

Adding to the Narrative: Intersectional Feminist Critical Curatorial Practices in Classical Vocal Music Performance

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Abstract

Diversity and inclusion within Western art music have become topics of elevated importance in recent discussions. To create enduring results regarding these matters, there needs to be a commitment to in-depth study of practices that will produce visible change. This is one of the goals of my research, in which I tackle issues of representation by focusing on Black women composers and their absence from the canon as overlooked and marginalized artists. It is well known that women have been denied many opportunities throughout history; as composers, many experiences crucial to professionalism were not always available to women, including music education in composition, the publication and circulation of their works, not being hired as conductors, or receiving reviews from influential critics.¹ These opportunities and resources dwindled further if a woman was also a person of colour. Thus, in order to ensure their inclusion within the canon, these underrepresented identities demand and require unique recognition.

I have examined the issue of neglected women of colour composers in classical music from an interdisciplinary standpoint, utilizing the methodologies of history and experimentation to form an “intersectional feminist critical curation” framework. This framework implements knowledge from intersectional feminist theory and music curation practices in order to answer following questions: “What is the impact on new audiences of diverse backgrounds experiencing classical music through an intersectional feminist curatorial framework?”, “Can classical music be an effective device for messages of social and political change?”, and “What is the impact on myself as a classical vocalist and a Black woman to implement an intersectional feminist curatorial framework within my musical study and performance?”. The overall goal of this research was to discover an effective way forward to achieving diversity in classical music for underrepresented groups. Drawing from this study, I have created a digital performance project entitled “The Narrativity Sessions,” which functioned as an experiment utilizing this knowledge of intersectional feminist theory and praxis fused with select critical curation strategies applied to my own artistic practice as a classical singer. The outcome was a novel artistic practice that can

¹ Marcia J. Citron, “Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon,” *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 1 (1990): 104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/763525>.

contribute to creating innovative and artistically fulfilling performances while simultaneously advancing diversity and inclusion in the classical music sphere for audiences, performers, and composers alike.

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Chapter I: Introduction

A New Framework for Diversity and Inclusion

It is vital to our modern and rapidly changing society that we continuously assess and analyze histories, so that we can make valuable changes for the present and future, and do not repeat past mistakes and outdated patterns. However, it seems that many fields look to history as an unwavering path to follow, repeating and disseminating the same information and patterns despite there being new ways of thinking and discoveries of novel information readily available. When one looks at music history, specifically in the realm of classical music, what is predominantly taught without much variance are the composers and compositions that lie within the Western art music canon.

If one takes a broad glance at the Western art music canon, one can see a clear lack of diversity in terms of large demographic groups,² such as gender and race. Thus, it is hardly just for the canon to be the authoritative voice and often, the sole resource to studying and performing classical music, when in fact it does not include the diverse stories and contributions of many individuals, such as women and people of colour. Those who exist at the marginalized intersections of race and gender, such as Black women, are the least likely to have class privileges, and thus, often face more societal injustices.³ To tackle this diversity and inclusion issue, this thesis presents a review of literature regarding the history of women, race, their intersections, and their relation to classical music to present a detailed overview and understanding of canons, feminist movement, feminist musicology, and intersectional feminism. It also presents several music curation practices for use in combination with feminist theory, forming a framework I've entitled "intersectional feminist critical curation."

This framework was employed within an experiment, *The Narrativity Sessions*, a performance project that discusses intersectional feminist issues through performing classical vocal music by

² Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," 102.

³ Mikkie Kendall, *Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2020), Apple Books, 138.

women of colour. The results of this experiment were then used to answer the following questions: “What is the impact on new audiences of diverse backgrounds experiencing classical music through an intersectional feminist curatorial framework?”, “Can classical music be an effective device for messages of social and political change?”, and “What is the impact on myself as a classical vocalist and a Black woman to implement an intersectional feminist curatorial framework within my musical study and performance?”. The feminist themes of this experiment and this thesis’ exploration into women’s music history provide a more complete narrative of various Black women composers and how their intersectional marginalization influenced their abilities to become professionals in their field. It also makes apparent their continued marginalization and the need, in a modern and diverse society, to change this oppressed position.

Methodology: Interdisciplinary Methods and Practices

Intersectional Feminist Theory and Music Curation

This thesis highlights the lives and works of Black women composers, who are continuously overlooked within classical music, largely due to existing within an intersectional identity that places them in a marginalized position in society. Social and cultural contextualization is required to properly assess the complex experiences of marginalized women composers within the field of classical music. In order to sufficiently contextualize the work of women of colour composers, I provide an interdisciplinary literature review concerning the topics of canon and artist formation, feminist musicology, feminist movement and intersectional feminism. Feminist musicologist Marcia J. Citron’s writings are examined to highlight the issues of exclusivity within the canon and the reasons why white, middle- and upper-class males have succeeded much more as professional composers.

With Dr. Christina Scharff’s work, I further present the issue of inequality in the classical realm, as well as the field’s desire for an “ideal artist” that fits a specific and palatable mold. The identified issues will make evident the invisibility of Black women within this space and how past

feminist efforts and feminist musicology have not done much for advancing and supporting intersectional marginalized identities. Building upon this focus of various unrecognized Black women composers, I provide a historical overview on the life and work of classical music's arguably most successful Black woman composer, Florence Price. I believe an analysis of Price's multidimensional marginalized existence through which she experienced certain privileges while also being denied many opportunities provides interesting insight on the nuances of personal identity. It also shows how crucial it is to actively assess the full scope of diverse human experience within music, and any other field; so that we learn from the historical narratives of marginalized people and then make adequate changes towards diversity in the future.

As the system currently in place does not hold space for marginalized identities, this thesis offers a new framework through which we can adequately assess and view women of colour composers within classical music. The first half of this framework takes inspiration from the teachings of various authority figures within 2nd and 3rd wave intersectional feminism, which are movements that will be discussed in Chapter II in the subsection "Exclusionary Practices of Feminist Movement and the Stagnancy of Feminist Musicology." This includes lawyer and critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality. In her work, Crenshaw later expands upon intersectionality's definitions, abilities, and applications across wider scopes along with scholars Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall in writings concerning the field of intersectionality studies. bell hooks is another key intersectional feminist with her emphasis on solidarity, education, and the establishment of theoretical frameworks for feminist movement. I have also received insight through the texts of various modern Black feminists who are paving the way for a new era of advancing intersectionality for the masses, building upon 1st and 2nd feminist wave activism with a 3rd wave of Black feminism. While 1st and 2nd wave feminism focus more on legal rights and creating life for privileged women outside of domesticity, 3rd wave Black feminism is an intersectional feminist movement that places the focus on personal narrative for relatability and connection, fused with social and political discussion to imbue action and change.

The second half of this framework draws upon curatorial strategies and practices from the visual arts and their implementation in music. The implementation of music curatorial practices and concepts that are at the forefront of new music explorations are examined, such as the various types of contexts and the changing role of the audience. The majority of this knowledge has been acquired through the Royal Conservatoire's 2020 elective seminar entitled "With and Beyond Music: Curatorial Practices in Musical Performance and Composition," led by curator, performer, and researcher Heloisa Amaral. Another key focal point of curation is the notion of subjectivity, which is central to the practices of certain visual arts intersectional feminist critical curators conducting exhibition work in Canada. This specifically includes the Black feminist visual arts curators Gaëtane Verna and Andrea Fatona.

Research Questions, Experimentation, and Goals

Through the combination of my research regarding intersectional feminist theory and music curation practices, as well as the implementation of this framework in an artistic experiment taking the form of a digital performance project and visual vocal album, *The Narrativity Sessions*, I search for an answer to the following question: "What is the impact on new audiences of diverse backgrounds experiencing classical music through an intersectional feminist curatorial framework?". I would also like to discover if the implementation of these practices in performance will bring us closer to true inclusion within classical music and to diversifying the canon. In other words, how can classical music be an effective device for messages of social and political change within this field and even beyond? Finally, I would also like to address the artistic and personal implications on myself as an artist, by answering: "What is the impact on myself as a classical vocalist and a Black woman to implement an intersectional feminist curatorial framework within my musical study and performance?" Qualitative data was collected in the form of a questionnaire (Appendix 9) in order to assess the impact and influence of *The Narrativity Sessions* on audiences.

The goal of this research and experiment is to construct a wider narrative for the diverse and intersectional experiences of Black women and the African Diaspora as a whole; through the

artistry of music and words, blending personal storytelling as well as social and political messages with classical music acting as the vehicle for thought.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Assessing Barriers for Diversity in Classical Music

The Homogenous Western Art Music Canon and The “Ideal” Artist

“A canon is an authoritative list of books or a body of material that is considered to be essential for understanding a subject.”⁴ Canons exist in all fields, as the baseline for content that is deemed “excellent,” “genius,” and worthy of a place in history, thereby continuing its relevance in our society. Canons possess immense power as well as respect, and “set exclusionary standards for works whose quality and thematic content do not meet certain criteria.”⁵

Feminist musicologist Marcia J. Citron has defined within her substantial work in gender and music that there exist two main types of canons within musicology, repertorial and discipline.⁶ Repertorial canons refer to the repertoire of pieces that are frequently utilized within the field for various purposes such as study, performance, teaching, and recording. Repertorial canons can be segmented into eras or genres; with further segmentation, perhaps then one could see more women composer’s works being appreciated, such as Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) being a critical influence within the early music canon.⁷ However, in reference to what the majority of people refer to as “standard repertoire,” very few women composers, if any, are consistently and frequently mentioned.

Concerning the idea of the disciplinary canon, Citron has stated that this revolves around the factors that shape a field’s “self-view”⁸ of what is accepted and thus dispersed within the said field. Characteristics such as “goals, methodologies, research conventions, institutions, social structures, belief systems, underlying theories, audience, language” come together to form a

⁴ Sondra Wieland Howe, “Reconstructing the History of Music Education from a Feminist Perspective,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 6, no. 2 (1998): 98, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/40327121>.

⁵ Citron, “Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon,” 102.

⁶ Howe, “Reconstructing the History,” 99.

⁷ Julie C. Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 30, Kindle.

⁸ Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20, Google Books.

disciplinary paradigm⁹, an ideal archetype. Musicologists identify disciplinary paradigms such as “Western art music, Schenker analysis, sketch studies, archival work, documentation, objectified language, era periodization, historical emphasis, and scholarly journals.”¹⁰ These paradigms should be continuously assessed and critiqued, as “[c]anons embody the value systems of a dominant cultural group that is creating or perpetuating repertoire... canons arise in a multi-cultural society of disparate power structures, where canons themselves provide ‘a means by which culture validates social power.’”¹¹ As Citron also notes, whether one is consciously aware or not, we continue to exist within a white male supremacist society, and thus, the values and influence of this group remains dominant above all others. She gives an example from 20th century literature, where teachers, “mostly white, male, and middle class” have been the ones to determine what should -or not – become part of the canon.¹²

The same could potentially be said for any discipline that involves being accepted into academia and higher-level institutions, as professors and academics often belong to this dominating group of people. A 2018 study that gathered the data of 1.5 million college and university faculties in America concluded that in terms of full-time faculty ranging from lecturers to professors, 40% were white males and 35% were white females. This is a stark contrast to the 3% each that were Black males and females.¹³ Therefore, if the educators and disseminators of historical social and cultural information are for the majority leaning towards objective teaching practices that perpetuate the tendency to not stray from tradition, and as a result offer students’ histories that have excluded minorities due to society’s misogynistic and prejudiced attitudes present at the time, how will one ever see truly diversified canons? This is one of the reasons I aim to examine the disciplinary canon that is Western art music, bringing forth the issues that women as a whole have faced historically that have prevented them from entering the field of classical music professionally. This is not to say that white educators cannot teach topics concerning racism, or

⁹ Howe, “Reconstructing the History,” 99.

¹⁰ Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 20.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Fast Facts: Race/ethnicity of college faculty,” National Center for Educational Statistics, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61>.

that male teachers cannot discuss issues related to sexism. However, there may be less emphasis placed upon such important subjects due to the individuals having other, more privileged lived experiences that do not deeply resonate with a marginalized existence. This could result in less effective discussion due to the personal nuances and subjectivity that this social and cultural subject matter requires.

The formation of canons is a complicated process that occurs over an extended period of time and involves various factors; but at its basis, Citron has noted that its foundational elements are the dominating behaviours and sentiments taking place at the time of composition, coupled with the social climate of the present.¹⁴ The conditions that have acted as barriers to women's professionalism within the Western art music canon include the following: advanced music education (specifically within composition), publication of works, obtaining powerful high-level music leadership positions, and critical reception.¹⁵

Women have historically been excluded from all activities concerning the outside world due to the cult of domesticity or the cult of womanhood. This was the notion that society functioned "properly" when the sexes existed within two separate spheres. The public sphere of the exterior world was men's domain, and the private sphere of the interior was women's domain.¹⁶ Karin Pendle reiterates this in her discussion of women's history: "Victorian middle- and upper-class women were trained for marriage, for playing a supportive yet dependent role in a patriarchal society, not for careers."¹⁷ Virtually confined to the realm of the home until larger social change took place at the end of the Victorian era, women began to seek opportunity in the public sphere in areas such as education and the workplace. The end of the 19th century is when women began to have access to music education in the conservatoire setting. However, they still weren't at this time permitted to enter theory and composition classes as these were considered subjects reserved for males only. If women were serious about pursuing composition, they were most

¹⁴ Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," 104.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶ Rebecca Beusaert, "The Cult of Domesticity, Religion, and Social Reform," HI271: Survey of European Women's/Gender History (Lecture Notes, Wilfrid Laurier University, October 22, 2019).

¹⁷ Karin Pendle, *Women and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 193, Kindle.

likely incredibly motivated to be self-taught or instructed by family or close friends inside the home, as music theory skills in harmony, counterpoint and orchestration are fundamental to the path in becoming a successful composer.¹⁸

The difficulty of having their works published was another factor that halted women's professionalism in music. With the societal shift from wealthy and elite music patronage (from which women were also excluded) to the dissemination of works through publishing companies, success in publication was often linked to being a well-known, established composer who has had their works performed frequently. Repeat performances of one's compositional works denoted the sustainability of a composition and thus, its worthiness of being circulated through publication.¹⁹ Having their works consistently performed were often linked to and a result of the next barrier, which is that women were almost never hired as conductors. A conductor functions in a position of leadership, authority, and power within professional music that mainly exists in the public sphere, such as in concert halls and larger performance venues. Being a respected conductor often results in connections and access to musicians and instrumental groups with which to work on one's compositions and thus, have them performed and perfected for publication.

Finally, if a woman composer did not have her works performed regularly and by result, had little to no publications, then there was no tangible material for music critics to assess and discuss in the media.²⁰ This lack of opportunity for discussion about their compositions meant that audiences wouldn't even have the chance to learn of women composers works in their daily life and thus, continues the cycle of largely impenetrable barriers women faced in attempts to exist as professional musicians in the public sphere.

The women who did compose music in the private sphere, were composing what is also known as salon music, and is often associated with amateurism and thus deemed unworthy of

¹⁸ Citron, "Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon," 105.

¹⁹ Ibid., 106.

²⁰ Ibid., 102.

professional public performance.²¹ Solely creating music within the home reduced women to composing mainly within small form genres, which has resulted in most women composers up to and including the 19th century having a plethora of works within the genres of parlour songs, vernacular songs, art songs and chamber music.²² Large-scale genres such as symphonies and operas require elements such as stages, sets, concert halls and a substantial number of singers and instrumentalists involved, only available in the public sphere. As a result, male composers have dominated the genres to which we often look as paradigms for artistic masterpieces within this discipline, such as operas and symphonic works.²³ These divisions among male and female composers have subconsciously and consciously have created a clearly apparent imbalance in our history, as Pendle states: “[a] two-tiered hierarchy of music making, the professional and the amateur, in which the former takes precedence. Since the word amateur implies the domestic world inhabited by women, critics have thus placed less value on women’s activities.”²⁴

Citron provided an update on the situation of women composers in the Western art music canon in the mid 2000s, stating that in the era of her early work the 1990s, this was a time when feminist musicology was brand new, as was the idea of canon formation. Since its beginnings, feminist musicology has made a substantial effort to retrieve histories and works by female composers. However, the overview of women’s experiences so collected remains too general and focused mainly on white women composers. Citron criticizes Pendle’s “add-and-stir” model, the idea of “mechanically” adding more women composers to the group without carrying out meaningful research on their lives, in other words, without reflecting on how they fit within the social and cultural contexts. Citron writes: “while visibility does count for a lot—without exposure, women remain invisible and are assumed non-history worthy—it is not the whole picture... the how and why must be addressed, not just the what and the how many.”²⁵ I believe this to be the difference between tokenistic diversity and achieving true inclusion, as real diversity has never been about

²¹ Ibid., 110.

²² Pendle, *Women and Music*, 193.

²³ Citron, “Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon,” 110.

²⁴ Ibid., 180.

²⁵ Marcia J. Citron, “Women and the Western Art Canon: Where Are We Now?” *Notes* 64, no. 2 (2007): 210, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30163078>.

simply attaining higher numbers of marginalized people or reaching a certain quota. Even the repertorial canon of new music, a genre that is often considered rebellious and progressive, does not absolutely break with the disciplinary canon of Western art music. Composer and academic Sandeep Bhagwati writes: “[the field of new music] does not truly desire to go against social order, complying with institutions (opera houses, symphony orchestras) when they decide to play and feature their works...playing the marginal was a tactical enactment that could be abandoned once the desired position of privilege had successfully been secured.”²⁶ Citron and Pendle both agree on the need for new paradigms to assess the “how” and “why”, the social and cultural history that has kept women of colour within the oppressive margins of society.

Dr. Christina Scharff’s research offers an “ideal” musician archetype of our modern society, a mold that is often quite difficult for marginalized people to achieve. According to Scharff, the “ideal” musician can easily handle and/or has access to the following: unstable and volatile work environments, networking opportunities, early and higher music education, and parenting roles limiting career opportunities. Musicians in general are expected to be incredibly flexible and dedicated to the craft, often by working various gigs and positions to make up their livelihood. This lifestyle is not entirely secure, and often provides lower incomes as well as little to no workplace benefits. A UK Musicians Union’s survey found that “65% of surveyed musicians had no pension plan, 60% reported working for free in the last twelve months. Only 10% were full-time salaried employees, half reported not having any regular employment... and the vast majority of musicians (94%) work freelance for all or part of their income.”²⁷ This type of uncertain and insecure work environment excludes many people, such as those who require consistent medical care, as well as those lacking savings, external financial support, or without any type of familial assistance.

²⁶ Sandeep Bhagwati, “New Music: Towards a Diversity of Practices,” *On-Curating* no. 47 (2020): 45, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-47.html#.YTI1bS0Rq9a>.

²⁷ Christina Scharff, “Explaining Inequalities in the Classical Music Profession,” *On-Curating* no. 47 (2020): 16, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-47.html#.YTI1bS0Rq9a>.

The issues of networking and its relation to homophily, the concept of choosing to form relationships based on shared demographic backgrounds,²⁸ are incredibly relevant topics to intersectional feminism discussions. Black feminist authors such as Sophie Williams have written at length about how to deal with the marginalizing effect of homophily in the workplace. Williams' book *Millennial Black* provides great insight on the necessity of creating networks and mentorships with people of similar backgrounds to one's own in order to ensure success and advancement in the workplace as Black women. The book also provides advice on how to cultivate such networks and mentorships. Homophily is a tendency that people possess entirely naturally, and stems from our search for comfort and familiarity of some form, to create the basis of any new relationship. These could include gravitating towards shared traits with others in race, gender, education, class, social groups, or value system.²⁹ While homophily is often not pursued with ill intent, it is an exclusionary principle. This becomes clear when one examines the statistics surrounding the types of people who tend to possess the higher-level (i.e., mentorship) positions at companies and institutions, who are more often than not both white and male.³⁰

Coupled with the basic concept that music is also a non-compulsory, autonomous activity that people partake in by choice, and those who are drawn to its copious different genres and want to engage with it, will do so within the spheres that resonate with them. Consequently, those who do not feel welcome will most likely not enter new, undiscovered spheres. This can and does lead to all sorts of imbalances within a field, such as less diversity in terms of geographics, gender, social class, race, and religion.³¹ Sandeep Bhagwati further refines this issue when he notes that these imbalances are deeply enforced and rooted in a tradition that uplifts the same group of people for generations, while other demographics are deterred and hindered from the field. Over time, this imbalance becomes structural, leading to increasingly homogeneous and hierarchical institutions.³²

²⁸ Ibid., 17

²⁹ Sophie Williams, *Millennial Black: The Ultimate Guide For Black Women At Work* (London: HarperCollins Publishers), 170.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bhagwati, "New Music," 45.

³² Ibid.

Having previously discussed with Citron's work the necessity for advanced music education to achieve professionalism, it is important to also call attention to the financial barrier this often presents. While women in music are now allowed to receive higher education in composition, they, along with any other prospective student, must pay application fees, audition costs, and high tuition costs in order to obtain their higher-level education. Hence, woman coming from a less fortunate background cannot afford expensive educational programs. This is another source of inequality that the conservatoire and university system perpetuate. Theatre historian Anke Charton recognizes this as a form of "gatekeeping" in the field of professional classical music:

The process of professional formation and validation as a musician within the traditional Western network of institutions signifies an enormous investment of time and money packaged within a narrative of a chosen elite...The socioeconomic borders of music education are an entwined hedgerow of financial and educational privileges. In addition to the money needed to obtain a degree, implicit, class-labelled knowledge of music and its associated settings function as a major gatekeeper.³³

There is also great privilege and associated connotations in being able to receive early music education. These are often integral years of child development where a foundational interest and skill is created and honed easily within a subject and is simultaneously associated with one's social status and class. This notion dates back to the early 19th century, as amateur music making became considered a "social grace in imitation of English high society."³⁴ It was often only the upper-class families with adequate wealth who could provide music instruction and instruments for their daughters, but still with women being restricted to playing harpsichord, harp, guitar, or piano.³⁵ Pendle writes the following about music education in American childhood: "middle-class women soon began demanding education, to better train their children; they wanted training in music in order to bring the beneficent influence of the "divine art" into the home."³⁶ Finally, the element of parenting, and specifically, motherhood, can be seen as a hinderance to professional musicianship. As women are historically associated with childcare and domesticity, it is likely for

³³ Anke Charton, "Diversity and New Music: Interdependencies and Intersections," *On-Curating* no. 47 (2020): 8, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-47.html#.YTI1bS0Rq9a>.

³⁴ Pendle, *Women and Music*, 193.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

them to be perceived as eventually fulfilling that parenting role as their main occupation. This can lead to women being seen as unable to commit to the unpredictable demands of artistic work and being potentially viewed as unreliable due to maternity leave and other reasons related to childcare duties.³⁷

Scharff concludes that due to the requirements one must possess to achieve success in the field, the “ideal” classical musician is gendered, classed, and racialized. There is a “prevailing association of classical music with whiteness,” the middle- and upper-class are likely to have more access to influential networks and financial means, and masculinity is continually associated with creativity while female artists being expected to take on supportive roles such as teachers.³⁸ Historically, it has also been thought that women should simply be satisfied acting as muses to men’s creative genius, instead of seeking out more active artistic roles.³⁹ This can be attributed to Charles Darwin’s theory of social Darwinism, which deemed women as inferior evolutionary developments in relation to men, and thus did not possess the intellect required to create high art forms.⁴⁰ Darwin’s theories are also central to scientific racism discussions due to his beliefs in a hierarchy of races, making him a founding contributor to white supremacist ideology. When one assesses the factors that form a canon with the elements that create the “ideal” musician, the exclusivity and inequality of the field of classical music becomes glaringly obvious. It is evident that fewer opportunities for success and progression have always been and continue to be available for marginalized people.

As a starting point for inclusive efforts, I now bring attention to the legacy of Black women composers in 20th century America, with a comprehensive focus on Florence Price. These women were able to achieve varying levels of professionalism within music despite their lower odds of attaining success. It is important to add these unfamiliar stories to the historical narrative so more people can understand that Black women composers have a rich, multidimensional history

³⁷ Scharff, “Explaining Inequalities,” 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁹ Pendle, *Women and Music*, 211.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

in classical music. Despite not having the resources and opportunities of their more privileged counterparts, many were able to create beautiful and substantial bodies of work and support themselves with composition and performance careers.

The History of Black Women Composers and The Life of Florence Beatrice Price

Notwithstanding the fact that the average music history course omits their stories, there is a broad history of Black woman composers achieving great success in classical music dating from the early 20th century. The peak of this success was during the time of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1910s-1930s, a flourishing cultural movement in New York City, and a welcoming community for Black people to blossom artistically and intellectually. The Harlem Renaissance has been described as “a moment of hope and confidence, a proclamation of independence, and the celebration of a new spirit exemplified in the New Negro.”⁴¹ It was a time where Black people began to thrive in the public space creatively as “Black concert choral groups developed, composers won awards, and scholars studied Negro folklore and songs.”⁴²

Black woman composer Shirley Graham Du Bois (1896-1977) was passionate about the Black renaissance ideology, and although she didn’t live in the Harlem community, she sought to create works that clarified and represented Black cultural identity.⁴³ She has largely been attributed to being the second wife of W.E.B. Du Bois, the renowned civil rights activist, author, NAACP founder, and a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance.⁴⁴ This is the case even though many of Shirley’s artistic and intellectual pursuits took place long before she had met her husband. Shirley Du Bois was a profoundly expressive individual and explored several different realms as her artistic mediums. She was involved in academia from 1926-1935, with her education taking her to the Sorbonne in Paris, Columbia University, Morgan State College, and the Oberlin

⁴¹ Samantha Ege, “Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence,” *The Kapralova Society* 16, no.1 (2018): 6, <http://www.kapralova.org/journal30.pdf>.

⁴² Howe, “Reconstructing the History,” 100.

⁴³ Sarah Schmalenberger, “Debuting Her Political Voice: The Lost Opera of Shirley Graham.” *Black Music Research Journal* 26, no. 1 (2006): 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25433762>.

⁴⁴ “W.E.B. Du Bois,” NAACP, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/web-du-bois>.

Conservatory.⁴⁵ Her versatility as a writer allowed her to create operas, plays, novels and biographies, all with the artistic goal of articulating African-American heritage.⁴⁶

The community of the Harlem Renaissance was indirectly formed as a result of the Great Migration of the early 20th century, a mass movement of African-Americans from the south settling and seeking refuge in northern cities in the United States, hoping to escape the violent racial abuse and segregation of the Jim Crow era that was deeply ingrained in the southern states.⁴⁷ From the traumatic experiences of legal lynchings and segregated society, and in the era preceding, the enslavement of their race as a whole, Black people had no choice but to seek strength and a way forward through the means of expression, with music being a critical source for communication of their stories.

Blues and gospel music were developed at this time and functioned as part of activist work while being shared among the safe spaces Black folks created for themselves, as unfortunately, discrimination and segregation were also prevalent in the northern United States. Artists in these genres used their voices to seek justice and community, as well as to express their own personal experiences, “a wedding of politics and the aesthetic.”⁴⁸ The genres of blues and gospel correlate easily with nightclubs and churches, thus these public spaces became safe havens for Black folks, and specifically Black women, who often took on leadership and musical roles, utilizing the church as “a means of spiritual and emotional survival,”⁴⁹ and with their presence in nightclubs “women musicians spoke candidly to community about continued difficulties and hope for the future.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Josephine Wright, “Shirley (Lola) Graham Du Bois.” *Grove Music Online*, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049984>.

⁴⁶ Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*. (New York: NYU Press, 2002), 44.

⁴⁷ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 189.

⁴⁸ Julie C. Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction*, 187, Kindle.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 192

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

After the Great Migration, there was a shift seen in cultural values among middle- and upper-class Black folks. More emphasis was placed upon accomplishments in classical education, languages, and the arts.⁵¹ These values were reflected in the cultural movement that took place in Illinois, known as the Chicago Black Renaissance. However, the safe spaces for Black women composers were often created within the home. An important supporter of Black composers in art music was Estelle C. Bonds, whose home functioned essentially as a 20th century salon, open as “a new Chicago community for African-Americans... a cultural hub for artists and intellectuals.”⁵² Estelle Bonds’ daughter Margaret Bonds took after her mother in terms of natural artistic and musical talents, going on to become a successful composer of art songs, solo piano repertoire, orchestral works, and chamber ensemble pieces.⁵³ Composer Irene Britton Smith was also active at this time and functioned in the same circle as Bonds’ and Price. Her studies took her to Juilliard and as far as France to study composition with Nadia Boulanger.⁵⁴

Another important figure of the Chicago Black Renaissance, as well as the Harlem Renaissance was Nora Holt, who was active during the mid 1910s-1920s as a music critic, cabaret singer, magazine editor, and composer.⁵⁵ She was an integral founding member to various organizations in Chicago, such as the National Association of Negro Musicians founded in 1919 along with other musicians in the sphere.⁵⁶ Holt completed her advanced music education in Chicago, becoming the first Black person in the United States to receive a master degree in music, having graduated from the Chicago Musical College, now known as Roosevelt University.⁵⁷ Holt went on to write approximately two hundred compositions, including orchestral, chamber and vocal works. Unfortunately, her life’s work, apart from a solo piano piece, was lost due to theft of her belongings from storage.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that there are no tangible manuscripts or scores, it does not negate the impact and breadth of work that Holt and other Black women composers

⁵¹ Helen Walker-Hill, “Black Women Composers in Chicago: Then and Now,” *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (1992): 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/779279>.

⁵² Ege, “Florence Price,” 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Walker-Hill, “Black Women Composers in Chicago,” 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

whose works did not survive the years, contributed to the 20th century Black artistic and cultural renaissance, as well as music history as a whole.

There are many other modern Black women composers not discussed in this section such as Undine S. Moore, Maria Thompson Corley and Jacqueline Hairston, whose lives and careers took place in the mid-end 20th century or are currently thriving today. A quote from Moore highlights the personal effect of racism and discrimination felt by Black people who simply desired to create art: “One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of Blacks, so that though I have been ‘making up’ and creating music all my life... I would not have thought of calling myself a composer or aspiring to be one.”⁵⁹ Moore, Corley, and Hairston are featured composers in the experiment portion of this thesis along with Margaret Bonds and Florence Price.

As this section functions as a brief overview of some Black woman composers, it should be noted that there is much more history that could be discovered and discussed. Music history scholar Sondra Wieland Howe believes that one should look to “alternative perspectives to construct a comprehensive history of music education,” stating that “this wealth of material on the black experience would add a rich dimension to our ‘canon’ of the history of music education.”⁶⁰ In an attempt to add another dimension to this narrative, I now shift focus to the complex life of Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953), who would come to be known as an internationally renowned and acclaimed African-American female composer. Price was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas to a middle-class Black family, as the daughter of Dr. James H. Smith, a dentist and Florence Irene Gulliver, a music teacher.⁶¹ Price’s mother was her first music teacher and even had her performing in public by the age of four.⁶² It is important to note that Price’s father’s life and position was not the typical situation of the African-American community in this time

⁵⁹ Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 61, Google Books.

⁶⁰ Howe, “Reconstructing the History,” 100.

⁶¹ Ege, “Florence Price,” 2.

⁶² Barbara Garvey Jackson, “Florence Price, Composer,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 1 (1977): 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1214357>.

period, as he entertained a successful dental practice of a wealthy, interracial clientele that even included the Governor of Arkansas.⁶³ Thus, Price's family was already established in a more privileged position than the average Black person in the southern United States. The years leading up to and after Price's birth, there was deep political unrest and consequences for the lives of southern Black folks, as the Reconstruction era ended in 1876, and the power of white supremacy was restored in the South.⁶⁴ Racial tensions, as well as outright racially motivated violence were felt and exhibited throughout Price's life in Arkansas. Alongside this hostile environment, her life remained filled with music education and artistic opportunities throughout childhood, as by eleven she had compositions printed, and by sixteen she was compensated for her compositional work.⁶⁵

When the time came to seek higher music education and Price was looking to attend the New England Conservatory, her mother proposed she "pass as having Mexican heritage" in order to diminish the severity of racism and oppression she would experience. While the conservatory did allow Black students to apply at the time, there was no protection if they were accepted "from the attitudes and prejudices in society that they would surely face from peers and superiors."⁶⁶ This was possible due to Price's mixed heritage on her mother's side, resulting in her paler complexion as a lighter-skinned Black woman, or to someone unaware of her background, a woman with "racial ambiguity."⁶⁷ While the idea of "passing" as a race different than one's own in today's world is a controversial topic of discussion and criticism, in a time where Black people were being refused many opportunities in society due to their racial background, it was a means of survival and one can empathize with Price's mother in her encouragement of this option to construct the best possible outcomes for her daughter's success.

⁶³ Ege, "Florence Price," 2.

⁶⁴ Jackson, "Florence Price, Composer," 30.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁶ Ege, "Florence Price," 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Price's time at the conservatory was fruitful and resulted in a double major diploma in organ performance and piano pedagogy.⁶⁸ After her schooling, it was her intention to return to teach Arkansas, which she did indeed do, teaching at Shorter College in North Little Rock, and eventually became the Head of the Music Department at Clark University in Atlanta, Georgia.⁶⁹ This was now the era of Jim Crow and despite Price's exceptional musical and teaching talents, she was often rejected and denied opportunities due to her race, such as her application for membership with the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association.⁷⁰

With racial tensions steadily rising in the south, Price's time in Arkansas culminated in 1927, due to a horrific lynching in a middle-class Black neighbourhood in Little Rock,⁷¹ which prompted her family's move to Chicago. This is the time period in which we see Price's music career truly flourish. Settlement in Chicago provided Price the backdrop of the previously mentioned burgeoning sociocultural movement, Chicago Black Renaissance, through which she developed close relationships with Estelle and Margaret Bonds, even residing in their home to devote her time solely to compositional work. Through Price's relationship with the Bonds', her artistic circle expanded to eventually include the likes of Marion Cook, Abbie Mitchell, and Langston Hughes.⁷²

By 1928, Florence was working with two publishers, as well as writing for radio and music commercials.⁷³ The moment that launched Price's career to widespread attention throughout the United States was her winning of the 1932 Wanamaker Prize for her Symphony in E minor. Winning this national scale competition allowed her music to be brought to the attention of influential professionals in the field, such as Frederick Stock who conducted the Chicago Symphony. Stock subsequently premiered Florence's symphony at Chicago World's Fair Century

⁶⁸ Jackson, "Florence Price, Composer," 35.

⁶⁹ Ege, "Florence Price," 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jackson, "Florence Price, Composer," 36.

⁷² Ege, "Florence Price," 7.

⁷³ Jackson, "Florence Price, Composer," 37.

of Progress Exhibition Concert.⁷⁴ This was the first time in history that any major professional orchestra in America performed a symphony by a Black woman composer.⁷⁵

Despite being secretive of her Black heritage in her youth, the Symphony in E minor “promotes racial pride and awareness”, which can be heard through Price’s use of African-American musical idioms such as the pentatonic scale, call-and-response, syncopated rhythm, altered tones, as well as features African drums and a juba dance.⁷⁶ It is evident that Price never truly attempted to shed or ignore her roots and ancestry, instead deciding to publicly embrace and celebrate them when she was given the opportunity to utilize her voice through her musical compositions. I believe this to be an important insight into Price’s character, as she was a light-skinned Black woman living during a time of brutal racial turbulence with the ability to “pass” in this society for a different, more palatable racial identity that could make her personal and professional life considerably less complicated. Instead, Price chose to stay true to her ancestry and heritage, which in today’s world, means everything to people of similar identities, such as myself, searching for our lineage and histories in spheres where we are woefully underrepresented and seemingly invisible.

Price was deeply aware of the double marginalized position she faced in society and desired for evaluations of her music to come before and instead of the evaluation of her existence. In 1943, Price wrote a letter Serge Koussevitzky, urging him to consider this very idea:

My Dear Dr. Koussevitzky,

To begin with I have two handicaps—those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins. Knowing the worst, then, would you be good enough to hold in check the possible inclination to regard a woman’s composition as long on emotionalism but short on virility and thought content; —until you shall have examined some of my work? As to the handicap of race, may I relieve you by saying that I neither expect nor ask any concession on that score. I should like to be judged on merit alone.

⁷⁴ Pendle, *Women and Music*, 316.

⁷⁵ Jackson, “Florence Price, Composer,” 37.

⁷⁶ Pendle, *Women and Music*, 316.

Clearly, Price longed not to be marginalized for simply existing as she was in the world, and instead solely wanted to receive a fair judgment of her work. This is a courtesy extended to her more privileged peers, and unfortunately, is incredibly difficult for minorities to obtain. While people can claim colour blindness and their acceptance of all types of people, society's structure still lends itself towards a white male supremacist hierarchy and there remains preconceived unconscious biases deeply embedded within our psyches due to the long history of this hierarchy. These are the notions of the patriarchy and systemic racism at work, and it requires active awareness and dismantling of said power structures to achieve any chance of widespread equity for oppressed people.

The premiere at the Chicago World's Fair led to more performances of Price's works with various orchestras across America, including the Chicago Symphony, the Chicago Women's Symphony, the Chicago Chamber Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony the American Symphony, the Brooklyn Symphony, the Bronx Symphony, the Detroit Symphony, and the Michigan WPA Symphony.⁷⁷ Prices was widowed in 1942, and as the single mother to two children, she continued to provide substantial financial support for her family in her chosen career path of teaching and composing music.⁷⁸ Price made the conscious decision to form her own compositional voice through a mixture of both European and African heritages.⁷⁹ This shows us how she choose to be a part of uplifting those of African descent from within the community, presenting herself through her career as a proud woman of colour who faced adversity, but in turn created a legacy of influential classical music works tied to her diverse experiences in a multidimensional and intersectional existence.

Throughout her lifetime, Price composed approximately three hundred musical works, with a significant amount being in the male-dominated large-scale orchestral forms.⁸⁰ Price is arguably the most published African-American female composer, most likely due to her professional

⁷⁷ Jackson, "Florence Price, Composer," 40.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ege, "Florence Price," 6.

⁸⁰ Walker-Hill, "Black Women Composers in Chicago," 11.

success while she was alive. However, many of her works and the compositions of previously mentioned Black women composers remain ignored and unpublished in manuscript. This is why it is vital for researchers, students, teachers and professional musicians to take action, as emphasized by feminist collective leader and composer Lucien Danzeisen: “If music and musical practice are to be considered current as an institutionally recognizable art form, it is precisely these institutions (from music schools to university music departments and conservatoriums) that have to deal with the society in which we live, by which we are deeply influenced and which we help to shape. Artists must be active agents in shaping the world we live in.”⁸¹ It is the last line of Danzeisen’s quote that resonates the most, as all of us artists must constantly seek out and share previously unheard music history narratives in any capacity, so that overlooked composers can begin to have their talents recognized through publications at long last in circulation and subsequently being heard in performance spaces.

Exclusionary Practices of Feminist Movement and The Stagnancy of Feminist Musicology

If we examine the beginnings of feminist movement, dating back to 19th century, it is evident that feminism has primarily focused on the needs and rights of the middle- and upper-class white woman from its inception. In America, first wave feminism focused on the legal rights of women including property rights, child custody rights, equal access to education, and women’s suffrage.⁸² The first wave emerged out of the abolitionist movement, but this era of feminist movement was deemed successful and came to a culmination with the suffragists having had the 19th amendment passed in 1920.⁸³ However, this law did not negate the Jim Crow laws in place, which still discriminated and excluded Black people from various aspects of society, such as the right to voter registration, as well as there being a continuation in racially motivated violence and legal lynchings.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Stellan Veloce, Rosanna Lovell, and Lucien Danzeisen, “FEM* _MUSIC*_ : Collective Feminist Activism Within and Beyond the University,” *On-Curating* no. 47 (2020): 73, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-47.html#.YTIlbS0Rq9a>.

⁸² Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 21.

⁸³ Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (1998): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002193479802900206>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

Sojourner Truth is a well-known feminist and abolitionist of this time period, and her famous speech “Ain’t I A Woman,” delivered at the 1851 Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio, speaks of the issues Black women faced at the time, centering around the idea that they were often not seen by others as women at all. Truth sought to highlight that enslavement denied Black women motherhood, womanhood, their femininity, and protection from exploitation.⁸⁵ In this speech, Truth was one of the first people to call attention to the idea of intersectionality, before it was an established term, and did so as a response to white women who made it clear that they were only advocating for themselves: “When Sojourner Truth rose to speak, many white women urged that she be silenced, fearing that she would divert attention from women’s suffrage to emancipation.”⁸⁶ Truth was not deterred by this lack of support from white folks and was able to shift conversation to include her marginalized and overlooked life experiences, redirecting attention in some capacity from what Crenshaw describes as “the authoritative universal voice”:

[U]sually, white male subjectivity masquerading as non-racial, non-gendered objectivity—is merely transferred to those who, but for gender, share many of the same cultural, economic, and social characteristics. When feminist theory attempts to describe women’s experiences through analyzing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. Feminists thus ignore how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, moreover, how it often privileges them over and contributes to the domination of other women.⁸⁷

This is the downfall of the feminist movement, to speak for all women but to only focus on actually aiding a privileged portion of women. Despite their disenfranchisement, Black women found ways to continue to fight for themselves and move forward, frequently organizing themselves as part of voter’s leagues, suffrage clubs, and at rallies.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid., 236.

⁸⁶ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 153, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸⁸ Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory,” 237.

Second wave feminism, “the largest movement in the history of the United States,”⁸⁹ began in the 1960s, and its main goals were to further advance women’s legal rights and to have more access to aspects society previously prohibited to them. At this time men were in control of their wives’ property and wages, and there were certain areas of public life in America that a woman was not permitted to occupy unless she was also accompanied by a man.⁹⁰ Many attribute Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* with inciting this change and social shift from most women functioning mainly as domestic helpmates, to being commonly found in the workforce and attending college.⁹¹ However, with a wider historical examination that includes women of colour, “Black women have traditionally worked outside the home in numbers far exceeding the labor participation rate of white women.”⁹² There is evidence certifying this information dating back to the year 1880, where 73.3% of single Black women worked in comparison to single white women at 23.8%.⁹³ hooks confirms this repetition of history where white women advocate entirely for themselves: “this class of women were so centered on their own experiences that it was ignored that the majority of women at the time of [*The Feminine Mystique*]’s publication were already working outside of the home in conditions that were not liberating financially or from male dominance in their life.”⁹⁴

As the first wave can be linked to abolitionism, second wave feminism in its beginnings was connected to the Civil Rights movement. However, African-Americans did receive violence and retaliation from white people after the enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which ended the legal segregation of the Jim Crow laws,⁹⁵ and scholars have identified the strain this time placed on Black women, who “were forced to choose between pledging membership to a movement against racism or chauvinism.”⁹⁶ This further alienated people of colour to the margins of social reform and excluded Black feminists again from the women’s movement. As Dr.

⁸⁹ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 157.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 156.

⁹³ Williams, *Millennial Black*, 29.

⁹⁴ bell hooks, *feminist theory: from margin to center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 96.

⁹⁵ Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory,” 243.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

Ula Taylor denotes, “white women followed the tradition of their foremothers, by “developing their feminism” in a movement to rid the country of legal and/or racial injustices and ultimately created organizations endemic to their needs as White, economically elite, professional women.” This makes apparent the downfalls of mid 20th century feminism, as there is a clear continuation of cultural reproduction, “the transmission of existing cultural values and norms from generation to generation,”⁹⁷ and the goals and ideals of the suffragette era were clearly not created with women of colour in mind.

Third wave feminism, having emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, is often seen as the most diverse and inclusive part of feminist movement, as its focus has been independence and individualism, understanding that there are many ways to exist and embody womanhood, and women should be free to make their own life choices. This was also a time when women of colour were able to finally speak freely on social issues, and were openly critical of the past feminist waves’ exclusionary environments, as they did not seek to empower and uplift women of colour in the way that they did for white women.⁹⁸ Critics illuminated how Black women are never able to remove or distance themselves from one part of their identity; the multidimensional marginalized identity of Black women as a whole must be addressed. This notion would come to be known by the term intersectional feminism, which will be discussed in detail in the following section.

As feminist movement as a whole and thus, the field of feminist theory, has only just begun to include women of colour within the last three decades, it is reasonable to expect that the possibility of utilizing said theory in different disciplines, from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, would most likely not be as advanced in progressive movement as is the source material, due to not possessing generations of such focused social change. I highlight this possibility to discuss musicology and specifically, feminist musicology, which is relatively stagnant in terms of advancing the place of women of colour composers within musical canon. The majority of the

⁹⁷ Dunbar, *Women, Music, Culture*, 227.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

discipline has placed focus on conducting in-depth research on white European and American female composers. As discussed in the first section of this thesis, Marcia J. Citron is known as one of the founding contributors to feminist musicology with her work *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993), along with Susan McClary and her work *Feminine Endings* (1991).⁹⁹ There have been more and more female musicologists entering the sphere since the emergence of the discipline in the 1990s, which also contributed to the expansion in research and publications. This fact, coupled with third wave feminism becoming widespread in the 1990s, has allowed for women's progressive visibility within certain fields, allowing for a "rethinking of historical and cultural paradigms that involved women."¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, however progressive and innovative these and other scholars' works may have been for the traditional and conservative field of musicology, it is important to note that their works tend to neglect women of colour.¹⁰¹ Scholar Juanita Karpf succinctly explains this sentiment: "the dearth of feminist inquiry focusing on Black female performers of art music suggests that the majority of musicologists have yet to develop a methodology capable of viewing the cultivated tradition as a discourse for activism, feminism and resistance."¹⁰²

There is also the assumption made by many historians that there are no women composers of note because the women composers who were active, do not clearly fall within the already established repertorial canon of men that is now viewed by all as the standard.¹⁰³ This is twofold for women of colour, who have been overlooked and neglected in historical accounts due to their sex as well as their race. Thus, it is not enough to simply have more women active in musicologist positions within the field, or to "add-and-stir" women composers to the existing historical canon. There must be active effort to include women of colour in music history and music research, and to dismantle the white patriarchal structures that alienate them so that true representation and diversity can be achieved within classical music. Music history scholar Sondra Howe urges us to

⁹⁹ Juanita Karpf, "As With Words of Fire": Art Music and Nineteenth-century African-American Feminist Discourse," *Signs* 24, no. 3 (1999): 603, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3175320>.

¹⁰⁰ Citron, "Women and the Western Art Canon," 214.

¹⁰¹ Karpf, "As With Words of Fire," 603.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Howe, "Reconstructing the History," 99.

ask “How are women described? Perhaps we have to use different methods, ask different questions, and use different sources when describing women...As the female experience is added to the story of history, authors must analyze the “voice” of the female narrative.”¹⁰⁴ As scholars such as Howe have proposed, there is an immense necessity for an entirely novel approach and framework for discussing Black women within classical music, hence, why I aim to combine intersectional feminist and critical curation to attempt to augment diversity of stories and the scope of performance communication and in result, diversify audiences within the field.

¹⁰⁴ Howe, “Reconstructing the History,” 102.

Intersectional Feminist Critical Curation Framework

Understanding Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term first coined by lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s in her article “Demarginalizing The Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” The article covers the topic of the “single-axis framework” of anti-discrimination law and how this negatively impacts and does not support the unique and multidimensional life experiences of Black women.¹⁰⁵ Crenshaw noted that due to “feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse” not inherently embracing “the experiences of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating “women’s experience” or “the Black experience” into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, the social and political systems currently in place have continually disadvantaged and “othered” Black women, as these institutions are limited frameworks that have historically focused upon narratives that fit easily and clearly within said system (i.e. identities that don’t experience multiple axes of marginalization) and within the preconceived notions and biases of the people in power.

To further describe intersectionality, Crenshaw employed an analogy of traffic at an intersection, to picture it “coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.”¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that intersectionality does not speak solely of racism and sexism but includes any attributes or characteristics that make up one’s identity and contribute to one’s place, whether marginalized or privileged, within our society. This could include but is not limited to the previously mentioned race and gender, as well as class, sexuality, education level, culture, religion, geographic location,

¹⁰⁵ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 139.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

economic situation, able-bodiedness and more. While intersectionality was formed with the intention of focusing on the needs of Black women specifically, it has evolved into widespread theory and praxis across various disciplines and is now recognized as its own field of study. As the scope has broadened, intersectionality now focuses on “examining the dynamics of difference and sameness” which has helped to consider race and gender and create new developments in different fields.¹⁰⁸

In her 1991 work, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour,” Crenshaw further delineates different aspects of intersectionality, this time from the perspective of the issue of disproportionate battery and rape against women of colour.¹⁰⁹ She categorizes elements of intersectionality within the following subcategories: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality revolves around the dismantling of power structures such as imbalanced hierarchies and institutions that continually support and uplift privileged people while simultaneously marginalizing those with less privilege. These “multilayered and overlapping structures of subordination” can show us who is most vulnerable, unprotected and overlooked in our society.¹¹⁰ These power structures are also detrimental in many ways to social reform and political movements, as bell hooks has noted that “struggles for power (the right to dominate and control others) perpetually undermine feminist movement and are likely to hasten its demise.”¹¹¹ This is also related to the notion of political intersectionality, as Crenshaw writes that it “highlights the fact that women of colour are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas...the need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of colour and white women seldom confront.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis,” *Signs* 38, no.4 (2013): 787, <https://doi.org/10.1086/669608>.

¹⁰⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

¹¹⁰ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 797.

¹¹¹ hooks, *feminist theory*, 91.

¹¹² Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1242.

Political intersectionality can also be seen as offering a “dimension to structural intersectionality, a way to look at power dynamics with emergent social and political struggles.”¹¹³ This concept can be applied to any intersectional and marginalized identity, as a certain political agenda can deny “the validity” of parts of one’s identity if the discourse does not inherently address said intersections.¹¹⁴ This having to negotiate pieces of one’s identity to fit within typical social and political narratives often “others” people, and in the case of women of colour, they tend be “silenced as much as being relegated to the margin of experience as by total exclusion. Tokenistic, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion is at least as disempowering as complete exclusion.”¹¹⁵ This is the result of “Black male and white female narratives of discrimination [being] seen as inclusive/universal, Black female narratives [are] rendered partial, unrecognizable, something apart from standard claims of race discrimination or gender discrimination.”¹¹⁶ Thus, political intersectionality presents an opportunity to place intersectionality within the practical setting of social movement organizations.¹¹⁷

Finally, representational intersectionality involves the portrayals and production of images of women of colour in culture, media, and society at large which all ignore their intersectional interests and needs.¹¹⁸ It also involves a distortion of identity or one-dimensional depictions of identity, which leads to a lack of understanding and misinformation regarding the issues and situations faced by marginalized people. This is the category of intersectionality through which my artistic work has its foundation, as structural and political intersectionality are indeed important and key elements to intersectional feminist theory and praxis, but they require large and widespread social awareness and reform from privileged persons and power-wielding institutions, which is not a realistic change that I alone can affect within the context of this thesis. I find representational intersectionality to be a tool of personal control and individualistic power, as anyone within the contexts of media and culture can offer their opinions and ideas through

¹¹³ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 800.

¹¹⁴ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1232.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1261.

¹¹⁶ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies,” 791.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 801.

¹¹⁸ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1283.

their chosen medium(s) and can define and portray a narrative, or many different narratives, that encompass the realms of multidimensional experience and identity. This diversifying of messaging in media and culture is a critical element of reaching diverse audiences within any discipline, as the people living the marginalized experiences of the narratives that they themselves are centering in their works possess the innate subjectivity to communicate on a more profound and resonant level. The notion of subjectivity is a pillar of 3rd wave Black feminist movement and is also an imperative element to the second half of my proposed framework, music curation.

Third Wave Black Feminism and The Way Forward

With a comprehensive understanding of intersectionality and its origins in mind, the next step is to examine the current status and tendencies of intersectional feminism. It becomes clear from my research that intersectional feminism, or third wave Black feminism, in its current form, largely focuses on portrayal of “personal narrative with second wave theoretical underpinnings.”¹¹⁹ Many scholars and feminist authors are writing texts that combine their own lived experiences as Black women facing marginalization coupled with statistics, research, and theory to solidify their positions. There is also a tendency to write clearly and for the masses, a key factor that is often missing in scholarly work, which tends to only produce complex writings that can only be comprehended by small academic circles. Curator Kimberly Springer makes note of this issue and states that “[i]t is up to those of us with resources and commitment to take these writings and synthesize them into programs that appeal to the next generation, which needs them the most.”¹²⁰ bell hooks reiterates this point, stating that “[t]he value of feminist work should not be determined by whether or not it conforms to academic standards...If feminist writing and scholarship aim to promote and advance feminist movement, then matters of style must be considered in conjunction with political intent. There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few.”¹²¹ hooks also

¹¹⁹ Kimberly Springer, “Third Wave Black Feminism?,” *Signs* 27, no. 4 (2002): 1060, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636>.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1077.

¹²¹ hooks, *feminist theory*, 113.

states that this issue can be solved with feminist educators acting as “translators” who can communicate to diverse audience demographics across “age, sex, ethnicity, and degree of literacy.” Returning now to another point from Springer concerning the possibilities to “translate” messages, in deciding which educational tools to utilize, she suggests music as an effective option for communication of messages.¹²² While specifically she is speaking of popular music genres, there is no reason why classical music cannot also function as an entry point of conversation and dialogue for intersectional feminist issues as well.

Another key component of third wave Black feminism is a united front in all possible relationships, which involves solidarity in sisterhood, coalitions, and mentorships. hooks emphasizes this thought process, stating that “[t]here can be no mass-based feminist movement to end sexist oppression without a united front—women must take the initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity. Unless we can show that barriers separating women can be eliminated, that solidarity can exist, we cannot hope to change and transform society as a whole.”¹²³ Williams seconds the necessity of allies and coalitions, making clear that “[a]llyship is not a passive state, it’s an active pursuit that can feel risky in the moment. You can’t just decide you’re an ally—you have to do the work of allyship and use your voice and actions to protect marginalized people wherever needed.”¹²⁴ Women must also be ready to accept that we require allies outside of our marginalized groups; meaning people in more privileged positions in society, with whom to form coalitions. “Separatist ideology encourages us to believe that women alone can make feminist revolution—we cannot. Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole.”¹²⁵ Thus, privileged groups must be cognizant to take the initiative in supporting marginalized groups through the formation of active allyship.

¹²² Springer, “Third Wave Black Feminism?,” 1077.

¹²³ hooks, *feminist theory*, 44.

¹²⁴ Williams, *Millennial Black*, 152.

¹²⁵ hooks, *feminist theory*, 83.

Specifically for the group that is Black women, the term sisterhood can also hold much more weight and possess a deeper meaning, due to the ability and necessity to bond through the shared experiences of a unique intersectional identity that the rest of the world often overlooks. I highlight the experiences of Black women specifically due to my own identification with this group. This leads to a third point that hooks proposes: marginalized people must be listened to and heard by others in this movement, as they must act as the change-makers for society. “To build a mass-based feminist movement, we need to have a liberatory ideology that can be shared with everyone. That revolutionary ideology can be created only if the experiences of people on the margin who suffer sexist oppression and other forms of group oppression are understood, addressed, and incorporated. They must participate in feminist movement as makers of theory and leaders of action.”¹²⁶ This idea encapsulates my reasoning and inspiration for this project. Due to my own lived experiences, I, and many others, have a specific point of view that can provide valuable insight on matters involving inclusion, representation, and diversity. It is important that we give space for marginalized voices within all fields, which is the aim for my work with *The Narrativity Sessions*, to launch a platform for fusing the personal with political and social matters, as well as to provide a welcoming sphere for others who experience multiple axes of oppression to contribute their own valuable narratives to the conversation.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 163.

Music Curation: Context, Subjectivity, Audiences

Music curation is a relatively new field that borrows and develops its practices from the established curation methods of the field of visual arts. The role of the curator is an interesting one; while its origins are as an offstage manager who is “documenting and interpreting” art, in the late 20th century, the dimensions of the “public and political” have been added to the position.¹²⁷ While its beginnings focused mainly on the gathering of art, curation has evolved to concern itself with the connection of art pieces to each other and to audiences.¹²⁸ I believe this to be a critical idea in its application to classical music, as one attempts to move away from an aesthetics-based traditional approach to performance, and instead looks towards engagement, inclusivity, and audience expression. Curatorial methods can be used to display and show art from various mediums and disciplines coupled with elements of social and political messaging to create a multidimensional and ideally more accessible presentation that communicates profoundly with audiences on several layers. The “layers” or elements of curatorial practices that I will employ in my work to establish my intersectional feminist Black female viewpoint are context, subjectivity, and the shifting role of the audience.

Context: Spatial, Historical, and Social

The first element of curation discussed in pianist and curator Heloisa Amaral’s 2020 seminar, “With and Beyond Music,” was the idea of context.¹²⁹ It was asked of us to define how we understand context and to suggest what sorts of contexts exist. If one consults a dictionary definition, context can be defined as “the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood.”¹³⁰ It is also interesting to glance at the Latin origins of the word, which consists of *con-*, meaning “together” and *texere* meaning “to weave.”¹³¹ Employing the idea of weaving together one or more components to

¹²⁷ Heloisa Amaral, “Yearning to Connect: A Short Introduction to Music Curatorship,” *Research Catalogue* (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22501/rc.733406>.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁹ Heloisa Amaral, “Context,” *With and Beyond Music: Curatorial Practices in Musical Performance and Composition* (Lecture Notes, Royal Conservatoire The Hague, February 18, 2021).

¹³⁰ “Context,” Oxford Languages, Oxford University Press, Google Search, accessed November 21, 2021.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

make a situation or idea transparent is how I begin to construct my view of context. Additionally, context is synonymous with framework, which can quickly become disorganized as this thesis begins to form its basis upon frameworks existing within frameworks. But I believe that this is the ideal term to use, as context is a method of framing and presenting an idea or message for others to receive and absorb in various ways. One can explore many types of contexts, but for this research I shall aim to focus on spatial, social, and historical context, as they are the most relevant to my work and I believe will be very effective in practice.

Context in terms of space is the physical environment or setting in which one frames an idea. In the case of my work, I have chosen the medium of the digital space. More than ever, society is exchanging and engaging with information online and we rely on being continuously connected to the world in an online context. The setting of the classical concert hall is attached to many traditions and ideas about how people should act and behave, which is not entirely welcoming to new and audiences unfamiliar to that specific environment. A digital setting of online music performance videos provides a more relaxed and flexible format to receive new content that one is able to freely choose to engage with. But I do not believe that spatial context alone would attract new and diverse audiences, which is why I would also like to focus on historical and social contexts that are relevant specifically to the groups of people I aim to engage, which are people belonging to the African diaspora.

With the help of media such as poetry and text, I conceived my project *The Narrativity Sessions* with a mission statement: to paint a narrative of a diasporic Black experience from my own viewpoint as a young, queer Black woman, centering specifically on the history, community, and diverse narratives of African-American/Afro-Canadian Black people, with a specific focus on the history of Black people from my home province of Nova Scotia, Canada. I plan to access this community of people with the aid of digital spaces such as social media and through the portrayal of themes relating to the human condition, which I believe can provide opportunity for resonance with audiences through shared experiences. These themes and subthemes include: **community** (*matriarchs, childhood, sisterhood, ancestors, history, memories*), **resilience** (*courage, strength,*

dreams, hope), **identity** (*sense of self, intersectionality, marginalization, belonging, growth, expression*).

My goal in sharing artistic expression through the historical and social contexts of the African diaspora is to uplift and create space for my own community in a field where we are not adequately represented, as well as to allow this community of diverse people to add to the multidimensionality of Black narratives and representation in cultural media through their active participation as audience members, another critical element of curation to be discussed in an upcoming section.

Subjectivity and Communication

A dominant sentiment throughout the field of classical music, and one that is applicable to any high art form, is that personal tastes, opinions, and experiences have much less influence than long-established aesthetics and the authority of the canon. Even if one does not necessarily possess a preference for composers deemed “genius,” there is an understanding, or so I perceive it, that cultural institutions will always hold these composers in the highest regard and with the utmost visibility and recognition, continuing to disperse their histories and music to the public due to the longevity and power of the canon. As a result of this widespread institutional consensus, these organizations are integral in the formation of national and cultural identities and collective history.¹³² This idea of an “objective universal knowledge”¹³³ is at the core of all cultural institutions and is one of the main barriers towards inclusion of other narratives when authoritative and educating voices continually choose to provide one narrow viewpoint that has systemically eliminated other contexts. Hindrances such as these are exactly what some prominent intersectional feminist critical art curators in Canada, Gaëtane Verna, and Andrea Fatona, are tackling in their work through the driving force of subjectivity.

¹³² Joana Joachim, ““Embodiment and Subjectivity”: Intersectional Black Curatorial Practices in Canada,” *RACAR: revue d’art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 43, no. 2 (2018): 38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26530766>.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

There is much debate about a place for subjectivity, that is, for personal experiences and viewpoints, in public space and performance. But one must first ask oneself, how impartial and objective is the current system? When one dismantles the cultural fronts placed before us in society, it is evident, as Black feminist art historian, Dr. Joana Joachim, succinctly describes:

[Institutions] are given authority in collective memory-making processes and thus influence perspectives on the very narratives they construct. In this context, the pretense of 'objectivity' stands as a veiled means of enforcing Eurocentric standards for so-called high art—standards according to which non-European artistic contributions fall short of the criteria of excellence.¹³⁴

Thus, the “objectivity and universality” of the offerings of cultural institutions is in actuality a perceived objectivity.¹³⁵

The idea of objectivity versus subjectivity becomes even more interesting when considering the viewpoint of a scholar such as Samuel A. Floyd who concludes that “works of music are designed for the purpose of aesthetic communication...A work of music expresses, depending upon its inherent relations and the perceptions of these relations, and it communicates when the perceiver is able to relate his own life experiences to the work’s expressive content. Concepts such as “beauty” are irrelevant; communication is primary. A work of music is “good” to the degree to which it possesses the potential to communicate.”¹³⁶ The absolute purpose of musical works is yet another inconclusive debate, but Floyd does pose a compelling point. If one re-examines Citron’s research on canon formation discussed at the beginning of this thesis, one will find that the composers’ abilities to communicate through their work was not one of the requirements for professional music career longevity. Instead, it was mostly informed by power structures and privileges relating to education, access and opportunity, the aesthetics and sentiments in place within certain time periods, as well as the influence that critics wielded over public opinion. As a vocalist, who is constantly seeking engaging ways to effectively express and emote the music I am performing with my voice and my body, I am in agreeance with Floyd that music should first and foremost, communicate with the audience. In recognizing communication

¹³⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Samuel A. Floyd, “Black American Music and Aesthetic Communication,” *Black Music Research Journal* 1 (1980): 12, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/779290>.

as fundamental to my goals as an artist, the application of subjectivity accompanies effortlessly, as it inherently involves communicating personal expression and one's own identity through the means of artistic work.

Intersectional feminist curators Gaëtane Verna and Andrea Fatona both complete their curatorial work with this awareness of the power structures in place in order to help create institutional change and more representation within visual arts. Having interviewed both curators, Dr. Joachim discusses the components of their unique approaches to curation in her article "Embodiment and Subjectivity": Intersectional Black Feminist Curatorial Practices in Canada." As recently discussed, subjectivity is indisputably central to the work of these curators due to awareness of structural intersectionality. With this knowledge they utilize "the power relations at play in their own lives, within the institutional frameworks in which they work, and within society in general *to curate critically*—that is, to engage with issues of social inclusion and diversity in exhibition making."¹³⁷ This quote brings forward an important term, "critical curation," which I have now applied to my own work in classical vocal music performance. Joachim states that when one acknowledges one's own position in society and the privileges that this position entails, that is when curation can be viewed as "critical".¹³⁸ Specifically, third wave Black feminism calls attention to this notion, harnessing and empowering the personal experience for the benefit of uplifting the collective and allowing the personal to become social and political. Joachim thus presents the possible impact of truly embodying subjectivity in the public sphere, stating that "embodied knowledge and individual everyday experience—are considered crucial places of knowing that allow for important insights and transformative justice work."¹³⁹

While subjectivity forms the nucleus of "intersectional feminist critical curation," another component of this practice is continual reflection on notions of social inclusion.¹⁴⁰ Such reflection

¹³⁷ Joachim, "Embodiment and Subjectivity," 34.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 45.

leads to the nurturing of community in one's work. If one as the curator-performer is including one's own experiences and voice within their work, inclusivity must also extend to involve the relationships of the applicable community to have a voice in how they are represented in the cultural sector. For example, Fatona "uses education and community outreach to invite various perspectives and people into the spaces, projects, and exhibitions she organizes in an effort to foster a sense of hospitality and openness." This reaffirms one of my goals of having diverse audiences feel welcomed within new and unfamiliar spheres, which is why I believe active community contribution to be key to fostering a meaningful dialogue and engaged audience. The work of intersectional feminist curators is about fostering an open dialogue that is inclusive and inviting to marginalized groups, while simultaneously allowing the curator to express their own identity in their work. This deeply empowering and enriching practice, as Fatona states, has the impact to "express the range of humanity within the context of those social spaces" and is "linked to fostering a sense of belonging and recognition within society."¹⁴¹ I believe this to be the definition of true social inclusivity succeeding in practice.

The last component I will highlight of "intersectional feminist critical curation" that is applicable to my work is the recognition of multiple layers of meaning. "Within the framework of intersectional Black feminism, contending with the issue of subjectivity also involves recognizing that the curator's understanding of the exhibition's discourse will not reflect that of every viewer. As Fatona notes, the curator must recall their role as a translator working between the artwork and the onlooker. As such Fatona and Verna create spaces in which multiple meanings and understandings may intersect on a variety of levels, thus giving viewers numerous points of access to the conversation."¹⁴² This is one of the aims of my project, *The Narrativity Sessions*, as I know my personal experiences and opinions as the curator-performer will inform the selection of music to be performed, as well as the texts and poetry chosen to complement said performances. This is why I have decided to use the approach of a multimedia project, so that there are various elements (video, audio, text, imagery) with which to engage in each

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴² Ibid., 46.

performance, allowing audiences to have multiple opportunities for the works to resonate with them and the possibility for finding some amount of meaning in my expressions.

Audiences

After having previously discussed the importance of communication and building relationships with community to my proposed framework, it is thus, imperative to directly involve the receiver of said communication in this equation, which is the audience. My consideration of the audience is twofold. Firstly, I will alter the audience role in the performance events from passivity to activity. Secondly, the audience will be invited to provide feedback and opinions on the performance events they have experienced. In regard to this second point, researcher and curator Gina Emerson conducted a study as part of doctoral research that focused on “the audience experience of new music...[she] conducted surveys at twelve new music concerts [with] 1,428 audience members [taking] part in the survey across ten different European countries.”¹⁴³ Emerson concluded that “data-informed curation”¹⁴⁴ informed by audience’s aesthetic tastes, their preconceived notions, and overall demographics can lead to the development of more inclusive and open environments for new audiences experiencing this type of music for the first time.

Overall the results of Emerson’s surveys discovered a consensus that when the audience is less experienced with the music and its aesthetics, there is less chance of them being satisfied with the performance.¹⁴⁵ What did engage the surveyed audiences with the genre was the use of “extramusical elements” such as “audiovisual feature [and] audience participation.”¹⁴⁶ Both of these aspects have been previously mentioned as integral to my framework, having discussed using multimedia to contextualize performances on various layers of meaning (i.e. historical and

¹⁴³ Gina Emerson, “What Do Audiences Want? Data-Informed Curation for Diverse Audiences in New Music,” *On-Curating* no. 47 (2020): 40, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-47.html#.YTIlbS0Rq9a>.

¹⁴⁴ Emerson, “What Do Audiences Want?,” 41.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

social) and audience participation in regard to Black feminist curators seeking to include voice of the communities they are directly targeting with their exhibitions.

To complete the last of the components that comprise my “intersectional feminist critical curation” framework I will now further elaborate upon the changing role of the audience. To begin with, I would like to address Christopher Small’s ideas of how we perform: “performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform... Western classical music embodies a kind of society that does not allow for mutual participation of all peoples because it is based upon works, not interactions.” This is Small’s idea of “musicking,” the process of making music as opposed to music as a finished product that is delivered by the performer.¹⁴⁷ I do believe that musical works and their histories are still quite relevant to center and contextualize in classical music, due to the inequalities faced and lack of visibility of composers from marginalized backgrounds. However, I do agree with a performance approach of being more discovery-oriented as opposed to results-oriented.

This notion of discovery in performance can be uncovered with the changing role of the audience, which is historically passive when considering traditional performance settings. Audience members of classical music are present to observe and not to partake in a performance. But to those unfamiliar with the strict customs of the concert hall, this can seem an uninviting and stiff atmosphere where one might find it difficult to enjoy oneself. Amaral confirms the discipline’s need for innovative changes, stating that classical music is seen “by many as elitist, rigid and antiquated, the format seems to be attracting less audience by the day. In an effort to revert the crisis, many strategies are being employed to make the format better oriented towards interactions with society.”¹⁴⁸ The niche and often avant-garde genre of performance art in Western art music has been employing this approach to audience roles since its inception in the 1960s, led by controversial innovative performance artists such as Marina Abramović. Abramović is known for her work in challenging the roles of actors and spectators, whether voluntarily or

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas Cook, “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance,” *Society for Music Theory* 7, no. 2 (2001): 3, <https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Amaral, “Yearning to Connect,” 15.

involuntarily, and the outcome is a new type of artistic happening. Erika Fischer-Lichte discusses Abramović's performance realizations, stating that "[t]here no longer exists a work of art, independent of its creator and recipient; instead, we are dealing with an *event* that involves everybody—albeit to different degrees and in different capacities."¹⁴⁹

Fischer-Lichte further elaborates upon the idea of performance events and what it can mean for innovative movement away from traditional settings within classical music:

The dissolution of boundaries in the arts, repeatedly proclaimed and observed by artists, art critics, scholars of art, and philosophers, can be defined as a performative turn. Be it art, music literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus, the conditions for art production and reception changed in a crucial aspect. The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception and interpretation of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion, and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved—artists and spectators.¹⁵⁰

I aim to achieve performance events that lessen the division between myself as the artist and the audience with my project, *The Narrativity Sessions*, by allowing the audience to engage with my work and each other in the digital space, through the means of contributing messages that relate to the themes of my artistic content. This is an adoption of Williams' idea urging that "[i]t's our responsibility to find overlooked and under-heard voices and experiences and bring them into the conversation to challenge the status quo. In doing so we challenge [people] to understand and anticipate different perspectives."¹⁵¹ The audiences' contributions will exist as part of my performance event that feature extramusical elements so that all of the combined components can be available for commentary, ideally all working together to foster an interesting dialogue and an artistic happening that considers the audience's expression as much as the artist.

¹⁴⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, "The Transformative Power of Performance," in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain, (New York: Routledge, 2008,) 18, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

¹⁵⁰ Fischer-Lichte, "The Transformative Power of Performance," 22.

¹⁵¹ Williams, *Millennial Black*, 211.

Chapter III: Experimentation - The Narrativity Sessions: A Digital Performance Event and Curated Visual Vocal Album

Experiment Components and Implementation

The Narrativity Sessions performance project was released in the digital space on February 15, 2022, disseminated and viewed via my artist website, www.shaniceskinner.com, my Facebook artist page, and my YouTube account. The project features eight vocal pieces by Black women composers, including Maria Thompson Corley, Jacqueline Hairston, Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, and Undine S. Moore. Each piece is paired with quotes and/or poetry by Black writers and poets, including Angela Bowden, George Elliott Clarke, Terry Dixon, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Sophie Williams, and Mikki Kendall. I received express written permission to freely utilize the published poetic works of Bowden and Clarke in this project for research purposes, for which I am deeply grateful. The eight pieces performed are divided within the three overarching themes divided into three chapters: **On Community** (*Long Goodbye* by Maria Thompson Corley, and *The Season of Remembrance* by Jacqueline Hairston), **On Resilience** (*Sympathy*, *The Heart of a Woman*, and *My Dream* by Florence Price, and *On Consciousness Streams* by Jacqueline Hairston) and **On Identity** (*I Know My Mind* by Margaret Bonds, and *Love Let The Wind Cry... How I Adore Thee* by Undine S. Moore). The overarching themes were made public while the subthemes were embodied and internalized ideas for my curation of this project. The project videos with the included poetic selections as well as the text of each vocal work can be viewed in the appendices.

Each piece of this project explores intersectional feminist themes and experiences of the African Diaspora. In **On Community**, the first piece is *Long Goodbye* by Corley (Appendix 1), which explores receiving undying support, nurturing love, and comfort from the women in one's life, who are often viewed as the backbone of Black communities. This is connected to the overall topic and point of view of Black Love, which is also the title of the second poem by Angela Bowden. The second piece of this theme is *The Season of Remembrance* by Hairston (Appendix 2), which brings forth the history and memories of African Diasporic community, all sharing in a unique ancestral history of forgotten and lost lineages, cultures, and homelands that shape us as

a connected people today. Historical photos that are featured are from the Nova Scotia Public Archives so one may visualize the long history of Black Nova Scotians. The lost community of Africville is specifically touched upon in poetic selections by Dixon and Clarke, which had its roots in my home province of Nova Scotia.

In **On Resilience**, the struggle for being truly listened to in our oppressed and marginalized experiences is explored within *Sympathy* by Price (Appendix 3). This is followed by *The Heart of a Woman* by Price (Appendix 4) which highlights the notion of solitude as an “only,” a term coined by Williams that expresses how we as individual Black women are often expected to represent and speak for the entirety of Black women as some type of monolith.¹⁵² Also addressed is the strong hope that Black women possess in desiring to one day be fully understood and seen as unique, complex, and multidimensional people, not simply being perceived as an idea that is projected upon us by others due to biases. *My Dream* by Price (Appendix 5) follows to bring forth the overarching idea of resilience, specifically through the eyes of children. As a child, I was often fearless and courageous with enormous dreams I desired to achieve. A childlike sense of wonder is often pure and untouched before the stress and pressures of a demanding and unforgiving outside world has time to influence them. I thought it important to view resilience through a child’s eyes to understand that one may need to access their inner child’s qualities to repair the damage of the past and move forward. The final piece in this theme is *On Consciousness Streams* by Hairston (Appendix 6), which serves as a call to action for allyship. It features definitions of types of bias from various experts in diversity and inclusion to bring to all audiences’ attention the prejudices they might be perpetuating in daily life. It is meant as a point of education and reflection for audiences who might not be familiar with bias and its oppressive layers.

The final theme, **On Identity**, includes the piece *I Know My Mind* by Bonds (Appendix 7), and focuses on the complex topic of respectability politics, featuring various relevant quotes on the topic from Mikki Kendall’s *Hood Feminism*. Respectability is connected to the expectation of Black women as “onlys”, to portray one-dimensional, universally palatable images for the entire

¹⁵² Williams, *Millennial Black*, 151.

community. This is paired with one of Bowden's poems that highlights how Black women have a responsibility to behave and act in a certain manner, which often places our individual identities in the margins. The last piece of the project is *Love Let The Wind Cry... How I Adore Thee* by Moore (Appendix 8), which functions as a love letter to the self and to all Black women, coinciding with the title of the poem featured by Clarke. It is meant to uplift and inspire others to live and love unapologetically, in defiance of any biases, prejudices, or predetermined ideas placed upon us as people. Our identities and experiences are complex and unique; we must make space to express ourselves in a manner that fulfills every part of our being. A poem that has evidence of queer undertones by Dunbar Nelson is also featured to call attention to the added layer of queerness in the identities of various Black women such as myself, and to remember to live authentically in every aspect of one's intersectionalities.

Experiment Results

Within the first week of the release of *The Narrativity Sessions*, I received an overwhelmingly positive response in the digital space, from those in my own community and beyond. The project was widely shared on social media and received many encouraging comments on various platforms including YouTube and Facebook. I received feedback through a questionnaire (Appendix 9) on my website from several viewers who can be characterised as 'occasional to frequent' listeners of classical music. However, most of the responses came from people unfamiliar with the classical music field. Overall, the sentiment received from the audience was that they truly enjoyed the specific point of view of the project and that its focus was featuring women composers. It was also clear from their answers that their interest was piqued to learn more about and listen to women composers' music in the future.

Regarding the use of non-traditional extramusical elements such as text and poetry along with the performances of the pieces, responses were mixed. While some found it distracting and drawing away from the music, others thought that it contributed to the storytelling of each piece and allowed them to experience classical music in a new and connective way. It was interesting to note that all of the feedback responses were from women, most likely due to the subject

matter focusing largely on female experience. One response stated: “empowered women, empower women”, to which I wholeheartedly agree, as it is evident that women and specifically Black women as my target audience, felt heard and understood through this project and desired to support and share their thoughts, and for that I am deeply moved and grateful. Most responses indicated enjoyment of this digital performance but would prefer or desire a live setting in place of, or in conjunction with, this online performance. Some responses were more specific in detailing what exactly they connected with, such as one viewer stating they enjoyed the inclusion of Clarke’s poetry, and another sharing that they connected with Price’s “The Heart of a Woman,” and how resilience through life’s challenges and struggles as a Black woman deeply resonated with them. Most responses that I received followed the format of the feedback questionnaire I provided; however, I did receive a personal response of note which is as follows:

I am so moved to have witnessed this work.
 To see, literally, for the first time in my 32 years of life
 the juxtaposition of such heavenly melody, tonality, and skill
 (so acutely associated with pristine, white, wealth)
 flowing elegantly from the lips of a woman
 black like me;
 To drink in the sight of poor black faces of generations past
 in the midst of such iridescent sound-
 a sound that would have been denied the very souls pictured,
 black like me;
 To add poetry so viscerally describing black love and black experience
 amidst the lush voice of an undeniably
BLACK WOMAN
 slicing through deep-seeded psychological assumptions
 that “such music” is simply NOT FOR
 blacks like me....

I am floored.
 Stunned.
 Utterly taken aback.
 stirred to continue on, bravely, within spaces
 I have assumed have no place for a woman,
 black like me.
 Inspiration alights in my bones.
 Thank you for such exquisite work.

In terms of improvement for future projects, most people were pleased with the extra-musical elements included in the project. One respondent suggested that artist interviews could be added to allow audiences to connect with the musical journey of the artist and understand the performers' mind and intentions on a deeper level. I would have also appreciated receiving more questionnaire responses overall, but I believe this could be better achieved with the previous recommendation of adding a live and interactive performance to pair with the digital project.

One area of my chosen curation elements for which I did not receive much response was in receiving audience contributions on the project themes in order to change their role from spectator to active player. One could hypothesize that while audience members felt compelled to give feedback for the overall project within the online space, they might not yet be as comfortable being "on display" as part of a performance project. Perhaps, if the situation was in a live setting, more of an interactive rapport could be built, and audience members might feel more comfortable taking an active role within the performance. Then, the gathered audience information from live performances could be transferred to the digital setting for preservation. In spite of that, the response to *The Narrativity Sessions* was overall deeply encouraging for the prospect of pursuing new projects with a similar subject matter but on a larger scale.

Experiment Implications on Research Questions

In response to my research questions, I believe that the use of an "intersectional feminist critical curation" framework is indeed a positive and connective approach for reaching diverse and new audiences with classical music and as an effective device for social and political messaging. When it comes to the audience, *The Narrativity Sessions* made people reflective, curious, empowered, and responsive, desiring to share their thoughts and feelings in a space that carved out room for their personal viewpoints and provided an accessible avenue to understanding and reception for those not familiar with such artistic practices and performances. For me, this framework has created a new opportunity for exploring methods of storytelling and accessing diverse groups, as the identities and experiences of a specific group of people were placed at the center of the

project's thought process, and that targeted group is the one that has responded and shared the most and in a positive manner.

In producing a framework collecting history, theory, and praxis from various fields, in this case, music history, intersectional feminism and music curation, it felt as though I was implementing a well-informed approach to my performances, allowing me to express myself wholly and confidently as a performer. I have never felt more in my element and authentically expressive than during the recording process of this project and I believe this self-assuredness in artistry comes across in the recordings. It was deeply empowering to perform works by Black women composers and have in mind the selected poetry that corresponds to each piece, to form a larger and detailed narrative for myself as a Black woman and evidently for others who expressed how the project had resonated with them.

In the future, it is likely that I will apply such an informed approach to my artistic work. I hope to make this type of simultaneously thought-provoking and identity-fulfilling work a part of the direction and approach to my performing career. As placing oneself subjectively within one's artistic work that is meant to be shared with others allows for a type of expressive freedom one might only receive if, for a comparative example, one allowed and encouraged an audience to read and analyze one's personal letters and diary entries. Subjectivity and artistry are intimate experiences, and the performer has to be prepared to allow the audience in so as to be able to experience this type of profound expression alongside of them. In opening myself to such an intimate and personal performance, I have experienced more emotional gratification from studying and performing my vocal repertoire than I could have ever imagined.

Chapter IV: Conclusions

The insights from creating this “intersectional feminist critical curation” framework and the connected experiment, *The Narrativity Sessions*, have been uniquely valuable, and have ignited in me a passion and profound interest for intimate and personal storytelling, and social and political messaging within my classical music performance projects. It has also encouraged within me a desire to do meaningful work within the field of diversity and inclusion with a specific focus on the arts. Marginalized voices and experiences must continuously make themselves heard if we hope to ever achieve tangible change. This research has prompted me to theorize on how to make this type of work a feasible part of my career. While I do believe that live concert settings will always be a necessity in order to secure and maintain an interested audience, the digital space also serves as an excellent tool for promotion and creating impressions and intrigue. Thus, It is important to understand the role of each performance context, with online channels utilized for engagement and awareness, and in-person interaction providing a connective space for cultivating audience relationships.

Stemming from this research, I now possess a plethora of inspiration and ideas for future projects, all with the goals of addressing specific topics within the realms of intersectionality, racism, and identity. For example, a performance project dedicated solely to the lost community of Africville, Nova Scotia or an historical overview of Black community roots in Nova Scotia could access a wider, yet unique audience, focusing not just on the experience of Black women but the experience of all Black Nova Scotians. I would also be interested to do an in-depth project utilizing more works by Alice Dunbar Nelson, as through my reading of her poetry, I discovered that she was a bisexual woman and referred to her identity in her written works. Thus, a performance project focusing on queerness and its relation to Black womanhood could potentially be very eye-opening. I would also like to create a project that centers around the concept of “misogynoir”, a term coined by feminist professor Moya Bailey, to highlight how Black women in American and visual popular culture experience a specific type of misogyny on the basis of their gender and race.¹⁵³ As “misogynoir” examines popular culture, a project with media and images featuring

¹⁵³ Kendall, *Hood Feminism*, 58.

this notion could be found to be more relevant and engaging to younger audiences who are to be the next influential generation of audience members and performers within this field.

This combination of relevant social and political themes of today's world with a traditional artistic medium is an innovative option that I believe classical music requires to attract and interest new audiences as well as potential performers, who are now, more and more, beginning to see themselves represented within a historically divisive and discriminatory field. In understanding this need for continuous efforts and committed active work to achieving diversity and inclusion within classical music and pondering the next steps for "intersectional feminist critical curation," I do believe that this is truly, only the beginning.

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