

2020 SUMMMER ISSUE



EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Welcome to your Penguin Summer Issue!

This month, we focus on the intersection of music, race, and culture. We want to bring to light the experiences of students of color in our community, and invite discussion on the representation of diversity and equity within NEC.

We strive to uphold your stories and experiences in all future issues of the Penguin, and we look forward to amplifying the voices of our student body community. As your editors, we are committed to representing the students in our community through articles on race, ethnicity, sexuality, identity, and more. We want to hear and share your stories, and we invite you to send your responses and thoughts on the articles in this issue!

Please send your submissions to: thepenguin@necmusic.edu or follow us on our Instagram page [@penguin.nec](https://www.instagram.com/penguin.nec)

Sincerely,
Your Editors

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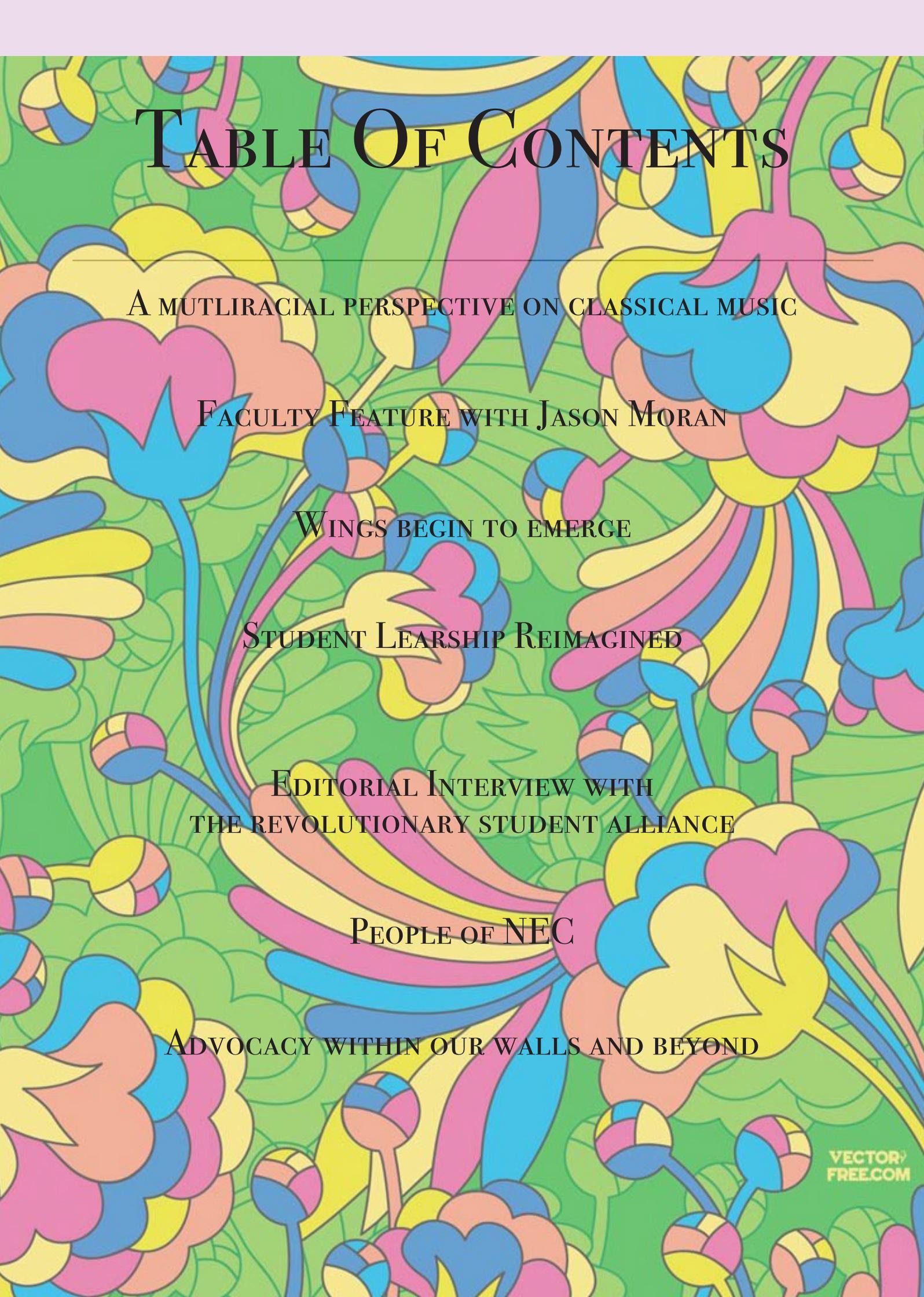


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ADVOCACY WITHIN OUR WALLS AND BEYOND

**A MULTIRACIAL PERSPECTIVE
ON
CLASSICAL MUSIC**

BY CHEYANNA DURAN

**We belong here.
There should be more of us here.
Our presence is valuable.**

**I INVITE YOU TO BE
DISRUPTIVE WITH ME....**

Most of the time, people assume that I am white. This is an immense privilege, but there are two large downfalls to this. One, it often means that people think they can trust me enough to be racist in front of me. Two, it allows people to erase an extremely significant part of my identity. When I disclose to people that I am Latina, I am often met by comments like: “Oh! So is English your second language?” or “Oh! So are your parents illegal?” or “Oh! That’s why you have such a nice body!” or, the worst response, “But you aren’t a REAL person of color, or a REAL Mexican.” In other words, REAL Mexicans are not people you should identify with. Most people at NEC know me for being a leader for SAGE, a club that centers gender related issues. Once during a conversation with other SAGE members, I was discussing why gender and racial equity is desperately needed at NEC. I was met with the comment, “We should really only be talking about gender, I don’t feel comfortable talking about race as a white person.” How am I, as a Latina, supposed to separate my race from my gender? How are black women, black trans folks supposed to separate their race from their gender? THAT is the problem.

Classical music institutions have ALWAYS been uncomfortable talking about race, as if taking a colorblind approach will solve all problems regarding equity in the institution. It feels like an excuse for white people to say that they are uncomfortable talking about race, so that they can further continue ignoring the problem. It should not be the responsibility of people of color to bear the burden of solving the insidious inequities that white people created. In classical music, those inequities look like where after school programs are available, financial aid packages based off of merit instead of need, the price of private lessons and youth orchestra and instruments and music and pre college, nepotism, the list could go on and on. None of these barriers were created on accident; they were intentional. It will take intentionality and urgency to solve them.

People often ask me why I play classical music. The longer I stick around, the more I start asking myself the same question. I wonder if winning a job in an orchestra will be fulfilling and if my presence there would be a political statement, or if I'd be better off putting my energy towards dismantling oppression from the top down.

For my fellow POC students reading this, both answers are correct. The institutions that we enter keep us questioning whether or not we belong, when our white counterparts aren't asking themselves the same questions. We belong here. There should be more of us here. Our presence is valuable. We come from generations of the most resilient, innovative, and entrepreneurial people. Classical music has needed to change for a long time, and we can be leaders in that. Classical music will always exist. We do not need to worry about classical music dying out, especially so long as white supremacy still exists. What if the reason that our audiences are so old and white and male is because classical music has made little to no effort to change for hundreds of years? Making an effort to change includes playing new and contemporary music (and not only the new and contemporary music of white men).

Introducing more diverse repertoire will not only welcome more people to the table, create better programs, but also create a relevance that classical music has not seen for centuries. Diverse programming is just good programming. Diverse education is just good education. The most exciting concert I ever attended was at the Sphinx Connect Conference last February, where we saw an entirely Black and Latinx orchestra play for a predominantly Black and Latinx audience. The two principal bassists were Black women. The conductor was Black. I have never seen anything like it, or heard anything like it for that matter. The concert highlighted Black composers, but opened with Beethoven's Egmont Overture. I have never heard Beethoven like that in my life. I have never heard such tremendous applause. I had also never seen myself accurately represented in classical music until that moment. Arguably, as a biracial woman it could be easy for me to ignore half of my heritage while attending an overwhelmingly white institution that focuses on white western classical music.

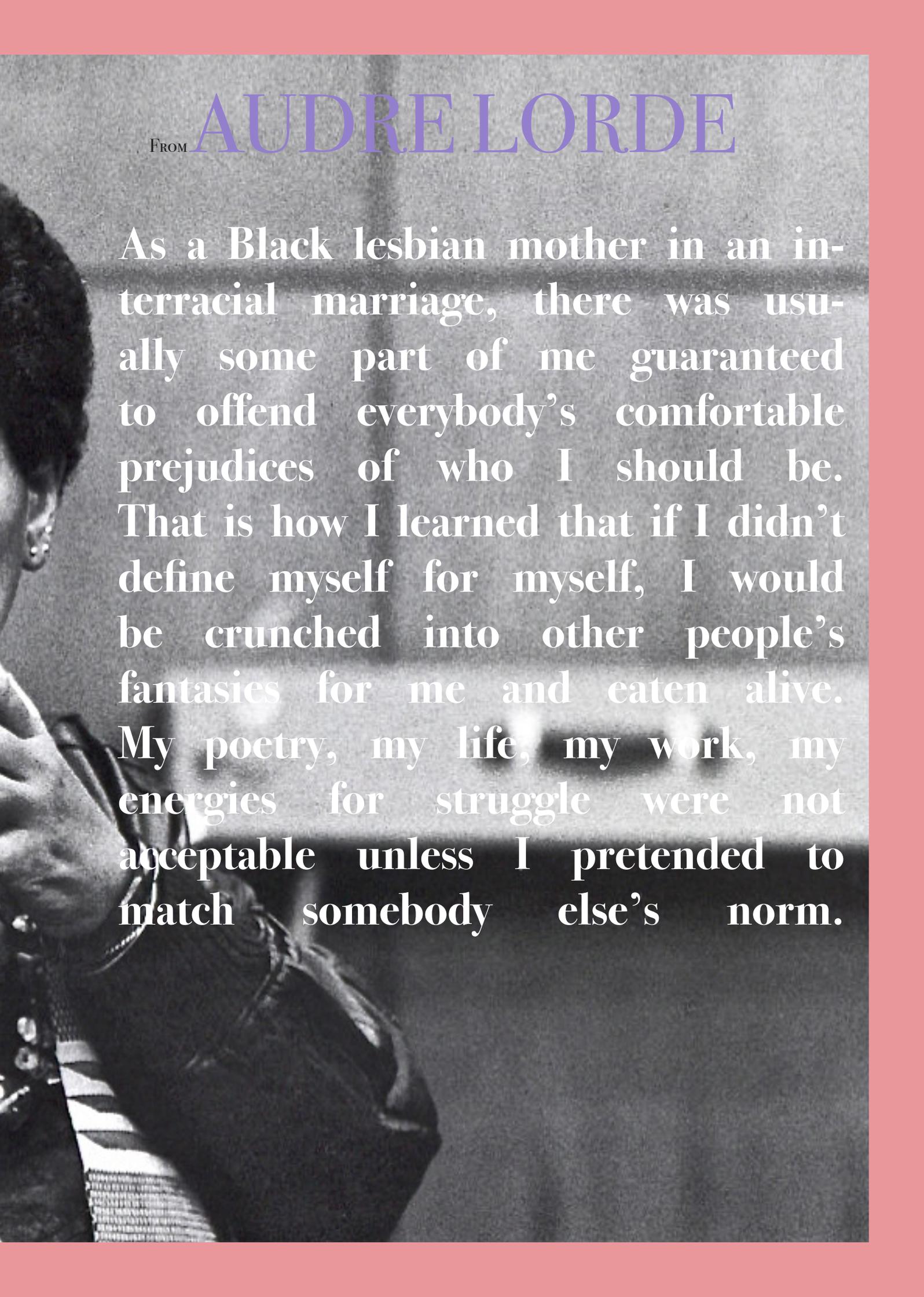
Sometimes it feels like people WISH that I would just pretend that I am not Latina, and that it would somehow make life easier if I stopped caring about my race. It does not work that way. Only white people can live their life ignoring race. I am so proud to be Latina. I feel incredibly blessed to come from a family whose culture is both complicated, and beautiful. Rooted in terrible oppression, but also incredible love. Even through the exhaustion of existing in white spaces, I am incredibly honored to bring my talents to the table, whether that is playing in orchestra or disrupting the status quo. I invite you to be disruptive with me.

~ Cheyanna Duran BM NEC '18 - 20, Oboe Performance

BM BU '20 - 22, Oboe Performance and Social Sciences

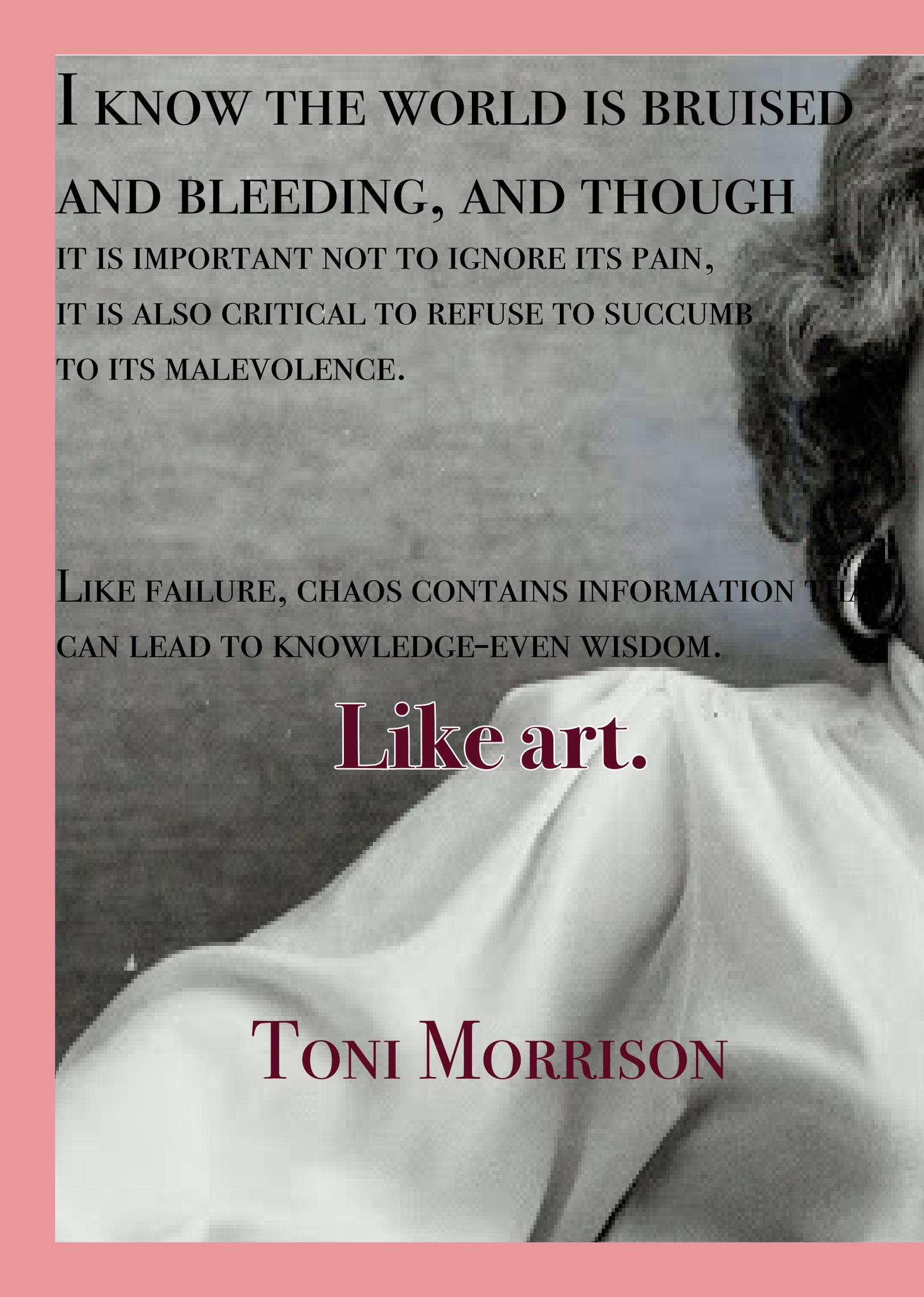
MONTHLY QUOTES





FROM **AUDRE LORDE**

As a Black lesbian mother in an interracial marriage, there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody's comfortable prejudices of who I should be. That is how I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive. My poetry, my life, my work, my energies for struggle were not acceptable unless I pretended to match somebody else's norm.



I KNOW THE WORLD IS BRUISED
AND BLEEDING, AND THOUGH
IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO IGNORE ITS PAIN,
IT IS ALSO CRITICAL TO REFUSE TO SUCCUMB
TO ITS MALEVOLENCE.

LIKE FAILURE, CHAOS CONTAINS INFORMATION THAT
CAN LEAD TO KNOWLEDGE—EVEN WISDOM.

Like art.

TONI MORRISON



FACULTY FEATURE:
INTERVIEW WITH JASON MORAN

BY CAROLINE JESALVA



Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down with Professor Jason Moran to talk about his thoughts on the intersection between music, race, and identity.

In our conversation, he touches on the role of the artist and the value of artistic expression, musicianship, and activism.

~ Caroline Jesalva BM' 23 Violin Performance

Q - This is really a time where we're re-imagining what we can do with music. How can artists build on this moment?

A - In the moment of creating, it won't feel like anything else you've ever done, and that's the moment that you know you're doing it right. It should feel different. Like now, watching orchestras partially dismantle to try to handle social distancing as an ensemble—they have to think about the spatial aspect, which they thought they had figured out, but now everybody has to rethink space. I think that's good because it will shift the mold again. This is a push moment, and as artists we are very sensitive to those things and can find our way to do it.

Q - Who were the teachers that shaped you outside of music school?

A - I think there are a couple places that I thought were teachers to me. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) for one. That building became a place for me to do research that wasn't built around theory or harmony or melody. Being in New York in the 90s also meant being in the center of Hip-Hop; going to see Hip-Hop shows was pretty inspiring. Going to those clubs and going to hear those bands when they were first emerging, like A Tribe Called Quest and WuTang Clan, was a magical and impactful moment.

Q - How did this change your perspective on music?

A - Well, it made me understand that you didn't necessarily have to get dressed up in a tuxedo and all bow together for something to be impactful. I mean we know that, but sometimes at Conservatory performance gets treated as a monolith, as if there's only one way of performing. For me, going to see a bunch of hip-hop shows suddenly made sampling a part of my piano practice. Art like Jacob Lawrence's exhibition on the Great Migration became my understanding of what historical narrative could look like; and sculptors like Bruce Nauman (image on left) was kind of what I wanted my music sound like. Those performance practices really changed the aesthetic value that I wanted to put into jazz.

Q - How can we continually self-educate ourselves as artists?

A - I think what a good student is able to do is read, understand the classroom that they're in, and ask the questions that the teacher did not give them. For me, I know I had to go look for other answers outside the classroom. Sometimes it takes a lot more history that isn't taught in the school. You have to look for other students too. There's so much offered to students in Boston, and there's a way to find another education that isn't taught in the school. As an artist, I can't wait. I have to hunt for the answer. I have to listen for it.

Q - What are the necessary questions we need to ask ourselves about music?

A - Does the song have another layer that you can rely on to tell the story? For me, it starts there. I realized I had a gap in my understanding of what I was playing when I met my wife, Alicia. I wasn't able to give her any kind of answer about the Duke Ellington song that I was playing, whereas she was asking questions about her operatic repertoire – Who was it written for? What was the story behind the piece? What is La Boheme really saying about culture and who has power? I just knew “Well, he's good! I don't know...” So there were big gaps in my historical understanding of what I was playing. Part of figuring that out is really playing with people who are all willing to discuss what the music means. You have to have a community of people who are interested in the idea of what music can do.

Q - For you, what is the intersection point between activism and music?

A - The artist's job is to promote understanding, and that can look a lot of different ways. I think if we want to change something we will have to provoke. If we don't, then we will just sit back. But I think there's power in provoking. I have enough examples over history of why it matters to push ahead and to find the crack and open it more. Otherwise, we get stuck. And I don't play music that does that and I don't play with musicians who do that either. I'm very careful to work with people and artists of all disciplines who really think about wedging themselves in and cracking something wide open. I think young musicians come with a different set of understanding about how the world works, and that's the language that institutions will rely on to help them change.

Q - As an improvising musician, what do you think are the unsaid components of music?

A - Jazz evolves out of something that not everybody can understand. That's an old thing in Black American tradition. We hear the relationship to sound that we know can invigorate a population. What is unsaid from every musician during their solo is really how they feel and the situation that exists off of the bandstand. The audience sees this styled figure on the stage, but when the styled figure steps off the stage....well, Miles Davis will still get beaten in the head by a policeman. Billie Holiday will still have to deal with some man trying to take her money. The music becomes a reflection of that. It becomes a reflection of the positive and negative image. The positive is the music and the negative image is real life.

Q - How did you notice the gaps in your institutional education?

A - I think one thing we learn while we're studying music is that there is a hierarchy, or at least we're taught that there is one. Who's important? What name gets pushed to the front of the music stands over and over and over again. After a certain point you should question that. Why is it good music? Is it because we played it over and over and over again? You know, they do that now on pop radio. They play Drake over and over again until the song you thought you hated, three weeks later, you think, 'Oh, this song is actually pretty good.' Maybe it is good! But I want to make sure we ask that question about what gets put up there.

I have to ask myself that question about the musicians that have been promoted in jazz — what about the women who have been deleted? Who was really controlling Louis Armstrong? I think for us our single most powerful process is deciding which rep we want to play and which stories we want to tell. That's part of our role — going beyond the things we think we feel or like, and asking whether the story has something relevant to say today. If you're playing the right song, 30 years later you'll never feel like it's out of style. Meaning, it'll still have a powerful message to convey to the audience. You know, you have to treat the audience like they're smart, as if they're going to grasp all of the meaning rather than 'I'm just going to give you something loud enough with a big ending to make you clap'.

Q - Recently, with NEC there's been a petition coming about diversifying the faculty and curriculum. How do you feel NEC can move forward and re-shape the mold?

A - It's long overdue. We have to really be honest with what history we want to preserve and which history we want to erase. And I mean simply within the school. It will take some people letting go of their hang-ups over what gets promoted and what gets preserved. We have to be honest about that as faculty, students, administration, and board members. I want to think about the future students twenty years from now who totally changes the game. I want to make sure that they're not getting some small, wedged-up idea about what music is; and as a conservatory, we have to innovate. If innovation means getting rid of a certain kind of supremacy, it's the time to do it. I'm here to support that kind of change.

Q - You've mentioned how reading was a launching point to understanding narratives that were excluded from jazz education, especially concerning female and racial intersections. How did this change your perspective on your art?

A - You know, now when I look at the list of collaborators who have really changed me as an artist they're all women: From Adrian Piper to Joan Jonas to my wife Alicia to Ava DuVernay to Kara Walker to Lorna Simpson to Elizabeth Alexander to Dr. Kellie Jones. These women are brilliant. I started to change my recording narratives, and now my jazz public has to know their names with the same weight that they might know Wayne Shorter or anybody else. I bow down to the way that they have powered through and the way that they have informed how I make music and tell stories. My role as a teacher at the school for the past ten years is to make my classes dual and sometimes triple classes. At one point, you might think you're learning about music, but now you're learning about race and class.

Q - What pieces have shaped you as a musician?

A - One of them is Round Midnight by Thelonious Monk. It's the first time I heard Monk and I was 13 years old. My parents were listening to his solo piano rendition of the song on a record player. I walked into my parents' room as they were listening to Monk, but while watching television. On the television was news about a politician in Houston who had died in a plane crash on a mission in Africa. So they're watching the wreckage, but they're not listening to the sound; they're listening to Thelonious Monk. That song has a different kind of power for me, because it's the song that I think made me want to become a musician. Another song is Leontyne Price singing 'When I am laid in Earth' from Dido and Aeneas by Purcell. The refrain is "remember me, remember me, remember me". I think for musicians, sound is the trace of our existence. These pieces are responding to the necessity to state something that is burned into memory, and I come back to these pieces all the time.

Note: Thank you so much to Professor Moran for contributing to this issue of the Penguin!

RESOURCES

- MORE FROM JASON MORAN - [HERE](#)

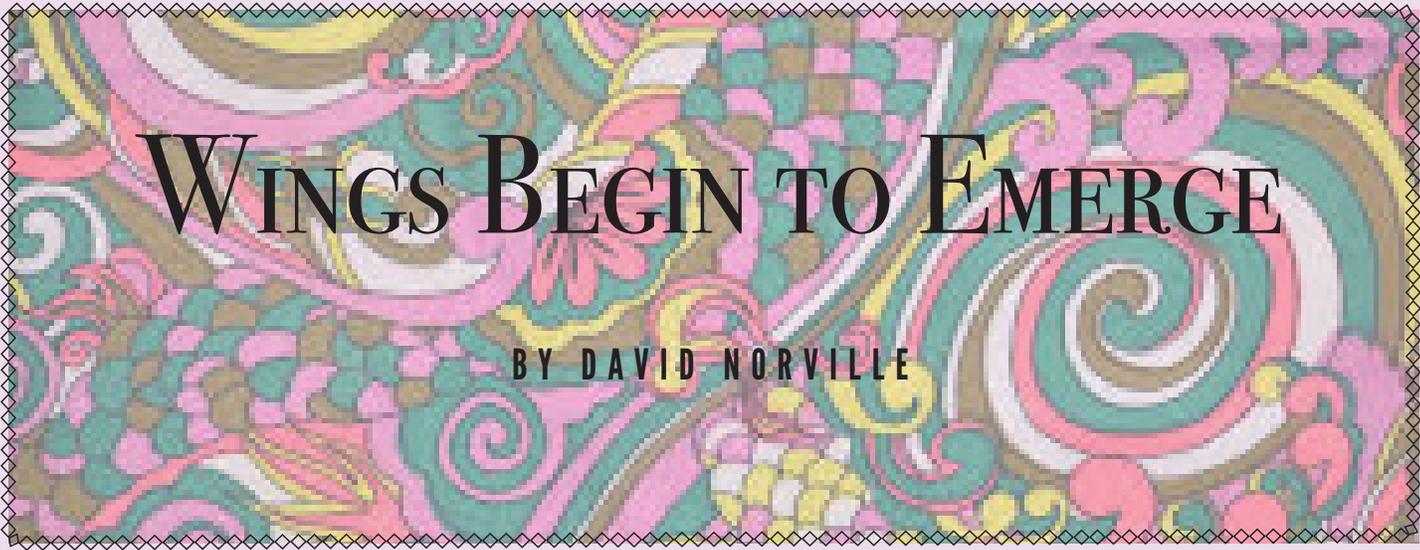
- MORE ON BRUCE NAUMAN - [HERE](#)



- TONI MORRISON'S INVISIBLE INK

- TONI MORRISON'S JAZZ

- CHECK OUT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MoMA) - [HERE](#)



WINGS BEGIN TO EMERGE

BY DAVID NORVILLE

To the NEC student body:

Hello, my name is David Alexander Norville. I am a Black man playing the oboe at the New England Conservatory of Music. I come from a line of people exemplify strength in all its magnitude and beauty in the smallest crevice of a wrinkle. I am strong, I am smart, I am resilient, but I still feel pain. I still weep. I still feel anxiety. I am excited to be re-meeting everyone in the fall. Let's make this a school dedicated to inclusion and belonging.

With Love, Grace, and Power.
D.A.N

I began studying the oboe at NEC in the fall of 2016. I had just recovered from my “post-Interlochen depression syndrome” and was wishing my fellow graduates farewell and good luck at their new, esteemed conservatories. I was one of 4 or 5 Interlochen students entering the freshman class of 2020 at NEC and among them, I was the only one of African descent. I belong to a squadron of young black artists called Focus On Your Art. Over the years, Focus On Your Art has become an organization dedicated to the maturation of emerging artists of colour through artistic activism, concert curation, and innovative educational platforms. Back in '16, Focus On Your Art was merely a collective of young black striplings, pooling their resources, experiences, and discipline into one another and aiding the entire group in manifesting their artistic and collegiate desires. They were the first squad of black artists I ever belonged to; the pool of fresh ink on dripped on a pad of white paper in the land of stately pines. They were my brothers and sisters. In the fall of 2016, for the first time in what felt like a lifetime, half of us were split up and enrolled in different colleges and conservatories across the country. We were starting a new chapter, isolated, within institutions that we would soon learn had not quite yet made space for us. In my mind, as many friends can attest, I can be quite the extremist. I started my time at the New England Conservatory feeling as though I was some type of alien attempting to pass as a human.

I had two years of feeling similarly at an arts boarding school. Why would this be any different? Armed with the readings of Malcolm X and James Baldwin, I kept the teachings and lessons of the race from my home planet by my side - always prepared to lecture those who portended racist or discriminatory behaviour. For the first semester, I spent my time working as a clerk at From the Top, practicing solfege and making reeds while listening to lectures by my favourite black leaders. Among them, James Baldwin, Angela Davis, and Stokely Carmichael caught my attention, challenged my problematic thoughts, and watered the soil of my mind with liturgical musings from which ripe racial pride was born. Of everyone I listened to, it was El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, otherwise known as Malcolm X, who impassioned me with the courage, fire, and knowledge to place one foot in front of the other each day. I remember dedicating an Instagram post to Malcolm on his birthday that year. As I do in all of my writings, I pay respect to my heroes like Malcolm X and James Baldwin through integrating their teachings and quotes into my pieces. “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a state of rage almost, almost all of the time.” I pen this now to characterize the dynamic of neurosis and frustration that came along with my studies and rose in consciousness in my freshman year.

Understanding the ways in which disenfranchised people function as coal in a furnace enraged me. Understanding what those stares and back-handed comments really meant angered me at each turn. Each morning, as I left 33 Gainsborough Street and walked into Jordan Hall, I surveyed the neo-renaissance style architecture, Jordan's grand staircases, paintings, and the ever so famous Beethoven statue. It's always important to remember the ways that power can be manifested through physical space and objects. The unconscious associations that inform one of how to sit in a chair or to be quiet in a library are the same ones that inform one upon entering the section of Boston at the corners of Mass Ave and Huntington, as well as Mass Ave and Gainsborough. You're entering a space that's derivative of European influence. Boston Symphony Hall, the Horticultural Center, and NEC's Jordan Hall are derived from one section of the world. From the style of the architecture to the people who primarily inhabit the spaces, there's a Euro-American amalgam of life, art, culture, and being; of which those who identify as anything else are utterly and completely heterotopic. A word which here means "in the wrong place, in an abnormal place." I was first introduced to that word by the social theorist Michel Foucault. He used it to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye.

In general, a heterotopia is a physical representation or approximation of a utopia that contains undesirable bodies to make a space appear truly utopian. In my time at NEC, I'd attribute two of Foucault's types of heterotopias to life within the institution as a Black person. The two types relevant for this stream of consciousness are the "Heterotopia of Time" and the "Heterotopia of Crisis." A heterotopia of time serves to enclose objects from all times and styles in one place. They exist in time but also exist outside of time because they are built and preserved to be physically insusceptible to time's ravages. Conservatories are similar to museums in the sense that they exist to preserve a certain sentiment, style, interpretation, and so on throughout time protected from the physical and mental evolutions that take place outside of the respective space. A place dedicated to the preservation of a particular mode of thought or mode of being takes responsibility and ownership for the perpetuity of all things deemed to be significant to maintain the structure of the institution. One does not have the privilege of cherry-picking the savoury qualities of an institution. One must carry with it the behaviours, attitudes, economical models, and iniquities that come along with the institution. It can be related to stowing away a time capsule with infectious bacteria for centuries and centuries and expecting the bacteria to not cultivate and grow a culture of its own.

One of the incredibly sad things about attending a music conservatory as a Black person is having the misfortune of coming of age there. It is a disheartening realization at the age of 18 or 19 years old to find that the institution and the world to which you have dedicated chapters of your life has not made a space for you to equitably exist as an able-bodied member. It is a day that comes at all different times during one's undergrad but is a day that Black people growing up in the conservatory do not forget. This allows me to introduce the second relevant heterotopia that Foucault spoke of, the heterotopia of crisis. A 'crisis heterotopia' is a separate space like a boarding school or a motel room where activities like coming of age or a honeymoon take place out of sight. Foucault describes the crisis heterotopia as "reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis." For Black students entering the conservatory, we are entering with the past two decades or so of personally experiencing racial epithets, condescension, discrimination, financial worries, and centuries of generational trauma. I may have used a misnomer earlier when phrasing our anxieties as some sort of neurosis. The word neurosis connotes that there is a worry we have that isn't actually present. What I am trying to impress here is that we have many worries at one time and many of them pose dangers to our physical bodies, education, and futures.

Our hearts may race, but we are not insane. I personally was greeted in Pierce Hall at registration during my freshman year with a "Welcome to the school" as well as a "You'll be asked to leave NEC in the next 5 weeks if you don't pay the rest of your tuition." I was a young freshman by myself in a separate part of the country with only one parent who, despite her hardest efforts, could not help to pay for my tuition because her credit score wasn't high enough to receive loans. I had the \$115 dollars my mother sent me with up North to Boston and around \$9,000 hanging over my head that was the next barrier I needed to surmount in order to achieve my dream of playing music in the world at a high level. A few months of phone calls and emails helped me find that outstanding balance. However, the sleepless nights I had, feeling like my world was against me, became a common theme throughout my undergrad. It's something that I will never forget. "You think your pain and heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read," claimed Jimmy Baldwin. Through my pain and sadness, I took the time to read, study, and connect with Blackness in its many forms and iterations. Through the four months of being forgotten off of symphony cycles during my sophomore year, I took time to mentor young inner-city kids in the Roxbury Youth Orchestra. I read and I cried and I read and I cried. I cried for myself and for my personal pain. I wept for the dozens of Black children I went to school with that were going through the same thing.

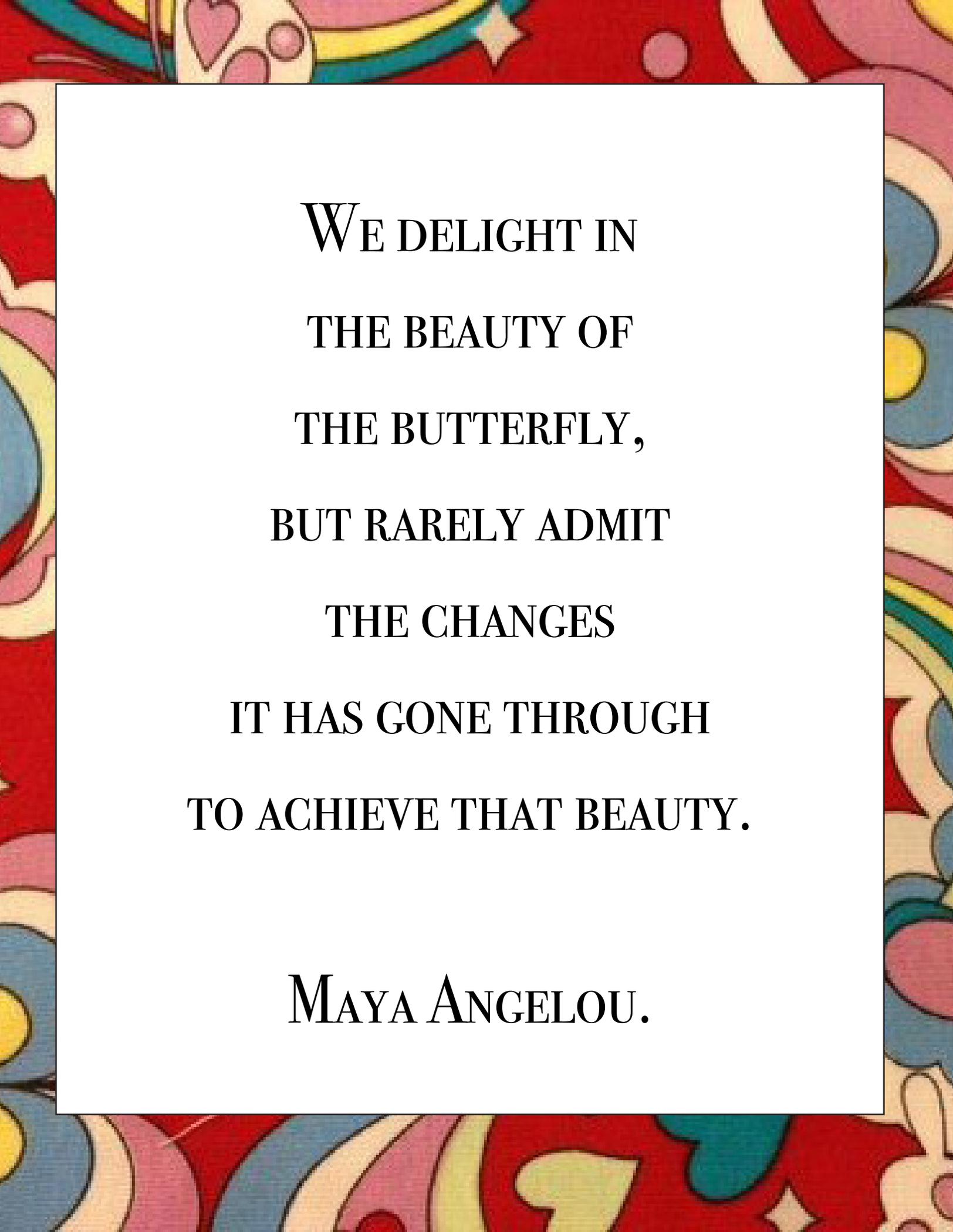
I knew a Black woman who had three jobs while trying to study at NEC. Her pain made me weep. I read Coretta Scott King's writings and biographies and learned that she also worked three jobs while trying to attend NEC. Connecting my experience to my colleagues and then to American heroes like Coretta triggered a type of crying that only be heard and/ or seen by those who knew the same pain. It was a silent bellow that imprisoned me behind a gate of sadness. I became disillusioned. I became cynical. "There is nothing so pitiful as a young cynic because he has gone from knowing nothing to believing nothing." A famous quote that came from another hero of mine, Maya Angelou. Little did I know that several years later, the attribute by which I was denigrated and lashed was the same attribute that, through loving and embracing, delivered me from evil. For Black people all around the world. It is so important to find community and home, for us to find security, have communion and remember ourselves. The question is, "how is that different from white people or Asian people around the world?" Well, the separation of families and the desecration of communities was instrumental to the degradation of households and the enslavement of the worlds African people's in the West. The ramifications of those histories still exist and iterate in many inconspicuous forms in all sections of the social sphere. It is for this reason why Black people at NEC, for example, congregate at lunch tables in the Green Room Cafe.

Telling stories, sharing meals, and laughing boisterously. Through our pain and grief, coming together is how we persist through difficult times. The conservatory is just a microcosm of the black experience. We've devised ways to persist through the most difficult of times and overcome continuously. The challenges we face in the conservatory push us to dark, dark places, and through the darkness, the lucky ones are able to step into a new state of consciousness. One that allows for the self to persist in Black flesh through the rejection, anxiety, embarrassment, and heartache - undergirded by a beautiful Black pride. Finding internal strength through community and culture. Our coming of age happens at different times within the community. In the conservatory, more often than not, the awakening happens through pained adversity rather than joyous exaltation. Through my pain and sadness, I began to reject the institutions that rejected me and embrace those who accepted people who looked like me. I learned to go where I was celebrated not where I was tolerated; for where I was tolerated there was no space for me. I resolved to reject the common traditional orchestral route in lieu of something more in accordance with my values. I aspire to create innovative educational concerts that highlight the beauty and majesty of Black and Brown music, history, and culture.

I aspire to build an organization that will provide the support, resources, and networks that young black kids in conservatory need to thrive and not survive. To win and not spin. The right to choose, not to lose. I want to help create a world of Black creators and entrepreneurs. A world where black people are economically empowered and have the support systems they need. I came to these revelations through crisis turned to triumph. For me, many of these formative years were ripe with mental breakdowns, many visits to the school therapist, depressive spells, and anti-depressant prescriptions. It's something I went through but at no point in time should anyone forget that most Black people who go through conservatory find the same issues, inhibitions, and epiphanies at varying degrees. We are strong. The question is must we always be strong? Must we always ignore our true feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and fatigue? Can Black people be okay? Can Black people feel peace? It took a knee to George Floyd's neck to trigger NEC into realizing that their knee was on ours. Please spare me the shock and confusion as I refer you to the past 6 centuries of Black life in the Western hemisphere. What is necessary now at the New England Conservatory is for truth and reconciliation to begin parts of the healing process within the school.

The utopian representation of the school that our marketing department so skillfully exemplifies does not tell the true story of how black lives are regarded and treated at NEC. As Walter Russell Mead has written, "Utopia is a place where everything is good; a dystopia is a place where everything is bad; heterotopia is where things are different – that is, a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another." It is time for us to re-meet each other as if we never truly knew each other before. When in reality, the Blacks have known their oppressors for quite some time but they are just beginning to really see our faces and hear our stories.

- David Norville MM' Oboe Performance



**WE DELIGHT IN
THE BEAUTY OF
THE BUTTERFLY,
BUT RARELY ADMIT
THE CHANGES
IT HAS GONE THROUGH
TO ACHIEVE THAT BEAUTY.**

MAYA ANGELOU.





STUDENT LEADERSHIP REIMAGINED

BY BRITTANY BRYANT

INTRODUCTION

Several members of the Student Leadership Council have formed a task force with the goal of reimagining NEC student leadership to possess true power and uplift student voices. Learning from past mistakes, the task force has developed a plan for a new Student Government Association—one with clearly-defined goals of transparency, efficiency, and unification. The SGA would provide increased resources for clubs, serve as a clear outlet for communication between the student body and administration, and represent NEC student needs and concerns.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, a group of students founded the Student Leadership Council with the goal of collaborating with administration to drive the NEC student agenda forward. Council attendance was mandatory for club leaders, an effort that added unwanted responsibilities for some members. Eventually, a lack of clarity and structure led to the group's hiatus. The new SLC was founded in Spring 2020 and consists of a combination of selected and self-appointed students; what began as a handful of students who had applied for the position soon grew to include student and alumni volunteers, as well as student leaders recruited by Dean Tatar. The SLC has faced certain challenges and limitations, and therefore seeks a new way to give students the opportunity to make change.

NEXT STEPS....

The NEC student government may consist of an Elected Board, an Assembly, and of course will include the NEC Student Body. The Elected Board would communicate directly with administration and may include a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, International Education Chair, Diversity and Equality Liaison, and more. The Assembly would consist of student representatives who hold voting power; these representatives would be voluntary or elected and also include club representation, should a club want to send a representative. Students may serve on permanent and semi-permanent committees, which would be founded to tackle certain goals. The general student population would have the opportunity to voice concerns in open forum-style meetings and communicate directly with their representatives. The Student Government model is still in the works and requires feedback from the student body. This is your government! In the next coming week or so, expect an email with more information about our research, plans, and how you can contribute. As a student body, we have recently made significant strides in promoting leadership, equity, inclusion, and the importance of raising NEC student voices. We look forward to continuing on that path with a transparent, powerful, formally established Student

MEET THE TASK FORCE:

Brittany Bryant, BM'23 Vocal Performance

Cate Byrne, BM' 22 Contemporary Improv

Grant Houston, MM'22 Violin Performance

Theodora Nestorova, MM'21 Vocal Ped

Joey Nizich, MM'21, Choral Conducting

Sebastian Ortega, MM' 22 Cello Performance

Anabel Tejeda, BM'22 Viola Performance

Jameson Wells, MM'20 Vocal Ped

Yifei Zhou, BM'22 Jazz Voice

EDITORIAL INTERVIEW:
REVOLUTIONARY
STUDENT ALLIANCE



EDITOR'S NOTE:

- INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY CAROLINE JESALVA
JULY 24, 2020

- TRANSCRIBED BY MADELEINE WIEGERS

RECENTLY, WE SAT DOWN WITH FIVE STUDENTS FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT ALLIANCE -- CHEYANNA DURAN, DAVID NORVILLE, JAHNVI MADAN, NOGA CABO, AND TYLER WAGNER -- TO DISCUSS THEIR RECENT PETITION AND PERSPECTIVES FORUM. THE PETITION FORMED AS A RESULT OF A FACETIME CONVERSATION BETWEEN JAHNVI MADAN AND NOGA CABO. WE HAD A CHANCE TO SPEAK WITH THEM THE DAY AFTER THEY SENT THE PETITION TO NEC ADMINISTRATION.

BELOW ARE EXCERPTS FROM OUR INTERVIEW WITH THE RSA, WHERE MEMBERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND ELABORATE ON THEIR WORK AND ACTIVISM WITHIN THE SCHOOL.

Q: What makes a petition an effective way for change?

A: Only so much is going to get done if we keep sending emails; we have to do more than that. Especially at a small school like NEC. It's one of the most effective ways to get everyone on the same page. When a big thing hits the news, everyone is like, "Retweet!" and log off. The next day, there is less engagement, and it dissipates from there. We wanted to find ways to leverage that engagement and keep people informed, involved, and thinking about what is really wrong. That is why we began with a petition.

Q: How many people have signed the petition?

A: Before we sent it off to the administration, we had 396 people engaged.

Q: We are interested in your demand to hire 15% BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) to our staff across all departments. Where did that number come from?

A: The 15% was a hypothetical to suggest the increase of hiring BIPOC across all departments. For example, if 15% of the student body identified as a person of color, that needs to be reflected in the faculty. The real percentage is actually way less, but the demographics of NEC are very easily accessible online. (Editor's note, NEC student demographics can be found [here](#))

Q: What has been your experience working with others when there is a lack of communication and a disconnect from these issues? What personal experiences have you had?

A: We have had great conversations with a lot of people on the administration, but other times, by the end it feels like all of this emotional labor from the students of color is being exploited from them, like, "Tell us more about how bad your experience was as a person of color," or, "Tell us what it's like to be a student of color at NEC," and by the end of it you're exhausted and upset and nothing gets done. It can be very frustrating. It also feels as though there is an air of this patronizing attitude, with positive and negative things. For example, if we are thinking about any sort of BSU concert of any magnitude, whether it be a small thing or something as large as the Coretta Scott King concert, it is usually met with a sort of pat-on-the-head, "How was your little thing that happened last week?" When it's actually a significant, influential event. Similarly, when we bring concerns forward, it is still met with the same energy. It's not a direct suppression, but by not engaging, they suppress the energy of the student body. We either feel like we are coming as a beggar or a child, or someone who will be patronized. It is a frivolous energy.

Q: In your panel presentation, you talked a lot about values and shaping NEC in accordance with them, to help set up their vision. What values did you intend to instill when writing the petition?

A: First and foremost, we were going directly from NEC's mission statement and core values. One of the things that we wrote in the letter is that there is a certain neuroticism that comes along with being a student of color, or an underrepresented student at NEC. We are drawn to the school by the mission statement and by seeing all of the people of color in the advertisements, and we come here expecting a certain set of values; expecting acceptance. Sometimes it's like, "I see those values over there... but I don't see me over there. I don't see 'her' over there. I don't see 'them' over there". We have to go back to the core values because that is what we signed up for.

Q: What are the negative ramifications about applying a standard of diversity, if any?

A: When the way we have seen the conservatory operate for so long starts to change, that can be cataclysmic to some people's understanding. When you integrate diversity, you integrate histories, cultures, understandings, practices, values, and it's going to change everything. Some spaces will end up with something completely different than what they started with, and sometimes completely different than what they were looking to get. That being said, is there an example where too much diversity became a problem? We are not asking for there to be equal numbers. We are asking to be represented; the bare minimum.

Q: How much room is there for disagreement in a socially inclusive environment?

A: It's not that there isn't room for disagreement. There is room for complexity; for multiple truths. It could be said that there is an infinite amount of interpretations for anything, but that does not imply the amount of viable interpretations. Our belief is that if there is a certain set of values, beliefs, or actions that can't be replicated without damaging the spirits of people around them, it has to go. There are some points in time at intersections where there is room for variability. In the black community, colorism is a great issue. It is hard to say what is right and what is not right. When you start to invalidate someone's identity and personhood, you should not take any steps further. We can't get behind something that is so vacuous in nature.

Q: Have you experienced tokenism in our community?

A: Well, for one thing, there's the big TV screen when you walk in. For most of the second semester, it felt like it was only showing the faces of students of color at the school. Then there is the issue of the Coretta Scott King concert. The bust was donated by chance three years ago and the president at the time called on the BSU to put together a concert to commemorate Coretta and celebrate the bust being donated to NEC. It feels a type of way because you know you're being tokenized and they approached you because you're black. In that regard, it takes away from the special meaning of the event, but at the same time, we were grappling between doing the event and not doing the event at all...but that means not remembering Coretta's legacy. We ended up doing the concert, however, it was more of a glorified board meeting. It was at 4 or 5 pm and all the students were in class. The room was packed, but it was professors, alumni, board members, but very few students and very few black people. That being said, it was an impactful concert. It was a great exhibition of what black people at NEC have to offer and have had to offer. People were crying, bawling their eyes out, and thanking us for the event. It was only in the aftermath of people having received the event so well that we were approached to do it again. By the third time, they made it an annual thing. But people are still not aware that it was the donation of Coretta Scott King bust that made all of this possible. For two years, we have worked really hard on this, for us, because it is our culture and our history; but at the same time, it is being used to make NEC look good; like they're doing things that they are contractually obligated to do.

Q: When does inclusivity have the potential to become tokenism? What steps do you think are necessary to ensure that this does not happen?

A: We addressed that a little bit before in the discussion on tokenism, but something we need to talk about is erasure. That is the most dehumanizing, and most hurtful thing - to be completely erased. That's where we're at right now. We don't learn about people of color at NEC - not in the classical department. We don't learn about women. You have to take a special class to learn about women, and you can't even take a special class to learn about people of color. Having concerts that play the music of different cultures, having classes that reframe the curriculum, hiring people... yes, you start bordering tokenism, but what's the other side? The other side is erasure. The other side is no representation. Sometimes we hear that argument from white people and white administrators, "Oh, if I start requiring people to play music by people of color, they will be doing it because they have to check a box, so I'm not going to do the requirement." But do they have another solution? No, and the erasure continues.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your experiences as a woman and as a person of color?

A: When I got to NEC, my immediate experience was being the only woman-of-color instrumentalist in my year in the jazz program, and that resulted in me being the only person of color in my jazz classes, and one of the few women. That, compiled with the predominantly white jazz faculty, made me feel out of place because there was never a moment when I wasn't the girl and the person of color. When you're the only woman, when you're the only person of color in a room, micro-aggressions occur and people don't get it. They say, "Oh, I didn't think that was bad ... That was okay ... They're a great person ... Oh, they didn't mean it like that." You start to feel crazy. You wonder if it's something you're really experiencing or if you're making it up. You wonder if everyone else is right and it is okay. You think, "That teacher just said something really sexist but nobody spoke up, so is that okay? Or am I right to feel uncomfortable right now?"

Q: You mentioned people will say they “stand in solidarity” but not show up. Do you see our current call-out culture as something that is beneficial? Or is it more of a witch-hunt?

A: The opposite of call-out culture is silence. Who is being silent? Women, people of color, all of the intersections. What is worse? We have no problem with call-out culture because the opposite is silence. I feel that a lot of these questions are things that white boys I have met in my first year have in mind, and the reason they don't come to meetings or engage with any of us is because of that fear that they will say something and be called out. It's not wrong to want to understand diversity and people should shy away from that. There isn't any angry monster here to attack you. If someone is at work with me, comes to a SAGE meeting where they say something problematic, we're not going to attack them. It's going to be a conversation. We have sat in enough meetings where nothing gets done, but solidarity statements are made. At the end of the day, that's all they are: statements. Those are the kinds of things that should be called out right now.

Q: How do we move people away from a “slacktivist” mentality and toward actual change?

A: A big thing that is happening is to institute training sessions going forward that will force all faculty, admin, and students to engage in talking about these things. We don't think that leads to people standing with something without understanding it. We want people to engage. If people started to say they're in solidarity, it would go back to just sending and receiving emails and getting nowhere. The whole point is to convert the whole school to critically think about these things. We believe what people truly think will be understood by their actions. In a space where people are performative, those are the same people who won't show up to our SAGE meetings, or BSU meetings. Those will be the same people who have deaf ears when we are getting murdered in the streets. There will be enough real-time evidence to see who is really standing in solidarity with their actions. That is not to say that people who don't speak up aren't contributing positively. There are many ways to contribute.

Q: What specific steps are being taken to ensure that students' voices are being heard in the community?

A: From what we can share [at the time of this interview], the appointment of Stanford Thompson is game-changing because he is trying to paint a high-resolution picture of what is going on at NEC, not only from students' perspectives, but faculty and staff. He's laid out a framework, and you can schedule a meeting with him to go on the record and tell your stories and be completely transparent. Those accounts will be taken into consideration when instituting reform and strategizing a reformation plan.

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Editors' Note:

Thank you to the Revolutionary Student alliance for their contribution to this issue. In response to the RSA's call for greater diversity, NEC orchestras have revamped their programming to include a composer of color in each orchestra cycle.

For those who want join or continue the conversation, we encourage you to share your perspectives and ideas for future sessions by writing to belonging@necmusic.edu.

To share thoughts and ideas in a more personal setting, contact Stanford Thompson to schedule a confidential phone/Zoom meeting [here](#).

STAY SAFE and
WEAR A MASK so you can kiss
the ones you love



PEOPLE OF NEC





PICTURE SUBMISSION BY LIZ KLEIBER BM' 23 FLUTE PERFORMANCE





PICTURE SUBMISSION BY
JAHNVI MADAN
BM' 23 JAZZ PERFORMANCE

PICTURE SUBMISSION BY MOLLY FLYNN BM' 23 VOCAL PERFORMANCE



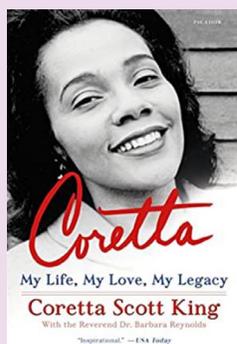
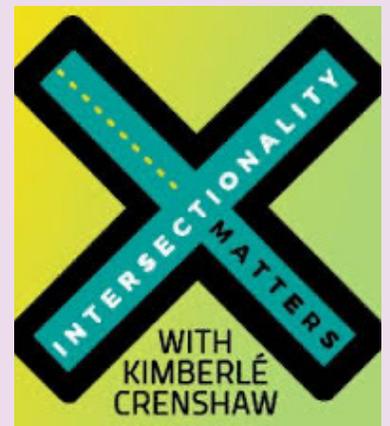
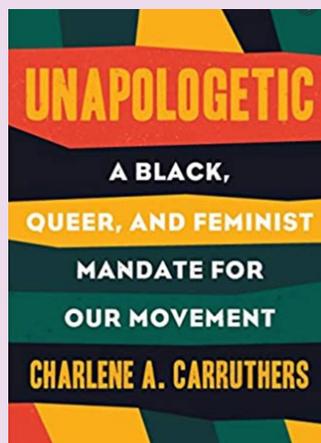
AMAZING WHAT ONLY A NIGHT OF PLANNING CAN DO. I AM IMMENSELY PROUD OF THE MANY PEOPLE THAT CAME OUT TO SUPPORT OUR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION AND SHOWED LOVE INSTEAD OF HATE.

- MOLLY FLYNN

ADVOCACY

WITHIN OUR WALLS AND BEYOND

By Madeleine Wieggers BM'23 Voice



BOOK

1. *My Life, My Love, My Legacy*
by Coretta Scott King
2. *How to Be an Antiracist*
by Ibram X. Kendi
3. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo
4. *So You Want to Talk About Race*
by Ijeoma Oluo
5. *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* by Charlene Carruthers

PODCASTS:

1. *About Race*, from the author of *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race*, Reni Eddo-Lodge
2. *Code Switch* by NPR
3. *All My Relations* by Matika Wilbur
4. *Intersectionality Matters!*
By Kimberlé Crenshaw
5. *Witness Black History* by BBC World

I want to preface all of this by stating that I am a 22-year-old white woman and my intention here is to express my belief that non-Black people must be vocal about civil rights. White-saviorism is one thing, but the fear of “coming across the wrong way” should not hold us back from showing support for our fellow human beings. From personal experience, I have noticed many white people will change the subject away from race when it comes up. This frustrates me deeply; I want to talk about it. It is important to talk about it. White people need to talk amongst themselves about it because 1. it is not the job of people of color to educate you about racial history, 2. the more we talk about it, the more comfortable we become with it. By now we are all aware of the climate of systemic racism in our country, so what do we do? Since important civil rights improvements unfortunately cannot seem to be made overnight, we must educate ourselves at the individual level. I have provided a list of only a few examples of books and podcasts that provide history and personal experience regarding racism—I am sure there are many more that could be equally as informative, and I encourage those of you who have preferred resources to submit them to The Penguin and to spread the word so we can build a supportive community. Right now, racial discrimination is one of the most prominent issues in our country. Getting NEC to a climate where everyone feels in-place is going to take a lot of individual work. The resources I have provided are from my own research and I encourage you to do some digging and learning for yourself. Even one session of research can make a difference in your perception of the matters at hand and can help you help others feel more comfortable. I will aggressively state that I do not care if you think it doesn't apply to you, for it applies to all of us on our journey within our community and the world. Please do your part.