

Big American Voices – January 3, 2018

The focus of our discussion today will be two songs by iconic, big-voiced American singers: Aretha Franklin, “Ain’t No Way” (1968), and Whitney Houston, “I Will Always Love You” (1992). We’re going to discuss vocal timbre, ornamentation, and venue/audience as we figure out what makes these singers expressive and admired.

**Warm-up writing:** Thinking about vocal timbres

*timbre* (n) – sound quality or color. Timbre is the reason that a flute sounds like a flute and an oboe sounds like an oboe, even when they’re playing the same pitch at the same dynamic level. Different sounds have different timbres because of vibrato, intensity, the attack of the note (beginning), the decay of the sound (ending), and its resonance (the presence of different harmonics in the sound).

Describe the voice of a singer you really like. What do you like about their voice, the way they perform, or the way their music makes you feel?

**Whitney Houston, “I Will Always Love You” (1992)**

Written by Dolly Parton (b. 1946)

If I should stay	I will always love you
I would only be in your way	
So I'll go, but I know	I hope life, treats you kind
I'll think of you each step of the way	And I hope that you have all
And I will always love you	That you ever dreamed of
I will always love you	And I wish you joy
	And happiness
Bitter-sweet memories	But above all of this
That's all I am taking with me	I wish you love
Good-bye, please don't cry	And I will always love you
We both know that I'm not	I will always love you
What you need	I will always love you
I will always love you	

“I Will Always Love You” was written and first recorded by Dolly Parton in 1974. Houston’s version was made for the 1992 movie *The Bodyguard*, in which Houston starred. The form of these songs is nearly identical, but they have markedly different effects on their listeners, and they’re intended for very different audiences.

See: Richard Rischar, “A Vision of Love: An Etiquette of Vocal Ornamentation in African-American Popular Ballads of the Early 1990s,” *American Music* (Autumn 2004), pp. 419-422

**Listening comparison:** Different vocal timbres

Listen to each of the following voices without judgment—we're not thinking about "I like this" or "I don't like this." Instead, we're thinking about how to *describe* the sound we hear and compare it to other sounds, leaving "good" and "bad" out of the discussion.

Margaret Price, "Ach, ich fuhls" from *Die Zauberflöte* (W. A. Mozart, 1791; recorded 1984)  
 Marianne Pousseur, "Nacht" from *Pierrot Lunaire* (Arnold Schoenberg, 1912)  
 Hole (Courtney Love), "Violet" (1991)  
 Joni Mitchell, "Big Yellow Taxi" (1970)  
 Billie Holiday, "Georgia on My Mind" (1941)  
 Estelle, "American Boy" (2008)  
 Mahalia Jackson, "Move On Up a Little Higher" (1947)

Different musical cultures have different vocal etiquettes.

*etiquette* (n) – manners or preferred behavior; the customary code of polite behavior in society or among members of a particular profession or group. The way a singer in one musical culture uses his or her voice is often the *wrong* etiquette for another musical culture. Some musicologists and authors refer to "vocal etiquette" as "tradition," "expectations," or "patterns."

The "correct" vocal etiquette is determined by members of a group (or a society) over time, but it can change from one generation to the next. Sounds and behaviors that audiences, patrons, and performers all like are reinforced (e.g., audience claps or cheers, performers are paid more or asked to do the same thing again), and passed down from professionals/masters to students/apprentices.

Vocal etiquette is determined not just by what people like or personal preference. Three other factors help shape vocal etiquette (and all other variables that make different music sound *different*):

- 1) Purpose – why the music is made
- 2) Venue – where the music is played or listened to
- 3) Cultural values – things that matter or are important to a society or group, things that seem "natural" to a society or group

## The vocal etiquette of gospel

*gospel* (n) – a musical style found in Black American churches that features the voice. The text of gospel songs consists of praising or celebrating God and also showing listeners how to address the difficulties and challenges of everyday life.

Charles E. Gold, “The Gospel Song: Contemporary Opinion,” *The Hymn* (July 1958), p. 70: “Essentially the gospel songs are songs of testimony, persuasion, religious exhortation, or warning. Usually the chorus or refrain technique is found.”

- 1) Musical purpose: religious worship, showing off (God-given) talent, demonstrating one’s connection to God, community-building activity
- 2) Venue: church (also recorded for commercial distribution from the 1930s onward)
- 3) Cultural values:
  - a. Following Emancipation (the end of slavery in the US in 1865), newly freed Blacks formed churches that became the hub of social activity, leadership, social services, and spiritual life. Gospel is way to strengthen that sense of community that was a place of safety for much of Black American history.
  - b. Gospel also continues West African traditions, such as the ring shout (worshippers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet and clapping their hands).
  - c. Gospel reinforces a sense of cultural pride. It’s the first Black religious music in America for which direct authorship of songs (i.e., composers) can be ascribed.
  - d. Spontaneity

All of these lead gospel singers to produce a particular vocal timbre or adhere to a special vocal etiquette that shows that they are part of a social group. Characteristics of vocal etiquette in gospel:

Vocal timbre – nasal vowels for emphasis, shouts, raspiness, hoarseness, use of both head and chest registers

Ornamentation – improvisatory introduction sections of songs, glides and bends, melismatic singing (many notes per syllable), embellishment of the last word of a line of text, heterophonic improvisation over a simpler chorus

See: Robert Stephens, “Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music,” *The Black Perspective in Music* (Spring 1984), pp. 26-27

The features that define gospel’s vocal etiquette have evolved over several centuries of music making in America and Africa. In the venue of gospel singing (i.e., in church), these sounds are a physical expression of the feeling of joy the singers experience when the Spirit (i.e., God) touches them or moves through them. They are singing for themselves but also performing on behalf of the congregation, showing the joy that everyone in the room is a part of.

Intense religious experiences that encourage worshippers to behave in expressive, emotional, or extravagant ways are found in many cultures around the world. Below is a description of another kind of intense American church-going experience, Pentecostalism – see: Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (2004), pp. 97-99:

Contemporary Pentecostals seek a direct, unmediated, personal, and deeply emotional experience of the divine... Pentecostalism constitutes a faith that is dependent on music to structure its religious services and to validate its system of beliefs by provoking intense emotional reactions within its most devout practitioners, leading them to “testify.” To dance in The Spirit, to be possessed by the Holy Ghost, is demonstration that one is accepted into the congregation of those blessed beings who will experience... the reappearance of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Music is the driving force...

“Music gets people in the attitude of worship. It helps them to forget outside influences and to focus on the Lord” (Jerry Trent, Church of God, Willow Run, Michigan, 1996). As the music becomes louder, more rhythmic, more repetitive, its driving quality supports, propels, and sustains the hand-waving, hand-clapping, foot-stomping choruses of “Amen!”... The music never flags as some members are moved to tears, to dance, to quiver and jerk in the uncoordinated gestures of some religious trances...

“And it was terrific,” exclaimed one worshipper at a service marked by intense, sustained, high-energy music, dancing and trancing: “and we really *got down* here. I mean we really *had church*...”

“Her mother had taught her that the way to pray was to forget everything and everyone but Jesus; to pour out of the heart, like water from a bucket, all evil thoughts, all thoughts of self, all malice for one’s enemies; to come boldly, and yet more humbly than a little child, before the Giver of all good things. (James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*).

### Examples of American gospel singing

These are all expressions of joy: more intense gestures than people make in everyday life, liberated from daily constraints by safety of house of worship, expressing deep, intense emotions.

- Emma Daniels and Mother Sally Jones, “You Got to Move” (recorded 1945) – close harmonies (thirds), heterophonic improvisation of both voices at the same time, vocal timbres that blend but remain distinct (one is more nasal than the other); text describes the feeling of having your body taken over by The Spirit (it forces you to move)
- Elder Charles D. Beck and choir, “Let the Church Say Amen” (recorded 1956 in Buffalo, New York) – call and response between the elder and the choir, high energy
- Mahalia Jackson, “I Found the Answer” (1959) – gospel is fundamentally joyful, unlike the blues
- Tramaine Hawkins with Edwin Hawkins and the Northern California State Youth Choir, “Oh Happy Day” (1968) – vocal ornamentation at the end of every line of text sung by the soloist; repetitious text
- Reverend Willie Gresham, “Soon, One Mornin’” (recorded 1977 at Greater Macedonian Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia) – the reverend leads (using a nasal vocal timbre, more intense sound, and ornamentation to make sure his voice is heard), and the congregation joins in
- Mississippi Mass Choir, “We Praise Your Holy Name” (recorded 1988) – highly ornamented solo line sung by a full, open voice; sounds of affirmation from the congregation/choir (clapping, shouts)
- Destiny’s Child, “Amazing Grace” (late 1990s) – more polished, pop version; performing for a mostly black audience in talent show situation

The timbre and ornamentation of Black gospel singing travels with musicians to other *venues* (i.e., outside of the church), but the vocal etiquette still communicates soulfulness, emotional depth, and expressivity to listeners. Both Aretha Franklin and Whitney Houston grew up in the musical tradition of gospel and used that vocal etiquette to communicate deep emotions to their listeners in non-religious settings.

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Aretha Franklin (b. 1942)

“The Queen of Soul”

92 albums (41 studio, 6 live, 45 compilation), 131 singles

Franklin grew up singing in church where her father, C. L. Franklin, was a preacher. C. L. Franklin was also a civil rights activist and friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as gospel singers Mahalia Jackson and Clara Ward, both of whom encouraged Aretha’s singing career.



“Respect” (1967)

Written and first recorded by Otis Redding (1965)

The song was interpreted as an assertion of female strength when Franklin sang it. Contemporary events in US history also made it feel radical (Civil Rights Movement, war in Vietnam, Equal Rights Amendment, Black Panthers movement), but Franklin said, “I don’t think it’s bold at all. I think it’s quite natural that we all want respect—and should get it.”

What you want

Baby, I got it

What you need

Do you know I got it

All I'm askin'

Is for a little respect when you get home (just a little bit)

Hey baby (just a little bit) when you get home (Just a little bit) mister (just a little bit)

I ain't gonna do you wrong while you're gone

Ain't gonna do you wrong cause I don't wanna

All I'm askin'

Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit)

Baby (just a little bit) when you get home (just a little bit)

Yeah (just a little bit)

I'm about to give you all of my money

And all I'm askin' in return, honey

Is to give me my propers

When you get home (just a, just a, just a, just a)

Yeah baby (just a, just a, just a, just a)

When you get home (just a little bit)

Yeah (just a little bit)

Ooo, your kisses

Sweeter than honey

And guess what?

So is my money

All I want you to do for me

Is give it to me when you get home (re, re, re, re)

Yeah baby (re, re, re ,re)

Whip it to me (respect, just a little bit)

When you get home, now (just a little bit)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Find out what it means to me

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Take care, TCB

Oh (sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me)

A little respect (sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me)

Whoa, babe (just a little bit)

A little respect (just a little bit)

I get tired (just a little bit)  
 Keep on tryin' (just a little bit)  
 You're runnin' out of fools (just a little bit)  
 And I ain't lyin' (just a little bit)  
 (Re, re, re, re) when you come home

(Re, re, re ,re) 'spect  
 Or you might walk in (respect, just a little bit)  
 And find out I'm gone (just a little bit)  
 I got to have (just a little bit)  
 A little respect (just a little bit)

See: Robert W. Stephens, "Soul: A Historical Reconstruction of Continuity and Change in Black Popular Music," *The Black Perspective in Music*, Spring 1984, pp. 21-22, 35

Giacomo Puccini, "Nessun dorma" from *Turandot*  
 Franklin performed at the 1998 GRAMMY Awards  
 with only 20 minutes' notice when Luciano Pavarotti  
 backed out due to illness. She sang in Pavarotti's  
 tenor range, but not in a *bel canto* style; she sang in  
 the style of gospel.



"Ain't No Way" (1968)  
 Written by Carolyn Franklin (sister, 1944-88)  
 Backup vocals by Sweet Inspirations (including Cissy  
 Houston)

Ain't no way  
 For me to love you  
 If you won't let me  
 It ain't no way  
 For me to give you all you need  
 If you won't let me give all of me

I know that a woman's duty  
 Is to help and love a man  
 And that's the way  
 It was planned  
 Oh but how can I, how can I, how can I  
 Give you all the things I can  
 If you're tying both of my hands?

Oh ho, it ain't no way  
 (Ain't no way)  
 It ain't no way  
 (Ain't no way)  
 It just ain't no way, baby  
 (Ain't no way)  
 Ain't no way, baby  
 (Ain't no way)  
 It ain't no way

For me to love you  
 If you won't let me

Stop trying to be  
 Someone you're not  
 Hard, cold and cruel is a man  
 Who paid too much for what he got  
 And if you need me  
 Like you say, say you do  
 Oh then please, please  
 Please don't you know that I need you?

Oh, it ain't no way  
 I tell you that it ain't no way  
 It ain't no way, it ain't no way, baby, no  
 It just ain't no way  
 It sure ain't no way  
 It ain't no way for me to love you  
 If you won't let me

Ain't no way  
 If you won't let me  
 Ain't no way

Whitney Houston (1963-2012)  
 “The Voice”  
 11 albums (6 studio, 4 soundtrack, 1  
 Christmas)



Whitney Houston is cited as a vocal influence by a variety of singers and performers:

Christina Aguilera	Ciara	Leona Lewis
Amerie	Kelly Clarkson	P!nk
Ashanti	Celine Dion	LeAnn Rimes
Beyoncé/Destiny’s Child	Nelly Furtado	Jessica Simpson
Mary J. Blige	Lady Gaga	Britney Spears
Brandy	Ariana Grande	Robin Thicke
Toni Braxton	Jennifer Hudson	
Mariah Carey	Alicia Keys	

“I grew up in the church, and gospel music has always been the center of our lives. It taught me a lot about singing. It gave me emotion and spiritual things, and it helped me to know what I was singing about, because in gospel music, the words mean everything. Now, whatever I sing, whether it’s gospel or pop or R&B, I *feel* it.” (quoted in *Jet*, 17 Feb 1986, p. 59)

Whitney’s mother, Cissy Houston (b. 1933), was a gospel singer (Drinkage Singers, Sweet Inspirations) and pop/rock backup singer (Elvis Presley, Dionne Warwick, Aretha Franklin). Aretha Franklin is Whitney Houston’s godmother.

Whitney’s career began in modeling, and she was signed to Arista records by Clive Davis, who had been trying for decades to create a female pop diva. He had failed with Aretha Franklin, because her identity and style were too closely associated with soul for her to be considered “pop.”

Mark Seal, “The Devils in the Diva,” *Vanity Fair*, June 2012, excerpts  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2012/06/whitney-houston-death-bathtub-drugs-rehab>

The result was *Whitney Houston*, released in 1985, when Whitney was 21. It sold 25 million copies. Her second album, *Whitney*, released in 1987, was equally successful. *Forbes* magazine said she was one of the 10 highest-earning American entertainers, worth \$44 million. By 1988 she had surpassed the Beatles’ record with seven consecutive No. 1 hits.

“She became a huge star,” says Reynolds, “but, like so many creations, they fall apart.”

A week after Houston’s death, Narada Michael Walden, who produced many of her hits, including “How Will I Know” and “I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me),” is

channeling Whitney over the telephone, conjuring up what he calls her “skyrocketing energy.” He tells me, “She was a ball of fire, a Leo, born in August! She believed in herself!” He recalls her barreling into his studio with Robyn Crawford, determined to achieve their common goal: to produce music that would last 100 years. She was 115 pounds of raw talent; all she had to do was unleash the thunder from her chest. “She wailed!” he says. “We were used to hearing that kind of voice from ladies 200 pounds! But here was this skinny woman with that kind of power.” The voice was infectious, intoxicating. Walden remembers that Mick Jagger, “a big Whitney fan,” came to his studio to meet the princess of pop. Natalie Cole, he adds, was in awe of the Jersey girl with the voice that breathed fire. “It was like riding a rocket ship,” Walden says of his time with Houston. “It was a superhuman feat! We talk about her addiction, but when you look at Whitney Houston, you have to realize how much work she did, how much love she put out into the universe.”

The glory of her voice was evidence of the power of God, “because she was completely spiritual,” says Walden. She would give prayers of gratitude in the recording studio. Soon, though, the voice was tempered by pain and heartache. In 1992, before 800 guests at her New Jersey mansion, she married Bobby Brown. “John, her father, told me how upset he was that she was marrying Bobby,” says Gerry Griffith. “Most people were. We knew Bobby and the type of guy he was—a street guy. But Whitney was smart enough to handle somebody like Bobby.” She’d never been one to take serious care of her voice, unlike Celine Dion, who “wouldn’t speak for 24 hours before we were going to record,” says Foster, who produced many of both singers’ hits. “Whitney, even when she’d been filming all day, would come into the studio and—*bang*,” he says, “she’d rip her jacket off, and she’d be starting to sing. She was focused, and she was at the top of her vocal game.”

By the late 90s, however, her voice would begin to betray her, and she would have to lower the keys in live performances. The reason wasn’t just cigarettes and her age. Whitney’s drug use escalated after the 1993 birth of her only child, Bobbi Kristina Houston Brown. She started lacing her joints with cocaine, as she later told Oprah Winfrey. She confessed that she would spend her days and nights getting high with Bobby, watching TV, not getting out of her pajamas for seven months, while Brown lost control—“he would smash things, break things ... cutting my head off a picture.” In short, she began the degrading process of what Oprah would call “making herself smaller ... so the man could be bigger.”

The pop diva was reverting to the New Jersey street kid. “People think I’m Miss Prissy Pooh-Pooh,” she told *Time* magazine. “But I’m not . . . I can get down, really freakin’ dirty, with you.” She told *Rolling Stone*, “I can get raunchy. . . . I’ve learned to be freer from Bobby.” She said in a later interview, “I started in the hood.” And she admitted, “Yeah, man, I’m what you call a functioning junkie.”

Stephen Holden, “Record Brief,” *The New York Times*, 20 December 1992:

“Houston transforms a plaintive country ballad [“I Will Always Love You”] into a towering pop-gospel assertion of lasting devotion to a departing lover. Her voice breaking and tensing, she treats the song as a series of emotional bursts in a steady climb toward a final full-out declamation. Along the way, her virtuosic gospel embellishments enhance the emotion and never seem merely ornamental.”

**“I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)” (1987)**

Written by George Merrill (b. 1956) and Shannon Rubicam (b. 1951); produced by Narada Michael Walden (b. 1952)

Pop style, sweet and innocent lyrics, repetitive, dance beat + gospel-style vocals (emotional, expressive, and showing off her voice more than the typical 1980s female pop song, e.g., Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun,” 1983)

Clock strikes upon the hour  
And the sun begins to fade  
Still enough time to figure out  
How to chase my blues away  
I've done alright up to now  
It's the light of day that shows me how  
And when the night falls, loneliness calls

Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody  
With somebody who loves me  
Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody  
With somebody who loves me

I've been in love and lost my senses  
Spinning through the town  
Sooner or later, the fever ends  
And I wind up feeling down  
I need a man who'll take a chance  
On a love that burns hot enough to last  
So when the night falls  
My lonely heart calls

Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody  
With somebody who loves me  
Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody

With somebody who loves me  
  
Somebody oo Somebody oo  
Somebody who loves me yeah  
Somebody oo Somebody oo  
To hold me in his arms oh  
I need a man who'll take a chance  
On a love that burns hot enough to last  
So when the night falls  
My lonely heart calls

Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody  
With somebody who loves me  
Oh, I wanna dance with somebody  
I wanna feel the heat with somebody  
Yeah, I wanna dance with somebody  
With somebody who loves me

Don'tcha wanna dance with me baby  
Dontcha wanna dance with me boy  
Hey Don'tcha wanna dance with me baby  
With somebody who loves me

Don'tcha wanna dance say you wanna dance  
Don'tcha wanna dance  
Don'tcha wanna dance say you wanna dance  
Don'tcha wanna dance  
Don'tcha wanna dance say you wanna dance  
With somebody who loves me  
Dance

### **Gospel vocal etiquette in popular music**

Ethnic identity goes beyond one's genealogy and upbringing. A person's ethnic identity comes from how one expresses oneself culturally and whom one's cultural products represent (e.g., the music one makes, the clothing one wears, the gestures one makes).

See: Phillip Mason, "Soul in the Culture of African Americans," *Music Educators Journal* (November 1992), pp 49-52

The vocal etiquette of gospel carries the associations of expressivity, soulfulness, and Black identity out of the church and into the public/commercial sphere. Listeners don't necessarily hear this vocal style and think "church"; they hear it and think "Black" and "expressive."

See: Richard Rischar, "A Vision of Love: An Etiquette of Vocal Ornamentation in African-American Popular Ballads of the Early 1990s," *American Music* (Autumn 2004), pp. 416-417

## **Homework and reminders**

### **Field trip**

On Friday, January 12, we will do a field trip to Brooklyn and visit two different kinds of music institutions.

3:30pm – Brooklyn Conservatory of Music (58 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Park Slope, 11217)

You'll meet people who work in arts administration (marketing, management, programming, and customer service) at a music school that has music programs designed for every kind of musician. The school's students include infants, children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly. Instruction includes classical, jazz, pop/rock, world music, and early childhood programs. Almost no one who studies music there is training to become a professional musician—they're playing music simply because they like it. The Brooklyn Conservatory of Music also has a large music therapy program, which uses music to help people with disabilities and trauma learn to communicate, use their bodies, develop teamwork, and build confidence.

If you want to read more, you can check out the school's website: [www.bkcm.org](http://www.bkcm.org).

Come up with at least 3 questions that you can ask when we meet people who work at the school, and ask them while we're there.

If you want to write about this trip for the magazine, you may do so!

### **Reading for January 10**

Class will begin at 11am on January 10.

Becky Blanchard, "The Social Significance of Rap & Hip-Hop Culture" (assigned on January 3)

Katty Mayorga, bio

**Magazine project**

Sign up for individual meeting times on January 10 (30 minutes each: 9:30am, 10 am, 10:30 am, 2pm, 2:30pm) to begin revising one of your planned 6 pieces. Bring TWO COPIES of one piece of writing you want to work on that day with me.

As a reminder, there are 6 required pieces for the magazine:

- 1) Revision of an in-class or homework short writing. Take a writing prompt we've already done and revisit it: expand it, add new ideas, connect your ideas to another experience you've had.
  - Vaudeville/Tin Pan Alley challenges, experiences, and skills
  - Analysis, comparison, and insight into America through pop music
  - Observation, comparison, and insight into Purchase class visits (percussion, brass, composition)
  - Observation, comparison, and insight into class guests (Hugh Ash, Isabel Gleicher, Laura Kaminsky, Katty Mayorga)
  - Talent vs. hard work vs. luck
- 2) One travel essay – Choose one of your 3 travel essays (Met Opera, BKCM/Bargemusic, Metropolitan Museum) to include in the magazine. Revise your first version for grammar but also, and more importantly (!), make it an even more vivid piece of writing and connect your travel experience to other ideas or experiences you've had.
- 3) Interview essay – Revise your email interview project as needed based on the feedback you receive.
- 4) 3 additional pieces – Pieces #4-6 are your choice. Here are some suggestions:
  - Another in-class/homework prompt revision (like magazine piece #1)
  - A concert essay from a concert you attended at Purchase
  - A poem or short story
  - A description of a piece of music you imagine/create
  - A graphic score
  - Any new piece of writing you feel inspired to create