to prepare a rescoring of the 1940's experimental film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, set to premiere January 2017. The Face the Music Symphony Orchestra commissioned a new work from George which was partially premiered at Roulette in December, and is set for a full premiere in Spring 2017. George's ensemble The Curiosity Cabinet, in collaboration with UK interdisciplinary artists Bitter Suite, performed the Sensory String Quartet in December, their debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music ... Research Associate **Stephanie Jensen-Moulton** has continued to work on two academic writing projects while on sabbatical leave. She presented her work on Christopher Knowles and *Einstein on the Beach* at Westminster Choir College in October, and responded to a panel on Disability Pedagogy at the November AMS annual conference in Vancouver. She was also co-convener of the summer 2016 *JAMS* Colloquy "On the Disability Aesthetics of Music."

# Toward a Global Jazz

Arturo O’Farrill, Brooklyn College, CUNY

On 14 December 2014, the night before the historic announcement by Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro of renewed US/Cuban relations, the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO) was performing at the official Havana residence of the American Interest’s Section Chief (now Ambassador), Jeff De Laurentis. With members of my non-profit, the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance, the twenty-one musicians who made up the ALJO, and a bevy of special invited guests and producers, we numbered about sixty. The ALJO had traveled to Cuba to perform at the International Havana Plaza Jazz Festival, along with special American guest performers and composers alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa, pianist/composer Michele Rosewoman, my sons Zachary and Adam, and Cuban musical legends Juan “Cotó” De La Cruz Antomarchi, Bobby Carcasses, Alexis Bosch, Michel Herrera, and Yasek Manzano.

In addition to our performance at the Festival, which included the Orchestra’s debut with Malpaso, Cuba’s premier independent modern dance company, we had come to record what would become a double CD titled *Cuba: The Conversation Continues*. This recording was based on an imagined conversation between Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo in the 1940s when they first began to recognize the common roots of American jazz and Afro-Cuban music. In fact there is a famous quote attributed to Dizzy in which he claimed “Chano doesn’t speak English and I don’t speak Spanish but we both speak African.” I was curious how the music we call jazz today would sound if the division between jazz and Latin music had been erased as Dizzy envisioned. With this in mind we asked several prominent American and Cuban composers to imagine what the results of that conversation would sound like were the two genres not separated by political revolution and sixty years of a failed embargo.

Back to the party at Laurentis’s residency. On this particular evening we were given a private audience with the soon-to-be Ambassador who seemed preoccupied and nervous. Months later we learned

that he knew about the next morning’s historic announcement but was unable to share this top secret information with any of his staff or even with his wife. He not only knew that the two Presidents were going to announce the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba, but that Alan Gross, an American in Cuban prison on espionage charges, was about to be released.

The group I had brought with me to Cuba included high level business men and woman, investors, and industry leaders. At the meeting they asked Mr. De Laurentis about the progress of Cuban and American relations and about what worried him. One specific question asked was, “What keeps you up at night?” With a mysterious look on his face he answered, “Making sure Mr. Gross gets home.” We should have surmised at that point that real progress was about to take place.



*The audience at New York’s Symphony Space joined Arturo O’Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra onstage during the last piece of the “Música Nueva 7” concert on 2 May 2015. Photo by David Garton*

The Sephardic Synagogue in the Vedado neighborhood in Havana was where Malpaso rehearsed. The next day we amassed our combined forces of dancers, musicians, producers, staff and onlookers to begin work for our performance of *24 Hours*, a modern ballet choreographed by Malpaso’s founder and artistic director Osnel Delgado, and set to my own musical compositions and performances. We were in the midst of this process when the word broke out that a historic

## Toward a Global Jazz (cont.)

moment was about to take place; we went downstairs and gathered around a TV with community members and watched Presidents Castro and Obama announce that there was to be an immediate normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States.

Watching the faces of Cubans and Americans alike, I was struck by the calm detachment and seriousness with which the news was met. It was almost anticlimactic. I myself snuck off to a corner and quietly wept because my father never lived to see this day and because my people would perhaps have a chance to escape the poverty and isolation they had experienced for decades. I had been quietly going to Cuba since 2002, leading people-to-people exchange groups, appearing at jazz festivals, and doing everything in my power to work for the day when this would occur and to insure that culture was the conduit for change and not commercial exploitation. To see the realization of what seemed like an impossible dream was completely beyond my comprehension.

My father, Chico O'Farrill, was born in Cuba in 1922. He left the Island as a young man in his twenties to make his fortune as a jazz musician and never returned to live among his people on any permanent basis. During the revolution he visited frequently but after the declaration by Fidel Castro of communism he felt betrayed and never went back. Settling in New York in the 1940s, he went on to become one of the premiere jazz arrangers and composers of his generation. His work with the likes of Machito, Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Farmer, Thad Jones, Count Basie, Miguelito Valdes, Tito Puente, Celia Cruz, and many more, was foundational for the art of modern, multilingual music that came to be called "Latin Jazz."

Towards the end of his life my father was invited to perform in Havana but declined because of pressure from the Miami Cuban American community, whose mistaken anti-engagement policies created heartaches and tragedy for generations of families torn apart by ideological rifts and anger at oppressive regimes on both sides of the Florida straits. In the last year of his life he relented and agreed to return, but his failing

health prevented the trip. It was difficult for me to watch my father's heart break because he never saw his ancestral land again.

In 2002 my dear friend and Havana Jazz Festival president Chucho Valdés invited me to perform in a solo piano recital tribute to Emiliano Salvador, the great Cuban pianist. I was thrilled but almost didn't go. Two weeks before the departure, the vagaries of the Cuban communication world had prevented me from confirming either a performance venue or accommodations. Legally Americans could not accept payment for performing in Cuba. When I e-mailed the festival and relayed my fears, they wrote back that it was important I not cancel as they had a "special surprise" in store for me.

When I landed I was overcome with emotion. It felt as if the ground beneath me had reached up into my soul. After clearing customs and immigration I was met by several gentlemen in suits who I assumed were either Cuban police or CIA. I feared the worst—it was very difficult to get a cultural license back in those days and I was concerned that I might have overlooked some legality that would result in my interrogation and arrest. But instead of pulling up to a detention center, we came upon a beautiful stone structure with huge wooden doors and highly polished brass plates which read "El Palacio O'Farrill." As we turned the corner we saw a line of people in uniforms waiting outside: clerks, waiters, house staff and executives. The door to our car was opened and an elegant woman reached in shook my hand and said, "welcome home Señor O'Farrill." There were tears in everyone's eyes, including my own. I was welcomed into a beautiful hotel with a massive interior courtyard and ornate stonework, all polished wood and brass. It was explained to me that this was one of the properties my ancestors had built and that Old Havana was filled with structures built by the O'Farrills, who were apparently very successful business people. I learned that one of my relatives had been Don Ricardo O'Farrill, one of the original mayors of Havana and the founder of the first musical conservatory in Cuba.

## Toward a Global Jazz (cont.)

That trip ignited a lifelong project to continue the conversation that Chico, Dizzy, and Chano had begun more than half a century ago and that the United States and Cuba were now resuming. The ranks of important musicians who live in both countries today that are at the vanguard of redefining not just jazz but contemporary music is quite impressive. In the New York jazz community alone there is tremendous respect for Cuban musicians Yosvanny Terry, Elio Villafranca, and Pedrito Martinez, and for composers Tania León, Leo Brouwer, and many more. The ways in which the United States and Cuba have influenced one another is profound and reads more like a love story. Baseball, Hemingway, modern dance, ballet, cigars, salsa, and tasty cuisine are conduits for a people who have long loved and admired each other's journeys.

Scholars and musicians have long recognized that Cuba has been a crossroads where African musical practice and European traditions have collided for centuries, creating the template for rhythms that are at the heart of many contemporary forms of music, ranging from Rock & Roll to Hip Hop, from Salsa to Reggaeton, and numerous genres in between. While Cuba has been one of the foremost crucibles for such mixing, this musical richness spread throughout the New World. Wherever Africans were allowed to keep their musical expressions and wherever European musical traditions were practiced, jazz-like musical practices evolved, a point to which I will return shortly.

My father was a prototype of the evolved musician of today. Classically trained, culturally influenced by Africa, and fiercely in love with the American interpretation of these forces, he was a perfect middleman. Positioned to mine European tradition, the African legacy, and the New World cultural fabric, he was as easily at home writing a symphony for strings as he was writing big band jazz or Rumba-inspired composition. His music flowed from the commingling of all three worlds.

In 2001 my father joined the ancestors and shortly after my own work with Cuba began. The greater

part of my journey, however, was in seeing a larger definition for this music than even the one Dizzy and Chano hinted at. Early on in my work I realized that the reintroduction of jazz to its Afro-Cuban ancestry was sufficient for the early 1940's, but today the paradigm needed expanding—anywhere the African and European musical worlds intersected offered fertile ground for jazz and jazz-like art forms to emerge. Clearly a more global vision stretching beyond Havana and Nueva York was necessary.

In 2002 at the invitation of Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center I created an ensemble called The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. From the start we were defined by a larger musical geography than the Caribbean island to our south. We began to experiment with Afro-Peruvian and Afro-Andean jazz, with rhythms like the Festejo and the Lando and with Colombian rhythms like the Porro, the Currulao, and Cumbia. Throughout the Americas we saw strains of the current that only the North Americans would have the hubris to claim they invented. In point of fact, the elements of blues, improvisatory practice, call and response, rhythmic swing, and all of the musical characteristics that musicologists define as American jazz, have long existed throughout the Americas.

This revelation was exciting to me as a musician and scholar but most of all as a composer. In 1948 Chico O'Farrill wrote the iconic *Afro Cuban Jazz Suite* for Charlie Parker, Flip Philips, Buddy Rich, and Machito with his Afro Cuban Jazz Orchestra. In its time it was a revolutionary, multi-movement suite, featuring state-of-the-art bebop jazz language, hyper-virtuosic soloing, and hot Afro-Cuban jazz rhythms. The piece has been universally hailed as one of the staples of contemporary jazz and is taught in conservatories throughout the world. It was a critical success as well, garnering praise from critics, scholars, ethnomusicologists and historians alike.

For me, the desire to compose a piece based on the same aesthetic that guided my father's *Afro Cuban Jazz Suite* for the sixty-fifth anniversary of the recording and the eightieth anniversary of Harlem's legendary Apollo Theater was not nostalgic. I did not pine

## Toward a Global Jazz (cont.)

for those days nor did I think that replication of these sounds was healthy for the future of jazz. Rather, I wanted to call attention to the spirit of experimentation, inclusion, and restless vision that guided the composition and also spoke to the many worlds through which Chico moved, which gave him a clear command of the techniques necessary to write such a transcendent work.

I tapped saxophone virtuoso Rudresh Mahanthappa, employed modern jazz language of cluster and tonal centered harmony, wrote in the rhythmic language of contemporary Latin idioms from Colombia, Peru, and Pan America/Africa, and composed a multi-movement suite that celebrated the progressive restlessness and vision that infused so much of Chico O'Farrill's output. Like my father I am a musician caught in the midst of many worlds, a classically trained pianist and composer, an Afro-Latino-centered performer, and a jazz pianist by trade. The resulting *Afro Latin Jazz Suite* is a direct result of these influences that stretch beyond boundaries, geographies, and genres.

In this spirit I entered the next phase of my career, honing the ALJO over a fifteen-year span that has shaped the music into a modern, Pan American, Pan African, Pan Latino instrumental sound that consciously questions the very nature of what most would consider "Latin Jazz." My teaching philosophy is also based on the simple precept that the music we call jazz is really Afro Latin based and one in which we've barely scratched the surface. Why we limit ourselves to terms like jazz, Latin, classical and otherwise is lost on me and apparently was lost on my father. We see music from the privileged vantage point of being in the midst of many worlds and are ready to propel the music we love into uncharted waters.

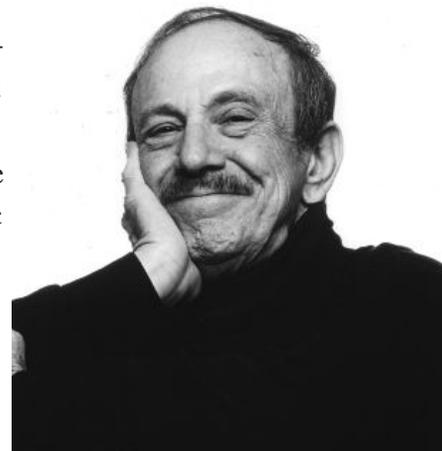
To that end the Brooklyn College Conservatory of Music, with the assistance of the H. Wiley Hitchcock Center for Studies in American Music, has given me the privilege of creating a unique Jazz Master's program. Our Master's in Global, Contemporary, and Experimental Jazz will deal with the newest strains in this music. We will study, teach, and perform music

from across the planet including Indo-Pak, Arabic, and Afro-Latin traditions. We will delve into the Afrocentric worlds of Free and Avant-garde jazz as explicated in the AACM and the Chicago School.

And we will explore the nexus of Electro-Acoustic jazz and the exciting horizon of contemporary notated and improvised performance practice. The days when practitioners had to choose a single style or genre and restrict themselves to a solitary musical reality are rapidly disintegrating, as evidenced by the final movement of my *Afro Latin Jazz Suite* (entitled *What Now*) that was written to celebrate the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic contours of Indian-inspired sonic expression filtered through a Mozambique contemporary Afro-Latino rhythmic style.

Several days after Castro and Obama's historic announcement the ALJO Orchestra, along with assembled guest musicians producers and staff from across the globe, found themselves happily ensconced in Havana's Abdalla studios. I looked out across the room and thought about the remarkable journey this music has taken. We recorded a historic two-CD set which so far has garnered two Grammy awards (including one for best original composition) and singled itself out for international critical acclaim, much as my father's *Afro Cuban Jazz Suite* did nearly seventy years earlier. How? By taking chances, rewriting the rules, and challenging the very norm understood to be jazz, as Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo taught us to do when they first engaged in their "Conversation."

The Conversation continues indeed!



Chico O'Farrill

# Samuel Floyd, Pioneering Cool Gent: A Tribute

Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., University of Pennsylvania

It would take a book to fully explain the importance of Samuel Floyd to music scholarship. And it's going to take many years to measure his impact. Anyone who experienced his work ethic, drive, focus, encyclopedic knowledge, and professional mastery knew they were in the presence of the best. Sam Floyd possessed an expansive and creative wingspan. It beamed scholars, activists, composers, performers, archivists, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, university administrators, foundations, publishers, and audiences. His sheer intellectual force was only matched by his generosity of spirit. He used his resources to showcase the scholarship of others and through that bigheartedness created a field of inquiry he called "black music research." Black music research could only be called a big house, thanks to Sam. At his now-fabled conferences one would experience live new music, living composers, in-process scholarship, in the foxhole mentoring—all with the sweet touch of a family reunion. Elders taught while young folks pondered, questioned, and of course made mistakes. Without sounding too nationalist about it, the intellectual space Sam created felt like a village in all good senses of the word, but in a downtown hotel.

Everyone seemed as surprised as I to learn upon meeting Sam—the scholar who changed the map—that he was such an understated man. Sam's professionalism was so legendary and awe-inspiring that I pause to discuss anything too personal here. I'm more than comfortable, however, sharing how he affected me directly and how he influenced the trajectory of our discipline.

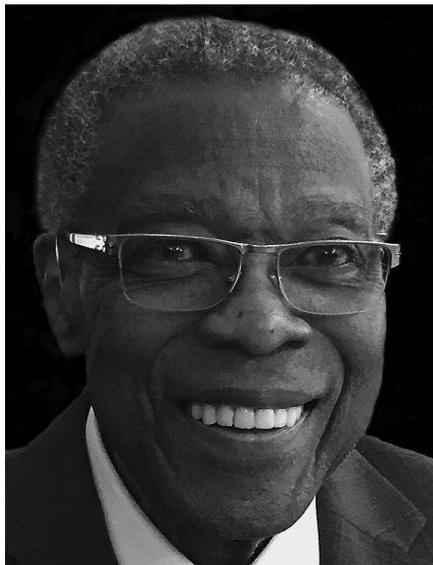
One of Sam's most lasting contributions to the broader field of American music was his use of the term "black music research," a pre-hashtag phrase

that expressed some of the political urgency of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As he began to institutionalize his ideas through scholarship, fundraising, and organizing, many joined his call. Scholars and musicians of all stripes attended biannual conferences of the Center for Black Music Research (CBMR), which Sam founded in 1983. They joined in with the common purpose of approaching black music research with the seriousness and comradery that Sam modeled. A gifted convener, Sam convinced established music societies to meet in conjunction with the CBMR. The cross-fertilization of ideas that resulted through the years certainly can be felt in the books published in University of California Press's *Music of the African Diaspora* series, which he initiated and edited.

When his work took a theoretical turn in the early 1990s, he applied the insights of poststructuralism, history, and literary theory to black music research through his application of the important scholar-

ship of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Sterling Stuckey. This move culminated in a groundbreaking article in *Black Music Research Journal* (a semi-annual publication of the CBMR) on the ring shout ritual and his Call-Response concept, a work now considered fundamental to black music studies.

I met him in the mid-1980s. Because of my lack of scholarly experience, I literally "fell off the turnip truck" and landed in his office at Columbia College after reading about him and his work and discovering that we were both Chicagoans. I was pursuing a Master's degree in music education and needed a research project. He kindly assigned me something to do that took much too long to complete—a straight-forward survey instrument to determine the demographic makeup of music department faculty in the United



*Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. 1937-2016*

## Samuel Floyd (cont.)

States. How he had the patience to deal with someone wholly ignorant of the scholarly world he represented (and who was also a father, choir director, accompanist, bandmate, public school teacher, and private piano teacher) is beyond me. Yet Sam coaxed that project out of me somehow. It became my first publication written under the name “Guy Ramsey,” a hustling musician seeking an advanced teaching certificate for a pay raise and who thought that the brief article would be his last publication. Sam seemed to know better.

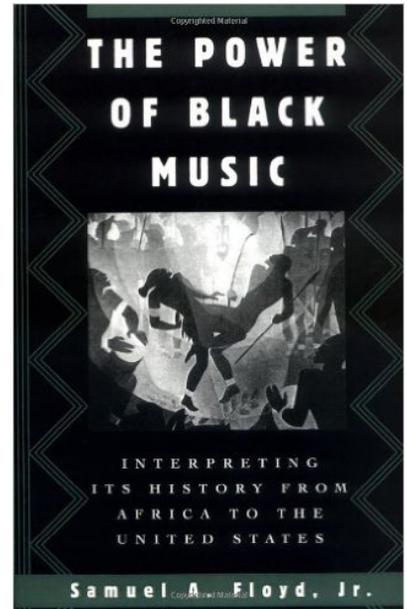
From that point on, I listened carefully to Sam’s directions. I attended the graduate program he suggested. And I worked with the sole advisor he strongly recommended, his good friend, the inestimable Richard Crawford, who did the daily dirty work of teaching me this business. Sam’s was one of the steady voices that helped me muster the endurance to make it through graduate school, the land of self-doubt, stipends, and pity. As I learned more about what I didn’t know, we became closer, with him graciously allowing me to engage in conversations about his work. As I moved through the ranks, our intellectual relationship matured. Although we would remain mentor and protégé for most of the time I knew him, it always made me feel like a bigshot after having one of our deep shop talks. Those exchanges took place in person or by phone—rarely on email as I recall—and they were foundational for me not just thinking like a scholar but feeling like one.

I admired Sam’s swag. He moved with ease through the academy and achieved his success, from my viewpoint, with a graceful stealth. Yet beneath his quiet exterior there was an activist’s fire. What confounds me to this day is how Sam convinced many from around the world to join his mission. And he did it all as a “cool gent,” a smooth, seemingly unflappable get-it-done man who was easy to admire but difficult to mimic. Sam gave as much respect as he received. I’m sure there are countless stories about how his example helped younger scholars, gave them voice and a rigorous read without belittling or berating them. He was, indeed, one of the most encouraging people I’d ever met. And if you were fortunate to have

had conversations with Sam, you learned almost immediately that it was his musicianship (and not necessarily his unsurpassed organizational abilities) that sat at the core of achievements. He knew so much music—from concert music to the most obscure blues—that he could see connections where others did not, and worked tirelessly to instill his ideas into academy discourse.

I don’t think I ever got over the fact that Sam answered my phone calls through the years. He was a star to me. To share a laugh with him was one of things that made me feel at home in this skin in my chosen profession. The confidence he demonstrated in my abilities through the years gave me reasons to keep on pushing despite doubts and obstacles both real and imagined. His career made my own possible.

When someone has been as formative to one’s life of the mind as Sam was to mine, the past tense of it all is impossible to grasp. I’m currently ending a semester in which I taught *The Power of Black Music*, his magnum opus that changed how many of us think about African American music making. It was fascinating to see a new generation of students turn onto his ideas, proving their continued relevance. Sam worked hard to stay current, and I think it would have made him happy to see young adults debating his ideas with enthusiasm. As for me, re-reading words that changed my life drove home our collective loss. But it also inspired hope that witnessing the impact of a life well-lived with such dignity and purpose could change the world permanently for the better. We should all strive to do as well.



# Prince's Last Decade

Patrick Rivers, University of New Haven

Will Fulton, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

The sudden death of Prince (*b* Prince Rogers Nelson 7 June 1958) on 21 April 2016 shocked music fans worldwide, and prompted a celebration of his artistry. In the wake of his passing, many commentators took a new look at his best-known and best-appreciated recordings, released roughly from 1978 to 1989, and praised the artist for his transgressive approach to visual performance, politics, and music industry structures. Prince's public works from his first decade as a recording artist, commonly discussed as the "Purple Rain era," have been the subject of monographs such as Per Nilsen's *Dance Music Sex Romance: The First Decade*,<sup>1</sup> documentary films such as *Prince: A Purple Reign*,<sup>2</sup> and numerous interviews and articles. In contrast, his vibrant later years are less considered. This is especially true of Prince's last decade, a period in which he was engaged in a prolific recording career, committed political activism, and innovative business practices outside the intense public spotlight he generated during his best-known performances.

It's a situation where people want me to go back and do what I used to do. They have to understand that it's my body of work and I'm trying to put in that body of work things that I haven't done. So that, when I finish and I look at all of it, it represents the whole complete pie as opposed to the same thing over and over again.<sup>3</sup>

2004 was Prince's last stand as a hit-making popular artist. After years of scarce public appearances, he performed with Beyoncé at the Grammy Awards in February and in March, entered the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and released his *Musicology* album with major label distribution to a robust wave of positive press coverage and record sales. However, he continually sought to transcend traditional music industry structures as an early digital music entrepreneur.

While he was no longer in the pop spotlight by 2006, Prince's last decade is an intriguing period of his

career. Reviews became tepid despite the release of more content. The media gave him less attention but he appeared everywhere, with everybody. Perceived as greedy and ungrateful, he promoted a prudent model for artist ownership and revenue generation and put



*Prince, curtain call following final concert performance  
Fox Theatre, Atlanta GA, 14 April 2016  
Photo by Evan Carter; evancarterphotography.com*

his money, time, and energy toward social justice. Without having to consider existentially record sales or concede to standard music industry procedures, Prince, in his final years, used his music and his platform to explicitly challenge and appease his dedicated enthusiasts, provoke socio-political thought, innovate the music marketplace, and pay homage to the black music foundations upon which his first decade was built.

Prince's last decade began with the release of *3121* (2006), his last gold-selling album or single. With an extensive catalogue and an inimitable command of popular music performance and songwriting, Prince spent his final decade expanding the diversity of this body of work by engaging contemporaneous

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

Superbowl halftime performance	LotusFlow3r/Ap!Sound albums	20Ten album and tour	Welcome 2 America tour	forms new band. 3rdeyegirl	Warner Music Group renegotiation	PLECTRUM/ELECTRUM album	Baltimore Rally 4 Peace (May 10)	Art Official Age album	Hin'N'Run tour	Tidal deal announced	Hin'N'Run Phase One album	Piano and a Microphone Tour
Planet Earth album				Live Out Loud tour							Hin'N'Run Phase Two album	
3121 album												
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015			2016

Timeline of Prince albums, tours, and events, 2006–2016

aesthetics while highlighting the rich history of black music. “Black Sweat” was the second single released from *3121*. The single represented Prince’s attempts to carve a space in the twenty-first century pop landscape with production inspired by current hitmakers like the Neptunes, whose minimalist, synth-heavy, and rhythm-privileging aesthetic echoed *Parade*-era Prince. For the next three years, without significant recognition, he released music that continued to add to his body of work, while giving his core supporters flashes of his earlier sound.

Although he worked with various major labels and companies over the next few years, Prince continually sought alternative ways to get the attention of listeners. For his next album, *Planet Earth* (2007), he once again contracted Columbia for distribution support, but the relationship soured when he came to a separate agreement with Britain’s *The Mail on Sunday* to distribute the album inside newspapers. In 2009, the triple-disc release *LOtUSFLOW3R* was only sold in Target stores in the U.S. and certain online outlets in Europe. Then, in July of 2010, Prince released *20Ten* solely in periodicals in England, Belgium, and Germany. He did consider issuing an expanded version of the album later that year, but his frustration with the music business and dealings with American corporate entertainment conglomerates precluded a traditional CD or digital release. He had become wary of how his music was positioned and consumed in traditional and digital music outlets.

Regarding his earlier music, Prince has enigmatically stated, “I’m not interested in what happened yesterday” but that “to me, time folds back on itself.”<sup>4</sup>

The *20Ten* album is an example of Prince’s nostalgic reflection during his last decade. The title itself recalls a process of revisiting the past—it could be read as both a description of the year of release or as a quip-like follow-up to *1999* (1982). If approached as the latter, the album displays several fragmented elements of his first decade output, as if time folded “back in on itself.” The 1982 LinnDrum drum machine was prominent on several songs and evocatively used for the synthetic drum fills on ballads “Future Love Song” and “Sea Of Everything.” Pulsating low ends of a Moog bass synthesizer propelled “Compassion” and “Everybody Loves Me,” and the horn-section-turned-synthesizer riffs that he popularized on *Dirty Mind* (1980) enlivened “Beginning Endlessly” and “Lavaux.” Prince’s distinct aesthetic had sonic cues that communicated to long-time listeners, and on *20Ten* he delivered a continuation of his archetypal production style. Ironically, the record was not commercially available to the vast majority of fans during his lifetime.

Sonic signatures on *20Ten* establish continuity with the *Purple Rain*-era sound. However, an important shift in political engagement is evident. “Free,” from the album *1999*, was a hyper-patriotic, anti-communist ballad featuring the chorus “be glad that you are free/free to change your mind/free to go most anywhere anytime.” In sharp contrast, *20Ten*’s “Lavaux” illustrated Prince’s explicit engagement with racial injustice during his last decade. The song expresses exasperation with America and the longing for escape that was vocalized in several songs from his last decade: “Life back home depresses me/another form of slavery/the cost of freedom’s anything but free.”

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

In June of 2010, Prince made a second appearance on the BET Awards to accept the Lifetime Achievement Award, and spoke optimistically about the state of black music and the coming “change” in the future in which America would be a “beacon to the world.”<sup>5</sup> The testing of this optimism unfolded over the next six years in wake of what President Obama referred to as

of Barack Obama.” The song also features the haunting line “where the most famous is dead,” a reference to Michael Jackson, who had passed away in June of 2009. Notably, Prince incorporated Jackson’s 1979 breakthrough “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough” into the set list on this tour and in later performances. *Welcome 2 America* was a concession and a celebration. He



*Prince performs at Madison Square Garden during the Welcome 2 America tour, December 2010  
Photos by Christopher Kornmann; [www.spitandimagedesign.com](http://www.spitandimagedesign.com)*

the “slow rolling crisis” of police killings of unarmed black people.<sup>6</sup>

In late 2010, Prince commenced the international *Welcome 2 America* tour. It was the last major tour in the U.S. in which he performed his catalogue of hits in large venues. With the exception of the opening pre-recorded song, the unreleased “Welcome 2 America,” the tour set list was almost entirely greatest hits material. The opening track was suspenseful—far from an idyllic “Welcome”—and disseminated his overt race-based, socio-political perspective to those that knew him most for his transgressive approach to gender and sexuality. The lyrics cautioned: “We still got a lot 2 learn about race relations, if ur in the mood 4 drama/in between 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina and the election 18 *American Music Review* Vol. 41, Issue 1, Fall 2016

gave the general public what they wanted to hear and revealed his increasing engagement with black cultural politics. Prince toured extensively from 2011 to 2013, but did not release another album for four years after *20Ten*—his longest break since 1978. The hiatus was due to a renegotiation with Warner Music Group, a label he had been estranged from since 1991, as well as the forming of a new band, 3rdeyegirl (comprised of Hanna Ford on drums, Ida Nielsen on bass, and Donna Grantis on guitar), in late 2012.

Performing with 3rdeyegirl in small clubs with approximately 1,000 capacity on the 2013 *Live Out Loud* tour allowed for Prince the rare, coveted opportunity for an older popular performer: the chance to showcase new material for a captive audience and

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

shake off the expectations of performing as a classics-driven nostalgia act. Just as David Bowie formed the rock band Tin Machine in 1988 as a way of casting off the burden of performing his standard greatest hits revue, Prince's new band performed a range of new songs and reenvisioned his catalogue without the expectation that he would perform his greatest hits. Many of the new songs premiered during these concerts appeared on Prince's next two albums, *Art Official Age* and *3rdeyegirl: PLECTRUMELECTRUM*, each released in late 2014 through his new deal with Warner Music.

Announced in April 2014, the deal gave Prince rights to his master recordings and was linked specifically to an expiring copyright. This renegotiation inspired similar actions by a number of recording artists whose contracts were similarly impacted by expiring copyrights. Given his stance against the music industry and the history of label ownership and control (frequently using "slavery" to describe label contracts), the significance of Prince acquiring his master recordings cannot be overstated. The renegotiation was announced alongside a planned special edition re-release of Prince's best-known work, *Purple Rain*, and previously unreleased recordings. These would not appear during his lifetime.

In March 2014, Prince unveiled his new band, 3rdeyegirl, and new-yet-old look (a natural, blown-out afro like the one he wore on his first album), with a performance on the revived *Arsenio Hall Show*. His first song, "Funk'N'Roll," highlighted several larger themes of Prince's career. The title and lyrics offer an anthem to the breaking down of racialized industry genre categories of "black" funk and "white" rock. During the performance of the song he stated "I don't really care what y'all be doin.'" This phrase, though surely not an original idea in the history of lyrical braggadocio, succinctly sums up Prince's later career. He wanted to make an impact on the popular music



Concert posters for Prince's *Live Out Loud* 2013 and *Hit'N'Run* 2014–15 tours

zeitgeist with 3rdeyegirl, but there was no real financial imperative to do so. In terms of commerce and respectability, he didn't really *need* to care what other musicians were doing anymore, or worry about his new recordings being competitive in the marketplace. However, perhaps craving relevance, he still engaged with contemporary artists and production styles, particularly for his *HitNRun* albums of 2015.

For a recording artist who had come to prominence with the album credit "Produced, Arranged, Composed, and Performed by Prince," the choice to hire an unknown producer to craft tracks for the majority of his new recordings was surprising. Producer Joshua Welton, husband to 3rdeyegirl drummer Hanna Ford, was twenty-four at the time, and more closely connected to newer production styles heard in R&B and pop that were distinguished by techniques culled from EDM, trap music, and dubstep. Most *HitNRun* tracks were created by Welton. Prince added voice and guitar before allowing the young producer to finish the mix and production of each recording. In a significant shift, Welton had greater control over Prince's sound than any previous creative partner. His engagement with Welton as a younger protégée was part of the ongoing project of his later years, promoting and anointing select contemporary black artists as

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

well as being a generational conduit of black cool and protest.

Among the more politically charged artists that Prince connected with during his last decade was rapper Kendrick Lamar, whose album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Interscope, 2015) is seen as representative of the zeitgeist of the Black Lives Matter movement. During Lamar's process of recording the album, he went to Paisley Park in September 2014. Although Lamar's goal of recording a duet with Prince for *To Pimp a Butterfly* did not come to fruition, during the meeting the two created and performed a version of Prince's 1993 song "Say My Name" (one of Prince's ventures into rapping), with Prince emphasizing in lyric: "you never would have drank my coffee/if I hadn't served you cream." Prince later praised Lamar and his latest album, particularly the track "Alright," which remains a public anthem in Black Lives Matter protests: "He just has something he has to say. It's pure. ... You're not taking 'Alright' off my playlist!"<sup>8</sup>

By the summer of 2015, in the wake of gaining control of his masters, Prince removed all of his music from every streaming service with the exception of the recently launched Tidal. Prince's self-removal of his music from Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube (through threat of lawsuits), by far the three largest media outlets for digital music distribution at the time

of this writing, was an extraordinary move for a major recording artist. For the vast majority of music consumers that had shifted from purchasing recordings to streaming music, Prince's withdrawal from popular digital music services in 2015 made his music virtually invisible.

Tidal is a subscription-based streaming service purchased in summer 2015 by artist and executive Jay-Z who, like Prince, owned his master recordings. They each sought to create a black-owned, artist-controlled music platform, and each has been seen as greedy and out-of-touch for his efforts to wield control of the music. In interviews, Prince likened Tidal to Oprah Winfrey's OWN network as a symbol of black ownership and empowerment. His relationship with the service also offered Prince something further, an on-demand delivery format for his recordings that he had initially envisioned with the NPG Music Club, his own digital music venture, in the early 2000s.

For Prince, the multi-instrumentalist who had learned in the 1970s how to craft complete recordings by himself in the studio, the concept of an immediate delivery service like Tidal offered such a solution. Ideally, the fan experience would mirror the studio environment with as little industry mediation as possible, as Joshua Welton describes: "That's how we wanted this music to be heard—the way it sounds inside [the



*Kendrick Lamar, 3rdeyegirl guitarist Donna Grantis, and Prince perform at Paisley Park, 30 September 2014<sup>9</sup>*

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

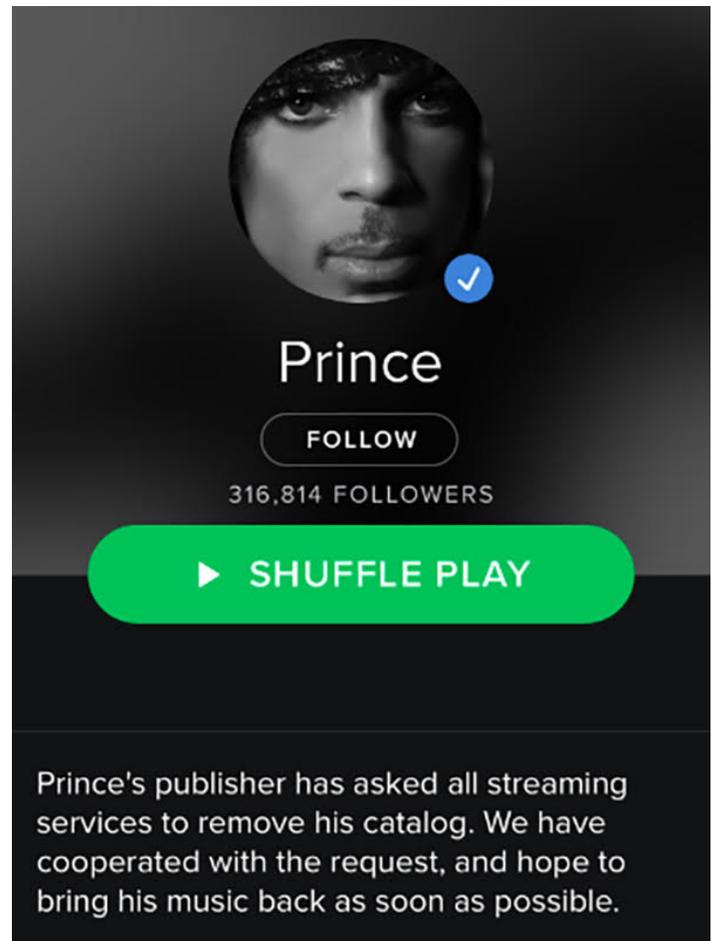
studio].”<sup>10</sup> The inspiration to create music went hand in hand with the sense of freedom from record label politics. Reacting to a Welton production in the studio during a 2015 interview, Prince offered:

I mean, you can't hold something like that back! That's the sound of someone not restricted by anything—not the matrix of a record deal or a contract or a system that's not dedicated to the music. ... That's a sound that has to come out!<sup>11</sup>

The partnership facilitated Prince's goal of having a direct studio-to-audience conduit without the troublesome mediation of the “matrix” of the traditional music industry. Prince released singles on Tidal throughout late 2015 and early 2016. Some of these appeared on the service with very short notice, including the live version of “Black Sweat,” recorded at a concert just seven days before his passing, and released on Tidal days later.

There is no evidence Prince thought April 2015 to April 2016 would be his last year. Unlike David Bowie, who by all accounts wrote and recorded his final album *Blackstar* in the months before his 10 January 2016 passing as a swan song during his battle with cancer, Prince died in the midst of ongoing, vibrant, artistic, and social activity as well as future planning. Still, his last year did include a solo piano tour that amounted to a career retrospective, and comments from Prince about a forthcoming memoir which has yet to materialize.

Prince's last year began with a moment of overt political engagement. Following the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody on 12 April 2015, and the pursuant rioting and turmoil in Baltimore, Prince responded with the single “Baltimore” two weeks later. The song, which powerfully concludes with an aural march scene and chant of “If there ain't no justice, then there ain't no peace,” and the subsequent Baltimore concert and music video, were an apex of Prince's overt political activity in his public works. The release of the song preceded news that Prince would perform in



*Spotify announcing Prince's removal from the service  
Notice sent by email by schuremediagroup.com, July 2015*

Baltimore on Mother's Day in a *Rally 4 Peace* concert. The announcement occurred during a time marked by social unrest and rioting, when curfews were still in effect. Prince's concert performance, part of which was livestreamed on Tidal, included a somber version of “Baltimore,” as well as a review of classic hits. Far more important than the lyrics of the song was the significance of the concert as a locus for community organizing and the promotion of social justice. Prince centered the event around a celebration of mothers, families, and peace, creating an environment to celebrate, mourn, and promote community activism.

The music video for “Baltimore” was released in July 2015 and was Prince's last. Images from the *Rally 4 Peace* concert, though scant of Prince himself, are featured in the video and juxtaposed with images of Black Lives Matter protests and print media accounts of Freddie Gray's death and the unrest in the

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

city. For a popular artist whose image and body were such a prominent iconographic focus of his career, the near-absence of Prince in his final video is significant. While commercial popular music releases often incorporate protest into their marketed products, by all accounts Prince was more concerned with using “Baltimore” and the *Rally 4 Peace* concert to promote awareness of racial inequity and social change rather than to capitalize on the tragedy. Former White House Green Jobs czar Van Jones, who Prince hired in 2010, revealed Prince’s extensive activism in his last years. During his life, Prince made it a condition for partners and employees not to discuss his actions, but Jones asserted that Prince’s public works beyond music needed to be known:

[Prince said] “Everything that you want to do that you think will help the [Black] community. ... I will help you do it.” So I went from working for a president to working with Prince. And every single thing that I said—I said “we’ve gotta go to Chicago and do something about violence,” we did three concerts in Chicago, three. And every community group there he let in. There were no vendors, only community groups to help. We went to Baltimore, we went to New Orleans. There were so many things that he did. Those concerts he was doing were a *cover* for him to be able to go into cities and help organizations, to help leaders, and

touch people. ... He said, “I don’t need any more attention, but I can’t be in this world and see all this pain and all this suffering, and not do something.”<sup>12</sup>

In the context of Jones’s revealing statement, Prince’s March 2016 Oakland concert should be understood as occurring in conjunction with the performer’s funding of Oakland nonprofits Solar Tech and YesWeCode, a nonprofit technology education company for underprivileged students. That he staged shows for many of his 2014–2016 concerts in cities with dense black populations (Baltimore, Oakland, Atlanta, Inglewood) supports Jones’s statement—Prince was using his celebrity, and the “cover” of the concerts, to create sites for community activism and development.

Prince’s *Piano and a Microphone* tour commenced in January of 2016. In *The Guardian* he discussed what would become his final tour:

So I’m doing it to challenge myself, like tying one hand behind my back, not relying on the craft that I’ve known for thirty years. I won’t know what songs I’m going to do when I go on stage, I really won’t. I won’t have to, because I won’t have a band. Tempo, keys, all those things can dictate what song I’m going to play next, you know, as opposed to, “Oh, I’ve got to do my hit single now, I’ve got to play this album all the way through,” or whatever.<sup>13</sup>

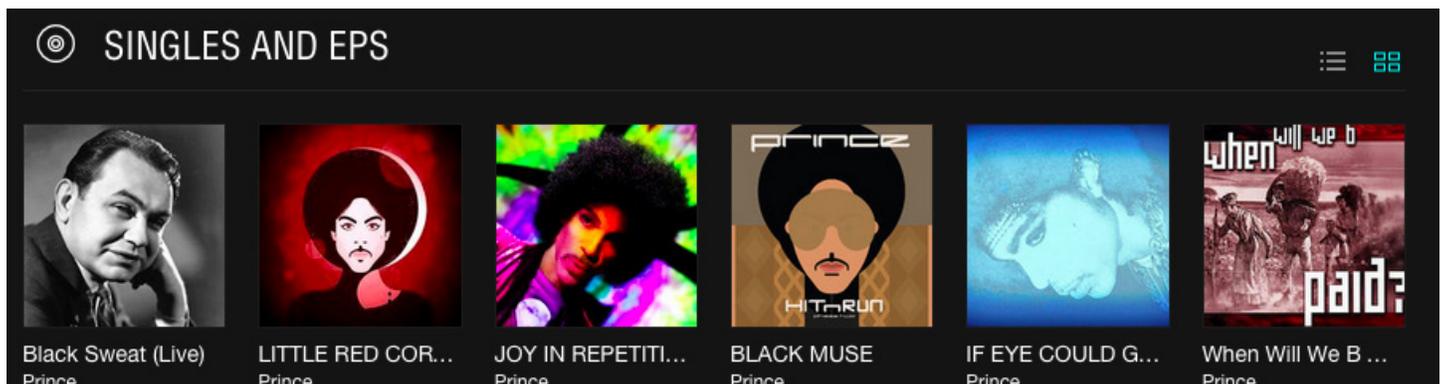


Image from Tidal digital music service of Prince singles released Nov. 2015–April 2016. Chronology right to left: “When Will We B Paid” Nov. 2015; “If Eye Could Get Your Attention” Nov. 2015; “Black Muse” Feb. 2016; “Joy in Repetition” *Piano and Microphone* tour, live from Sydney, Australia Feb. 2016; “Little Red Corvette/Dirty Mind” *Piano and Microphone* tour, live from Sydney, Australia, March 2016; “Black Sweat” *Piano and Microphone* tour, live at Fox Theatre, April 2016

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)



*Rally 4 Peace concert poster*

*Prince performing in Baltimore, 10 May 2015*

*Courtesy of Warner Music publicity <http://press.wbr.com/prince>*

The last concerts Prince performed were an early and late show on 14 April 2016 at the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. His last single “Black Sweat (live)” was drawn from this performance and released on Tidal. A week after his passing, an unauthorized audience recording was briefly posted online. This last concert recording shows Prince as a performer in peak physical condition in terms of his technical abilities as a vocalist and pianist. At fifty-seven, an age when most popular music performers would show vocal strain and even transpose their youthful hits to lower keys to accommodate a worn larynx, both Prince’s full voice and falsetto appeared effortless as he performed a range of songs from his thirty-eight-year recording career. As a pianist, he easily alternated between thumping dance grooves (occasionally recalling bop, stride, and ragtime syncopations) with florid runs during ballads.

His two sets of that evening were disparate challenges for the artist. Notable in his second set was the theme of black empowerment intertwined with his catalogue of love songs that deal with heartbreak and complicated relationships. The set dramatically opened with a dirge-like rendition of “When Will We Be Paid,” a 1969 reparations hymn by The Staple Singers that Prince covered and released as a single the previous year. During the set he fluidly merged lesser

known songs from his catalog with hits, and gave the crowd classic, sensual Prince with his boogie-woogie-like rendition of “Black Sweat,” peeling back the synth-pop sheen of the original and emphasizing the black heritage at the core of the song. In continuing his black music as activism that his shows had become, he addressed black struggle and culture when he demanded that the crowd, “Sit down. We going to have a family meeting,” and began singing “Black Muse”—a song about the perseverance of black people and culture through perpetual turmoil and the prospects of the dawn of a “new day”: “Black muse/we gon’ make it through/surely people that created rhythm and blues/rock’n’roll and jazz, so you know we’re built to last/it’s cool.”<sup>14</sup> Prince’s overt political celebration of black music in his last decade is striking, particularly for an artist who often purposely obfuscated his relationship to African-American culture in early interviews and iconography.

The third encore of the Fox Theatre concert concluded with a peerless “Purple Rain”/“The Beautiful Ones”/“Diamonds and Pearls” medley that extended Prince’s reflection of his career, as well as his historical celebration of black music’s icons. Following a repeated interpolation of Bob Marley’s “Waiting In Vain,” the medley climaxed with a return to the sing-a-long

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

chorus from "Purple Rain." As the crowd serenaded the end of the show he improvised slightly while decelerating and descending to the final chord. Adorned by a linear spectral gradient of purple, Prince uttered, "thank you," and arose from his piano with a raised, cane-holding right fist in the air.<sup>15</sup>

The night after the April 14th Fox Theatre performance, it was reported that Prince was rushed to a hospital after being found unresponsive on an airplane. He made one brief public appearance at Paisley Park a few days later before passing away at Paisley Park on April 21st. During the following celebration of his music, one of the outcomes was the deluge of unauthorized audio and video recordings that appeared on YouTube. Since Prince limited access to his music by removing it from the largest streaming services, Google-owned YouTube profited and became the public's primary method of hearing Prince's music. Although the extraordinary convenience of YouTube has made it an integral part of modern media, the case of Prince highlights that YouTube's business profits from evading the legal rights of individuals.

While Prince had been able to exert some control over the unauthorized distribution of his music, his death made it possible for the music to be exploited freely. For followers of Prince's ongoing quest to wrest control of his music from record companies, the fact that he died without an apparent legal will was shocking. As a result, his estate, including the vast collection of unreleased music housed in Paisley Park's vault, is currently under the control of Bremer Trust and his immediate family.

The story of the recordings Prince made during the last decade of his life will continue to be told in the posthumous releases to come. Warner Music announced the first two posthumous albums—a greatest hits album *Prince 4Ever* and a special edition of *Purple Rain*. Rather than presenting a career-long retrospective, these releases continue to highlight the focus on Prince's most popular period, his

earliest decade. The cover photograph for *Prince 4Ever* features a racially ambiguous image illustrative of his 1990s appearance instead of the natural afro that he donned in his final years. Whereas Warner had re-partnered with Prince for three albums and several singles in his last three years, the decision to present Prince as he was in his early years serves as a reminder of the extent to which his initial hit-making era frames the public's perception of him.

As the posthumous construction of Prince's legacy commences, the authors are optimistic that his last decade will be acknowledged as significant in the public's perception. It is possible to be skeptical and cynical of his late stage pivot, especially his more unambiguous engagement with the black community and his negotiation of his legacy. It is also possible, and more responsible, to see his last decade as a new stage of his life and career that was abruptly contracted. With black musical heritage planted in Joshua Welton, Janelle Monae, Kendrick Lamar, and others, advocacy for musicians' rights impacting the recording industry, and grassroots activism that will perhaps spark the next agents for social justice, Prince's last decade could be the most enduring legacy he entrusts to us—an epilogue that will be beginning endlessly.



Poster for Paisley Park Gala

Promotional poster for Fox Theatre Concert

## Prince's Last Decade (cont.)

### NOTES

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# Now He Walks in Beauty: An American Choral Icon

Malcolm J. Merriweather, Brooklyn College

2016 was a particularly poignant year of loss for the music world. In pop music, the world bid farewell to ground-breaking artists like David Bowie, Prince, and George Michael. On 12 July 2016 the world of choral music lost a great luminary with the death of Gregg Smith. During the second half of the twentieth century, Smith set the standard for professional choirs when he established the Gregg Smith Singers and was widely admired for his contributions to the field of contemporary choral composition through interpretation, commissioning, and recording.

Gregg Smith was born on 21 August 1931 in Chicago, Illinois to Myrtle and Howard Smith. He earned a B.A. in music and an M.A. in composition from the University of California at Los Angeles. His primary composition teachers were Lukas Foss and Leonard Stein, and his conducting and ensemble mentors were Raymond Moreman and Fritz Zweig. Throughout his career, Smith served on the faculties at Ithaca College, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Peabody Conservatory, Columbia University, and Manhattan School of Music.

In 1955, he founded the Gregg Smith Singers in Los Angeles. At the Contemporary Music Festival in Darmstadt, Smith and his singers were featured in *Time* (September, 1961, 73.) after a successful performance of music by Schoenberg, Krenek, and Ives. This was one of the first instances in which the choir received international acclaim for outstanding tone, technical precision, and intonation. Smith led the professional vocal ensemble for more than fifty seasons, earning worldwide praise through festivals, domestic tours, and international residencies. Smith recorded more than 100 albums with the Gregg Smith Singers, winning Grammy Awards for Best Choral Performance in 1966, 1968, and 1970 for *Ives: Music for Chorus*, *The Glory of Gabrieli*, and *New Music of Ives*, respectively.

With his ensemble, Smith led many premieres of contemporary works, as well as revivals of early American music. Their repertoire has included the premieres

of Igor Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* and William Duckworth's *Southern Harmony*; the complete choral works of Arnold Schoenberg and Elliott Carter; revivals of works by Charles Ives, William Billings, and Victor Herbert; pieces by Edwin London, Blas Galindo, Jorge Córdoba, Irving Fine, Morton Gould, William Schuman, Ned Rorem, and other twentieth century composers; and classics by Giovanni Gabrieli and Heinrich Schütz. In 1973, Smith furthered his commitment to American music by founding the Adirondack Festival of American Music in Saranac Lake, New York. For over thirty-four seasons the festival consisted of a choral workshop for amateur musicians, choral-reading sessions for composers, and concerts that featured notable composers from around the world.

Throughout his career, Smith collaborated with some of the most influential composers and conductors of the twentieth century. He was held in high regard by Leonard Bernstein, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss, Robert Craft, Milton Babbitt, Igor Stravinsky, and many other leading figures of his generation. In 1988, the American Academy and Institute for Letters and Arts presented Smith with the Lillian and Nathan Berliawsky award in recognition for his contributions to "serious American music."

Smith was an admired and prolific composer with over 400 choral, orchestral, theatre, and chamber works, many of which have been published by G. Schirmer, Music 70, Laurendale, and E.C. Schirmer. His compositional output can be grouped into four categories: original choral compositions; chamber and solo vocal; holiday music and folk song arrangements; and musical theater arrangements. My dissertation "*Now I Walk in Beauty, Gregg Smith: A Biographical Essay and Complete Works Catalog*" examines the qualities of text treatment, rhythm, form, phrase analysis, harmony, and expressivity that distinguish Smith's compositions.

At UCLA, Smith credits Lukas Foss with teaching him the emerging compositional innovations

## Gregg Smith (cont.)

of the twentieth century. It was here as a graduate student that he began to explore the music of Charles Ives, and where he encountered an article by the same composer, “Music and Its Future,” that would shape his own compositional method:

[The] distribution of instruments or group of instruments or an arrangement of them at varying distances from the audience is a matter of some interest; as is also the consideration as to the extent it may be advisable and practicable to devise plans in any combination of over two players so that the distance sounds shall travel from the sound body to the listener’s ear may be a favorable element in interpretation. It is difficult to reproduce the sounds and feeling that distance gives to sound wholly by reducing or increasing the number of instruments or by varying their intensities. A brass band playing pianissimo across the street is a different-sounding thing from the same band, playing the piece forte, a block or so away. Experiments, even on a limited scale, as when a conductor separates a chorus from the orchestra or places a choir off the stage or in a remote part of the hall, seem to indicate that there are possibilities in this matter that may benefit the presentation of music, not only from the standpoint of clarifying the harmonic, rhythmic, thematic material, etc., but of bringing the inner content to a deeper realization (assuming, for argument’s sake, that there is an inner content). (Charles Ives, “Music and its Future,” *American Composers on American Music*, ed. Henry Cowell [Stanford University Press 1933], 191–98)

The article had a profound impact on Smith’s choral compositions. He began to reject the rigid two-dimensional paradigm and confines of the concert hall. His original music is often scored for multiple choirs, instrumental ensembles, and soloists. These musical



Gregg Smith, 1931–2016

components are always intended to be positioned spatially within the performance venue. As in the cases of *Jazz Mass for Saint Peter’s Church* (1966, 1972), *Holy* (1992), *Mass in Space* (1982), and *Moreman Magnificat* (1975), Smith provides a descriptive diagram of performance configurations for the conductor. *Beware of the Soldier* (1968) utilizes three separate forces—children’s choir and wind quintet; soprano and string quartet; and men’s chorus and brass quintet—all in separate parts of the room. Similarly, his *Earth Requiem* (1996) echoes Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*, with choir and orchestra on stage and children’s choir with portative organ in the distance.

Smith is known for his tuneful melodies, while harmonic structures move back and forth from traditional to non-functional. His most difficult pieces for choir, requiring advanced or professional singers, are often motivic, with emphasis on the linear voice leading in each vocal part that results in an often dissonant harmonic idiom, as in *Landscapes* (1957), *Ave Maria* (1966), *Concert Madrigals* (1960), and *Exultate Deo* (1957).

Smith occasionally used twelve-tone technique, as in the Sanctus of the *Jazz Mass for Saint Peter’s Church* (1966, 1972), which is composed on a row based on a series of fifths that he also utilized in the *Suite for Harp* (1964) and *Theme and Variation for Piano* (1965). At other times, like Ives, his harmonies are polytonal or polymodal, as in *Two Whitman Songs* (1995), *On the Beach at Night* (1995), and *Magnificat* (1959). In

## Gregg Smith (cont.)

*Alleluia: Vom Himmel Hoch* (1978), a macaronic piece using German and English, Smith explores ostinato figures within a multi-dimensional context. In pieces like *Sound Canticle* (1974), elements such as rhythm, text, and duration are at the discretion of the performer. Other non-traditional features in *Sound Canticle* include tone clusters, glissandi, whispering, speaking, improvised pitches, and graphic notation of both pitch and rhythm. Compositions like *Babel* (1969) include aleatoric elements like *Sprechstimme*, *ad libitum* speaking, and fragmentation of words.

Smith's long association with the Texas Boys Choir led to many commissions for treble choir. These works often feature pleasing melodic figures and canonic motifs. His understanding of the children's voices is demonstrated in *Bible Songs for Young Voices* (1963) and *Songs of Innocence* (1969). Smith was a master of imitative polyphonic forms: he wrote more than fifty canons, and they also appear frequently within other compositions. The deceptively titled *Simple Mass* (1976), for two-part treble voices, creates many challenges for the singers, with polychords, tone clusters, and mixed meters. Smith is highly regarded for sensitive text setting, and has drawn on a wide variety of literature, from the poetry of John Milton to e.e. cummings; sacred texts; words by his contemporaries Kim Rich and Gomer Rees; and his own texts.

Chamber music and solo vocal music occupy an important position in Smith's output, and he often wrote pieces for people close to him. Most of the solo vocal works since 1970 were written for his wife, Rosalind Rees. The clarinet was his favorite instrument, but he also wrote for other instruments, including violin and viola in major chamber pieces such as *Fallen Angels* (1998), written for Linda Ferriera, and *Trio on American Folk Song* (1981). A recording of Smith's chamber works for soprano voice and instruments, titled *Delicious Numbers* with the soprano Eileen Clark, is expected to be released in early 2017. Gregg's final recording project, a 2-CD set titled *20th Century American Choral Treasures*, was released in October 2016 by Albany Records. The album consists of

remastered stereo tape recordings made for the nation's bicentennial in 1975-76. This retrospective recording with the Gregg Smith Singers demonstrates the depth of his influence in contemporary American music with compositions by William Schuman, Leonard Bernstein, and Randall Thompson. The album includes the first-ever recording of Lukas Foss's cantata *The Prairie*, conducted by its composer.

Smith and his ensemble earned many awards over the years. Highlights include Chorus America's prestigious Margaret Hillis Award (2001) for choral excellence; the Composers Alliance's Laurel Leaf Award (2003) for distinguished achievement and fostering American music; and Chorus America's Louis Botto award for Entrepreneurial Spirit (2004) "for a lifetime of devotion to choral music and unflagging creativity in finding ways to bring it to a broader public, through outstanding performances, recordings, and the preservation and dissemination of choral manuscripts." Smith earned honorary doctorates from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and St. Mary's College, Notre Dame. In 2014 Dennis Keene and Voices of Ascension (New York City) awarded the Perrin Prize to Smith for a lifetime contribution to the arts.

Gregg Smith will be fondly remembered for his masterful conducting that inspired several generations of singers, and for his advocacy for contemporary composers and their choral music. Barbara Tagg, my mentor and a Smith protégé, concisely summed up his life: "Now I Walk in Beauty" is a Navajo text he set as a simple canon many years ago; Smith has walked in and created beauty throughout his life, inspiring a generation of singers, composers, conductors, and audiences across the United States and well beyond." I am lucky enough to have been one of the recipients of Gregg's many gifts. As a first year doctoral student I boarded a Metro North train from Harlem to Yonkers where I was to approach Gregg Smith about being the subject of my dissertation. Gregg and his wife Rosalind (Roz) warmly welcomed me into their home—and our journey began. Over the next three

## **Gregg Smith** (cont.)

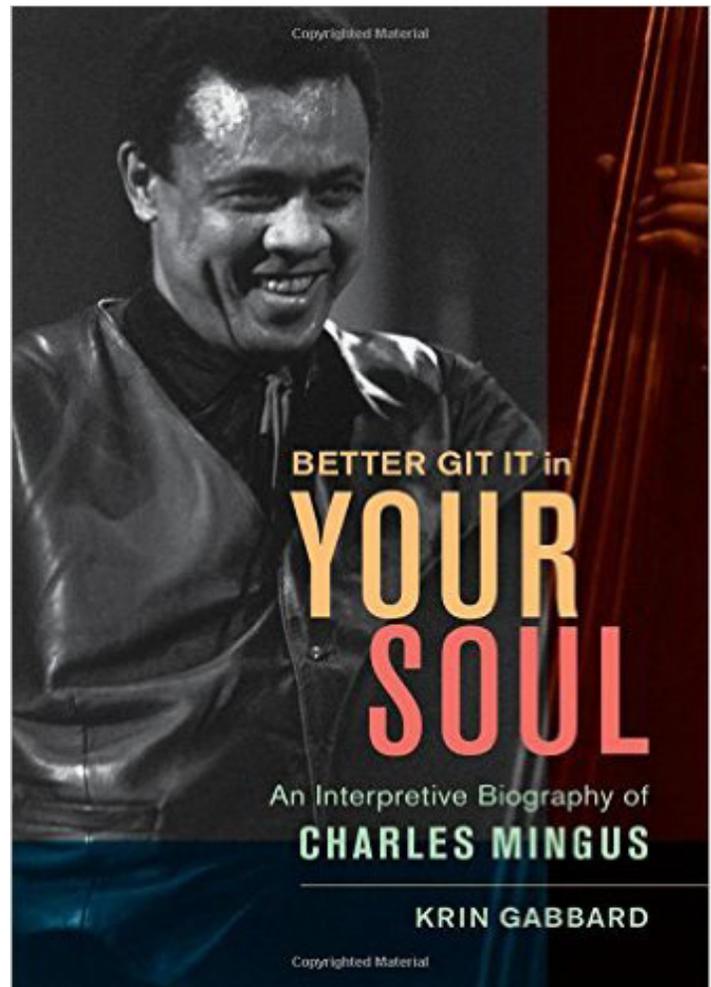
years, I made the familiar trip to the Smith's home and interviewed Gregg. From the comfort of their cozy living room I sat across from Gregg, perched in his big leather chair. With pencil, note pad, and iPhone voice memo engaged, I listened as he shared musical experiences, events, and jaw-dropping anecdotes—the Stravinsky stories were my favorite. With perfect pitch, an infallible ear, and knowledge that knew no boundaries, Gregg Smith was one of the most caring, humble, gracious, and loving individuals that I have ever met. Now *he* walks in beauty.

## A Portrait and Three Retellings

Vilde Aaslid, University of Rhode Island

The word “interpretive” in the subtitle of Krin Gabbard’s new book *Better Git It in Your Soul: An Interpretive Biography of Charles Mingus* (California, 2016) offers a clear clue to the book’s mission. It is not a replacement for either of the two existing biographies—Brian Priestley’s *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (1982) and Gene Santoro’s *Myself When I am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (2000). Nor is such a replacement needed. But in the fifteen years since Santoro’s book was released, a wealth of new Mingus material has emerged: the collection of John Goodman’s interviews *Mingus Speaks*, Sue Mingus’s chronicle of her life with Charles Mingus titled *Tonight at Noon*, and the recorded interviews with Mingus’s sisters, among others. Gabbard integrates these new sources into a wide-ranging consideration of the Mingus’s life and works in a project that is both personal and celebratory. Similar to Gabbard’s groundbreaking earlier work on jazz, the book takes a broad view of Mingus’s artistic contribution, including poetry and film. A complex, sometimes contradictory portrait of Mingus emerges. As Gabbard writes in the introduction, “Anyone hoping to read the biography of a man with a single, unified identity should read no further.” (8)

Fittingly, *Better Git It In Your Soul* does not proceed in a single, unified narrative. The first part comprises a conventional biography, with a retelling of Mingus’s life from beginning to end in just over one hundred pages. In each of the remaining three parts, Gabbard circles back to the beginning of Mingus’s life and revisits its outline with a different focus. Part two covers Mingus’s literary work, including his texted music, poems, and autobiography. Part three reviews Mingus’s music with particular attention to Mingus’s participation in the Third Stream. Part four examines in detail Mingus’s relationships with three important collaborators: Dannie Richmond, Eric Dolphy, and Jimmy Knepper. The book closes with a brief epilogue, “Mingus in the Movies,” detailing Mingus’s film ap-



pearances as well as the use of Mingus’s music in later movies.

Those already familiar with Mingus’s life will find few new stories in part one, but Gabbard’s ever-present interpretive voice makes for an interesting read nevertheless. During the otherwise swift recounting, the narrative intermittently dallies on topics not obviously critical to Mingus’s life story, but that Gabbard describes as deserving of special attention. These eddies include a history of the Watts Towers from Mingus’s childhood neighborhood, and Mingus’s encounter with Ralph Ellison. Mingus’s relationship with Duke Ellington, which Gabbard frames as a kind of lifelong father/son struggle, also plays prominently in Gabbard’s retelling, as does Mingus’s mental health. These themes and vignettes bring some fresh perspective in a section that otherwise draws heavily from the Priestley and Santoro biographies.

Gabbard’s most innovative contributions come in the latter half of the book. The research and insights

## A Portrait and Three Retellings (cont.)

in part two alone make it a worthwhile project. In this section we get a much-needed examination of the many ways in which Mingus worked with language as an expressive medium. As Gabbard observes, “Mingus always had the touch of a poet,” (114) and many scholars have noted Mingus’s proclivity towards using text as a mode of expression.<sup>1</sup> Although there have been several useful analyses of individual pieces, never before has there been such an exhaustive overview of Mingus’s texts. Here, Gabbard’s analysis flows as he examines the song titles, lyrics, poems, and the longer-form writings of Mingus. He begins from a stance of taking Mingus’s poetic approach seriously, writing that, “if the center of action for Mingus had not been music, he might have become the peer of [Ted] Joans and [Bob] Kaufman.” (116) This section includes a transcription of a poem that Mingus recorded himself reading, found among the audiotapes in the Charles Mingus Collection at the Library of Congress. Moving from song lyrics to complete poems, Gabbard traces themes in Mingus’s writing and makes a compelling case for the written medium as a significant component of Mingus’s artistic life.

Whereas Mingus the poet had not been thoroughly studied previously, Mingus the autobiographer certainly had. Gabbard brings helpful new material to the flourishing discourse on Mingus’s *Beneath the Underdog* in his thorough examination of the book’s editorial process. This section decenters Mingus himself, focusing instead on the women who helped shape the famous book into its final form. Particularly useful is Gabbard’s research into the work of Nel King, whose role in the book lies somewhere between editor and co-author. In the letters from the Alfred A. Knopf Archives, Gabbard finds a patient and committed King. Her resilient shepherding revised the autobiography from the sprawling typescript draft that resides in the Library of Congress into the much-lauded book that was eventually published. What Gabbard makes clear is that Mingus’s vision was always at the center of Nel King’s process, and yet *Beneath the Underdog* could not have taken its form without her.

The organization of *Better Git It in Your Soul*—the constant return to the beginning of Mingus’s life to cycle through with another lens—comes with an inherent challenge: repetition. With each pass, there are echoes of previous sections and the redundancy might frustrate some readers. But in a way, the structure evokes the process of research, in which we circle our subject, approaching it through different archives, works, and ever-developing theories. Each day in research is like a new encounter with a slowly changing subject, seen anew from every angle. Mingus changes over the course of Gabbard’s retellings, and by the end I had come to see the recursive structure as a strength of the book and a reflection of the multiplicity at the core of Mingus’s identity.

When Gabbard opens his book with a reflection on his first encounters with Mingus’s music and titles the section “Charles Mingus Changed My Life,” he signals that this book is personal. For Gabbard, “Mingus was exceptional,” and the admiration for the man and his music evident in that statement permeates the whole of the book. Gabbard strikes a tone that is celebratory, just shy of reverent. As he writes in his introduction, “I present this book in hopes that it will bring Mingus more of the esteem he deserves.” (9) On the whole, this book offers a valuable and well-documented contribution to the burgeoning studies on Mingus and his music.

### NOTE

1. See, for example: Nichole T. Rustin, “Mingus Fingers: Charles Mingus, Black Masculinity, and Postwar Jazz Culture” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1999); Scott Saul, *Freedom Is Freedom Ain’t: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties* (Harvard University Press, 2003); David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (Princeton University Press, 2006).



*Brooklyn J'ouvert*

## The H. Wiley Hitchcock Institute for Studies in American Music

and

The Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities at Brooklyn College  
in collaboration with the Conservatory of Music, the Department of Africana  
Studies, and the American Studies Program at Brooklyn College present:

Fall 2016

### Music in Polycultural America

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#### **Brooklyn J'ouvert**

#### **Reckoning with Brooklyn Carnival's past, present and future**

In recent times, the future of the Caribbean American celebration of J'ouvert has been called into question due to incidents occurring within the vicinity of the event. Join us for a symposium led by a panel comprising artists scholars and activists who will discuss the history of the Caribbean Carnival in Brooklyn, the story of J'ouvert, and the challenges and opportunities it faces moving forward.

Panelists: Joshua Guild, Jumaane William, Michael Manswell, Kendall Williams, Yvette Rennie.

**Thursday, November 3, 7:00–8:45pm**

**Tanger Auditorium, Brooklyn College Library**

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#### **Leonard Bernstein and the Piano**

#### **Leann Osterkamp**

Leann Osterkamp will discuss and perform important solo piano works by American conductor, composer and pianist Leonard Bernstein, including pieces that are currently unpublished.

A Young Steinway Artist, Leann Osterkamp is a doctoral candidate at The Graduate Center CUNY. An instructor at Juilliard Global Ventures, a teaching fellow of five years at the Juilliard School, and winner of international competitions, Leann regularly performs for the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation and the New York Festival of Song.

Osterkamp is currently recording *The Complete Works of Leonard Bernstein for Solo Piano* for the Steinway and Sons Label.

**Monday, November 14, 11am–12:15pm**

**State Lounge SUBO**

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#### **I Know Who it is That Doesn't Belong Among Us: Scoring Paranoia in The Twilight Zone**

#### **Reba Wissner**

Reba Wissner is on the Music History faculty of Montclair State University, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, New York University, and Berkeley College. Dr. Wissner received her M.F.A. and Ph.D. in Musicology from Brandeis University and her B.A. in Music and Italian from Hunter College of the City University of New York. She is the author of *A Dimension of Sound: Music in The Twilight Zone* (Pendragon Press, 2013) and *We Will Control All That You Hear: The Outer Limits and the Aural Imagination* (Pendragon Press, 2016).

**Monday, October 17, 2:15 pm**

**Tanger Auditorium, Brooklyn College Library**

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#### **Vince Giordano: There's a Future in Past**

#### **A Film by Dave Davidson & Amber Edwards**

Join us for an exclusive showing of a film exploring the extraordinary life and music of Vince Giordano, one of New York's most celebrated jazz musicians and leader of The Nighthawks, an ensemble that specializes in big band jazz and dance music from the 1920s and 30s. The group has been featured in films such as Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* and Woody Allen's *Café Society*, as well as HBO's series *Boardwalk Empire*. Q & A session to following the screening.

**Thursday, September 22, 5:30 pm**

**Tanger Auditorium, Brooklyn College Library**