

1969

THE BLACK STUDENT UNION PUBLICATION



RACIAL STEREOTYPING IN MUSIC

How have black artists begun to break the hip-hop and R&B mold?

CHRONICLES OF THE ALUMNI

We check in with some former SFS students and BSU members.

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The Earthquaker will be a newsletter designed to provide information and to inspire individual interest in black related issues. Tentatively, we plan two to three issues published by The Black Student Union dealing with black interests; however, information will be provided for the entire Sidwell community, with the expectation of complete participation.

THE EARTHQUAKER

THE SFS BLACK STUDENT UNION

*orientation edition
September, 1982*

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editor's note

This 2019-2020 school year, the Black Student Union leadership set a goal to bring Sidwell Friends's Black community closer together. In an effort to brainstorm ideas, I took a trip down to the archives where I learned about the fascinating history surrounding Black students in Sidwell. In the past, students have proposed a Harlem Renaissance class, hosted DMV go-gos, and taken trips to Six Flags. The year of 1982 stood out to me the most, as students created The Earthquaker, a magazine made to uplift Black students' voices in the upper school. Unfortunately, there was only one issue produced, but we knew we wanted to reignite it this school year.

The BSU is perhaps best known for the Production in honor of Black History Month we put on every year. Though this is an integral part of the club, not everyone can participate. We wanted to involve even more students than the production usually enables, so we chose to produce the publication with the same theme. Not only does this extension allow more student voices to be heard within Sidwell's Black community, but it also allows the message of the production to reach an even bigger audience.

Inspired by an alum, Jahari Shelton '19, we decided to name the magazine after the commencement of the Black Student Union. 1969 was created in hopes of helping people learn more about our experiences as black people both within the School and outside of it. We are so thankful to everyone who helped bring this idea to life! We are especially appreciative of Ms. Randolph, Ms. Wyeth, Ms. Hom-Diamond, and of course our advisors for always supporting us. We hope you enjoy!

adeoluwa fatukasi
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Racial Stereotyping in Music

HOW HAVE BLACK ARTISTS BEGUN
TO BREAK THE HIP-HOP AND R&B
MOLD?

ART AND WRITING BY PARKER ALEXANDER '21

Whenever I walk home from school on my own, my headphones blast my ears with sweet sounds. My Spotify playlists are littered with various genres and moods, from head-banging alternative rock to smooth R&B, euphoric electronic buzzes to heartbreaking pop ballads. Music surrounds me in my daily life, and my musical tastes reflect my identity - intricate, complex, and varied.


Nevertheless, the music industry does not appreciate the same diversity of genres in black artists. Black artists are often marketed as hip-hop or R&B without regard to their actual musical style. Singer FKA Twigs spoke out over the injustice in an interview with The Guardian, saying that when she first released her music, it was defined as genre-less.

But after it became known that she was of mixed racial heritage, she was described as an “alternative R&B” artist, solely due to her black ancestry. That specific identifier is notoriously used for similar, genre-defying black artists, such as Janelle Monáe, whose work has been consistently described as R&B, in spite of the fact that her older music drew from a variety of sources, including psychedelic rock, and whose newest album, *Dirty Computer*, had a distinctly pop-feel to it.

It is disheartening to see the lack of flexibility the recording industry affords black musicians. For a time, I was eager to make my own music and join the industry as an adult, but seeing how many black artists were underrepresented or invisible made me think that my dream was impossible. No other black person, let alone a mixed-race person, has been able to make it into the mainstream of these industries, so how could I? This feeling grew stronger as I began to listen to rock. The genre feels like freedom to me, at its loudest and most overt, screaming over heavy guitars about broken hearts and rebellion. But despite rock’s origins from rhythm and blues and black musicians in the 1950s, only a minuscule number of the top rock bands of the past decade had black members, which reinforces the feeling that rock is closed off to me; even though rock music has spoken to me in a way no other types of art really can, I always had a feeling that it was never meant for someone who looked like me to listen to, and it was not a style that someone who looked like me could use to convey their own musical ideas.

In spite of the widespread, constant stereotyping of black musicians, there have been several artists that broke out of the molds and became popular while defying the industry’s genre restrictions. Brittany Howard, who is mixed-race, made a name for herself in traditional rock-and-roll, earning several Grammys with her band Alabama Shakes and releasing her first solo album, marketed as rock or alternative, in 2019.

Lizzo, one of 2019’s newest pop stars, has had hits that glide through multiple genres, with her first hit, “Truth Hurts,” being a rap anthem backed by a trap beat, while her second, “Good as Hell,” combined soul-influenced piano and backing vocals with her signature mixture of rap and singing. Lil Nas X, the rapper behind the smash hit “Old Town Road,” tested the boundaries of the country genre with the song, and his EP, *7*, was advertised as Alternative, reflecting its array of rock and country influences.



Black artists are often marketed as hip-hop or R&B without regard to their actual musical style.

What I have taken away from the thousands of songs that I have listened to is that music is fluid and unique. Each artist brings something new to the art form, and each listener comes away from it with a different perspective. My wish is that more black artists will be able to achieve their vision without being restricted by the industry. So, when I start the long walk home, pop in my earbuds, and put “Tightrope” by Janelle Monáe on repeat, I become more hopeful that my dream will come true, and every kid who felt the same way I did could see that the possibilities with music are endless; there are no boundaries on genre by race, and people of all races should be able to create and listen to the art they choose.

The Use of Music to Overcome Black Struggle In America

Written by Julian Craig '21

Art by Marissa Michel '22

Aretha Franklin, Stevie Wonder, Kanye West, Tina Turner, Louis Armstrong, and Tupac Shakur; these are just a few of the most legendary black artists of American music. The influence of black culture on popular music throughout American history can not be understated. Many of the most popular musical genres in American history such as rock and roll, jazz, hip-hop, R&B, and funk have roots in black communities; however, many people do not understand the history behind black people's influence on American music. The art of musical expression is deeply ingrained in black history and culture, and it goes back far before black people were ever brought to America.

It would be a disservice to talk about black music in America and not talk about its roots in African cultures, that have always recognized the power of music. While scientists are still mystified by the study of how humans interact with music, for centuries all across the African continent, music has been used as a tool for communication and spirituality.

In the early 1600s, Europeans began taking African people from across the continent on ships and enslaving them. Many aspects of those people's cultures, including language, were lost, but music was fundamental to their way of life and was nearly impossible to take away from people. Enslaved Africans would sing songs on the ships to America to express and cope with the traumas they were experiencing, and many had no intention of ever letting their spirits or their music die. After their arrival in the colonies, it was common for enslaved Africans and their descendants to sing and hum songs while at work in the fields. Enslaved people developed ways to use short, soulful tunes to communicate messages on how to escape their plantations that could not be understood by the slaveowners. These tunes became known as negro spirituals and have been passed down for so long that many of these songs are still widely known today in the African-American community.

Spirituals were in the most literal sense a tool for survival, but as decades passed and black people were given more freedoms, a new genre emerged- the blues. Blues music has been around since as early as the 1870s, and it was a culmination of spirituals and work songs with no strict doctrine or structure. Musicians would use whatever instruments were available, making blues accessible to everyone.

The music created an escape from the harsh realities of racism and oppression that African-Americans faced every day, or gave them away to make art out of their suffering and denied opportunities.

The music was largely based around the blues scale which is a highly recognizable six-note scale that has spread to many different famous genres such as Rock n Roll, Jazz, Soul, Gospel, and even Pop music. The popularity of the scale shows the influence that blues music had on American culture.

Blues music provided great comfort to blacks in America with its raw, spiritual, religious, and emotional sentiments; however, one of the most socially impactful genres to affect the black community proved to be Jazz music. This colorful fusion of the Blues with European and West-African sensibilities originated in New Orleans at the end of the 19th Century and quickly spread to the rest of the country. With the success of Jazz music in both white and black communities, the music style both stirred up and dissolved racial tension. Many white Americans rejected the music, yet many would secretly play the music to themselves in private. Over 60 communities in the country enacted laws that prohibited jazz. In 1920 Prohibition forced jazz musicians into gangster-run nightclubs that served alcohol. The result of this was mingling between blacks and whites that was possible before. White Americans were engaging with the black community in a sort of awe and respect. Jazz became the obsession of the American people, and musicians like Louis Armstrong became the face of the African-American community. This is not at all to say that the struggles of black people disappeared. Artists would use their music to bring up the discrimination they faced, and, for the first time ever, the rest of America listened.

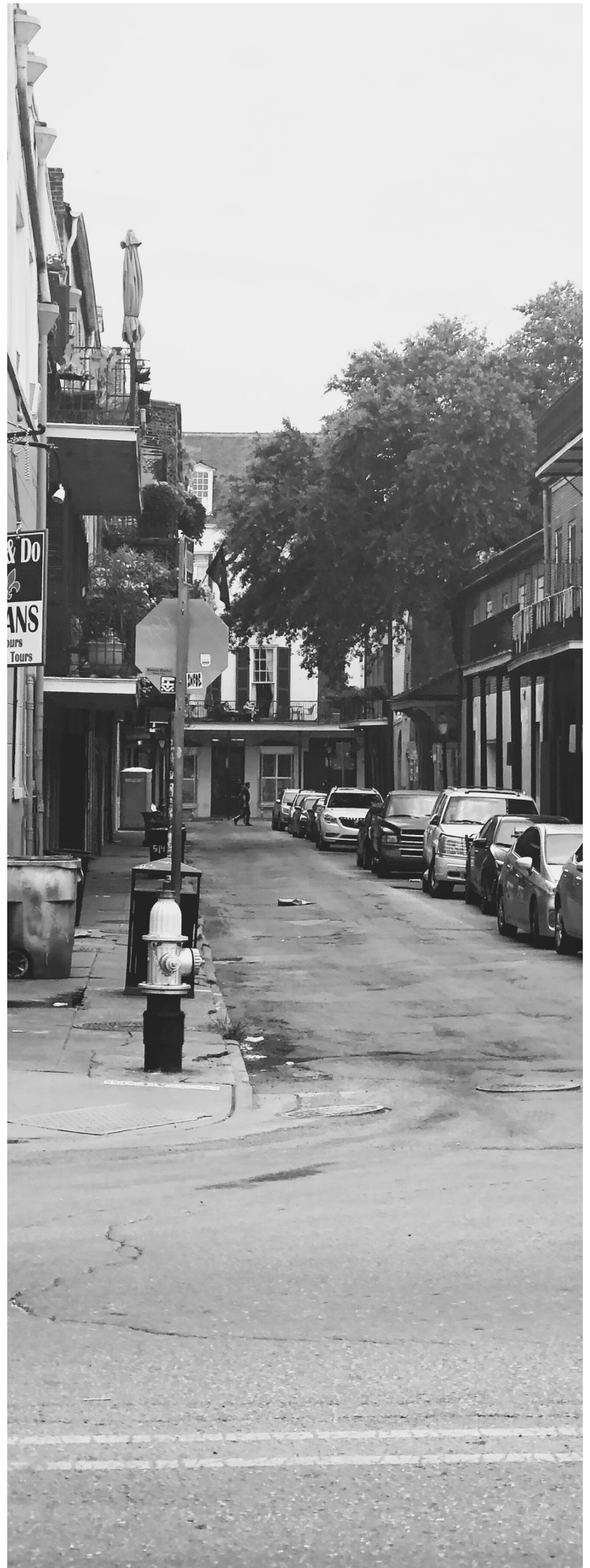
Hip-hop, as well as Rock & Roll and R&B, are prime examples of music genres created and inspired by African-American culture. All of these genres are among the top five most popular music genres of music in the entire world. Hip-hop has just recently become the world's most popular genre, and it was birthed from jazz with many odes to its predecessor.

It is no coincidence that rap and hip-hop music owes much of its origins and instrumentation to jazz music. Many say that the origin of rap is the improvisational vocal scatting done by jazz artists such as Ella Fitzgerald.

To this day many popular artists like Kendrick Lamar will seamlessly blend jazz music and jazz samples into a modern hip-hop fusion style. Much like many of the greatest black musicians, Hip-hop artists are also using their platform to address black issues like police brutality and poverty.

When one recognizes the interconnectedness of these genres and their relationship to black politics, it becomes much clearer to see that throughout black history music has been sonically evolving and adapting to the lives of the black community. Black art is often a direct response to racism, oppression, and suffering, and black people's expression through music has always been about liberation. For decades, many African-Americans have been awakened to the idea of black liberation, but for decades black people have had to deal with a racist criminal justice system, police brutality, poor education, and housing discrimination which only perpetuates the struggle.

Fortunately, hope has always persisted through music which traces itself right back to the heart of Africa where it all began. Whether or not it is seen by the people of today, this 400 year-long journey towards freedom has been propelled by the tradition of music. This persisted even in times when systemic change seemed so unlikely that it wasn't the intent of the musicians to try and enact it all.



featuring work from

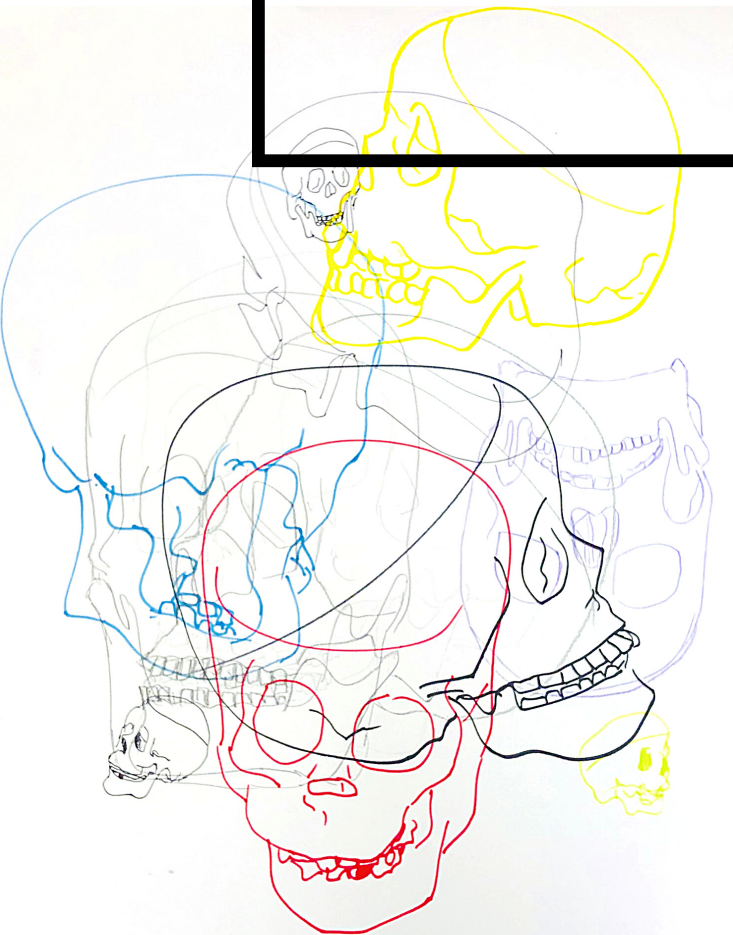
Nolan Lewis '21,

Marissa Michel '22, and

Graciana Kabwe '26



A R T S
CORNER @ IMPEL





STATEMENT FROM GRACIANA KABWE '26

Art affects life, and life affects art. I could easily verify that my poetry has changed since I was younger. The first real poem I ever wrote was in third grade. What the word meant, the images I visualize, that has all changed and is changing each day as I experience more life.

Most of the poetry I write is about family or about being a black girl. In my opinion, writing about my experiences as a black female in American society does not separate those that are of different races and genders. In fact, I believe that by understanding and observing other's experiences, we can unite and love each other more. I am confident that within our differences we can find similarities and accept each other openly and lovingly. We are all human.

We can express our views of the world through our art. We tell others the thoughts that we are too afraid to speak. Art gives even the weakest, the most vulnerable individuals a voice in this world.

I want my art to break the silence. End the fear.

To Rise
Graciana Kabwe

Rise.

My wish
for you and me
alike
is that within me,
within the last that is left
my hidden strength,
you find the breath the brings you life
the power, the determination
that keeps your blood pumping
and your limbs moving.
In knowing
you were alone
you find a community

My wish
for you and me
alike
is that you will find
the motivation
within yourself
to rise

I hope that in my chocolate brown skin
they see the gold shine through.
Like I do.
Like you do.

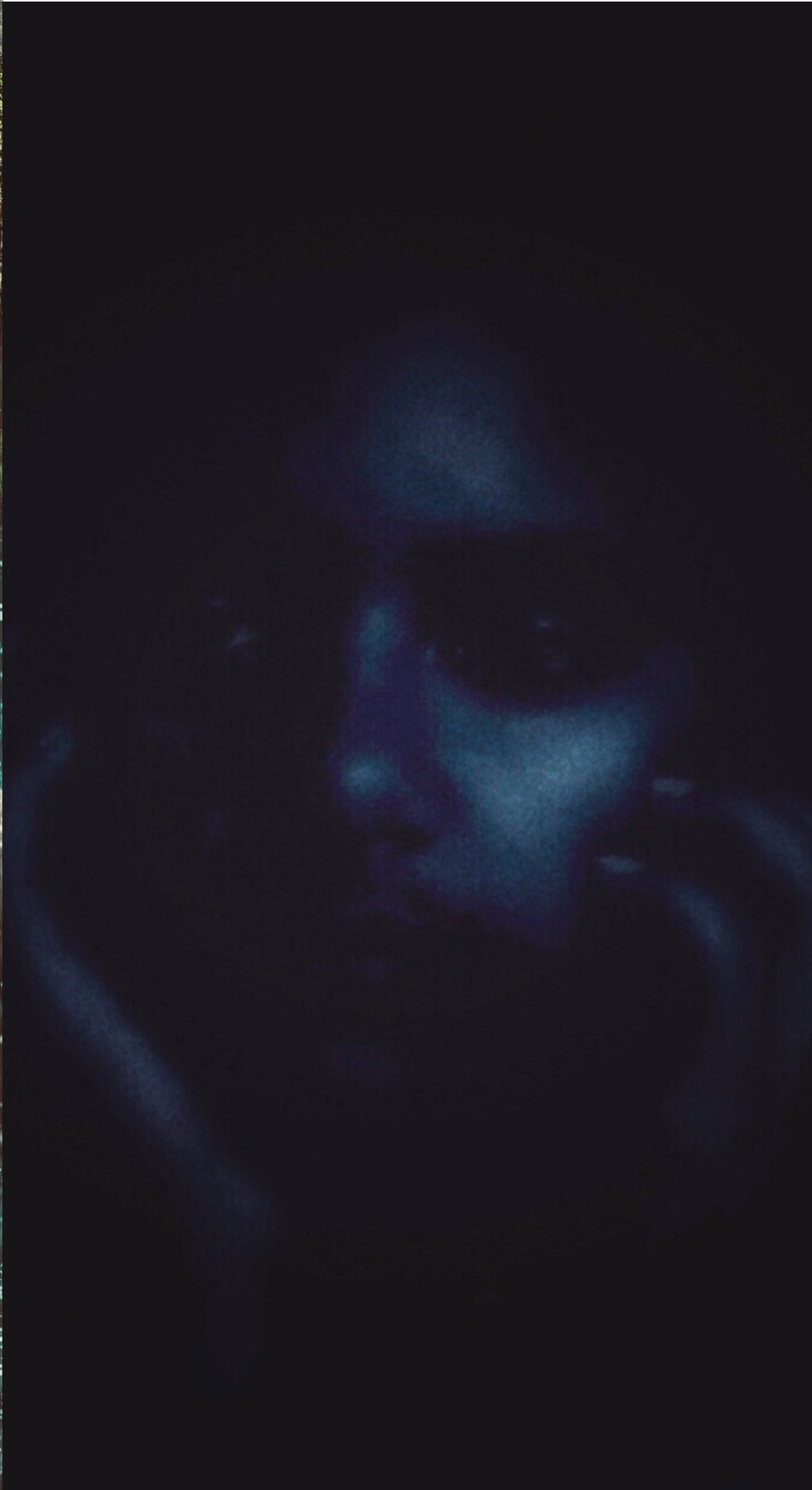
I know you have questions.
I know that with each story of pain
you hear.
You live in fear.
I feel your fear.
I know
your fear
Because it is in my own heart,
In the heart of children like you and
me.
I, too, am afraid.
Still
find, in me,
the future.
A moment.
A movement.

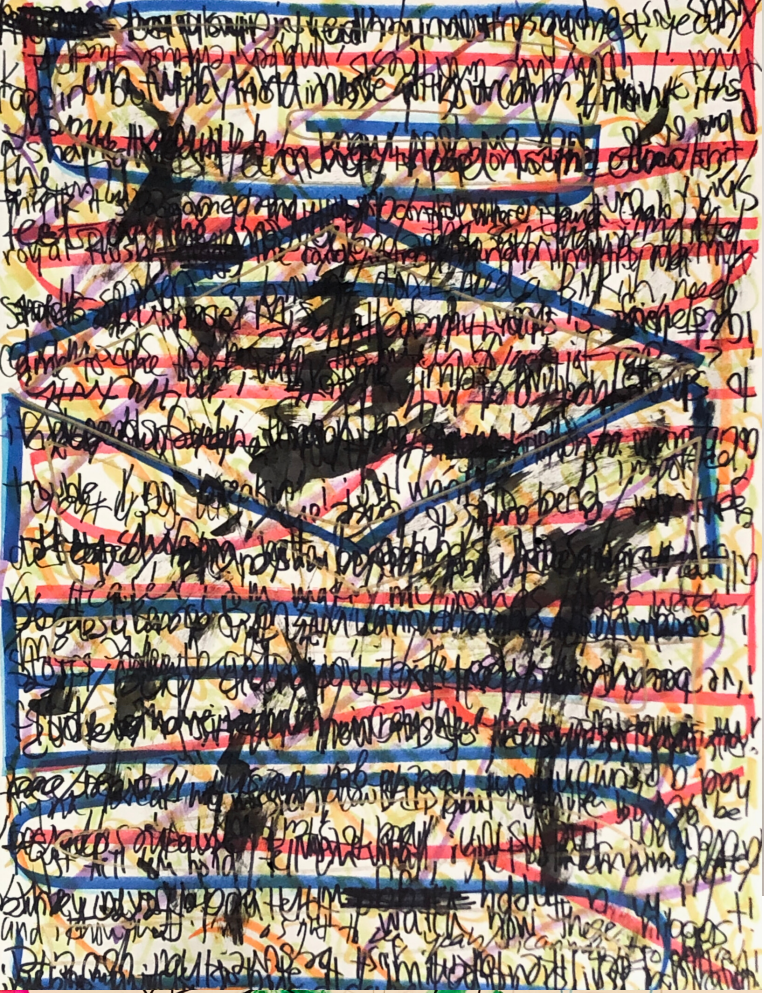
I live a life that is mine
and yours
to create.
How shall we live?
In fear,
like
before?

What will you do?

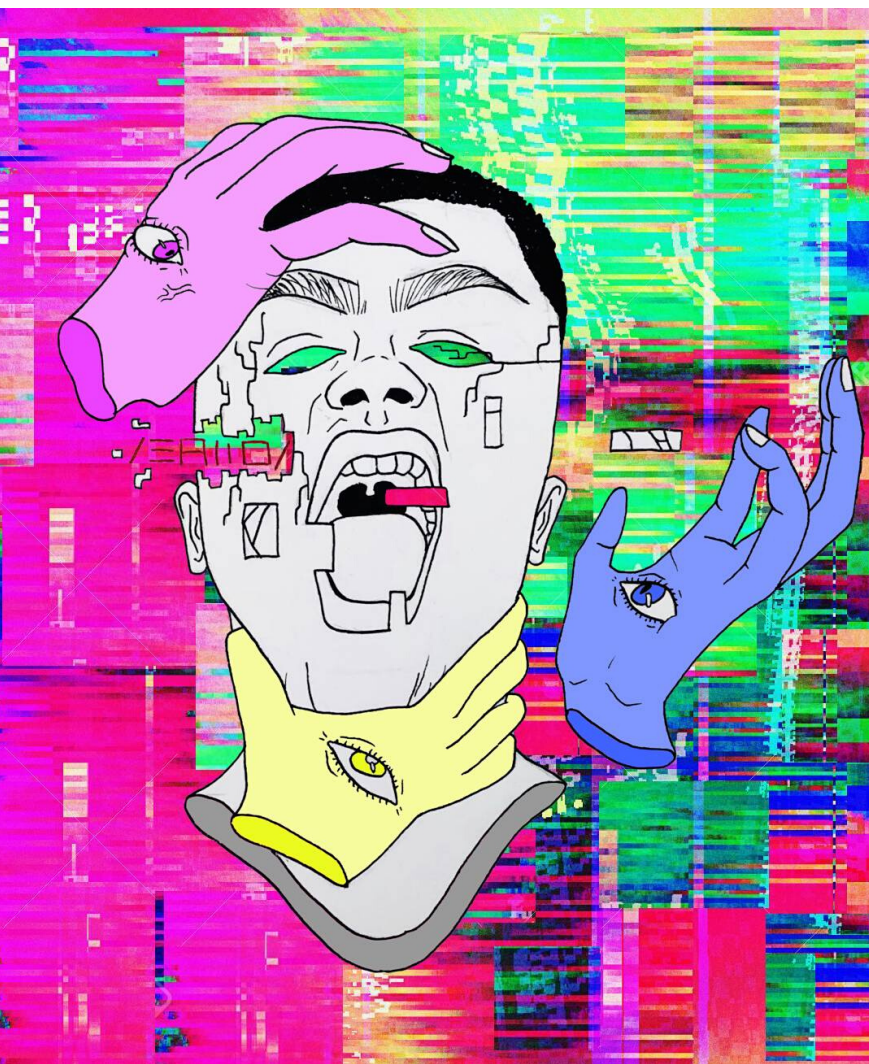
Rise?

MARISSA MICHEL '22





NOLAN LEWIS '21





CHRONICLES OF THE ALUMNI

Gone, but never forgotten! We check in with some former SFS students and BSU members to hear about their journeys beyond the classroom.

Lory Ivey Alexander

REFLECTS ON
HOW SFS HONED
HER ART SKILLS

STATEMENT BY LORY IVEY ALEXANDER '97
IMAGES BY LORY IVEY ALEXANDER '97 &
STANLEY STEWART BRAYBOY

My parents were working artists. They taught me to embrace my own creativity. Though I dabbled with many art forms, I threw myself into writing poetry, and I became very good at it. By the time I arrived at Sidwell in ninth grade, I was performing poetry at local readings and had been published in a few journals. This gave me the confidence to call myself a writer or a poet, but it took many years before I saw myself as an “artist.”

Because I was a late-comer to Sidwell, my arts and writing class schedule was solidly established, but Sidwell offered amazing opportunities during the school day.

**My Blackness is necessary to
and influential of the work that
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Black life and American
identity.**

I honed my poetry skills in Bo Lauder's poetry class, expanded my understanding of ceramics in Hunt Prothro's pottery wheel class, and explored my love of textile art by



making a quilted wall-hanging as my Senior Project. While at the School, I also sung in the chorus and wrote for and performed in the BSU show. The content and quality of the Sidwell arts program was certainly valuable, but I believe that the most important way in which Sidwell influenced my art practice was by making arts and creative practice part of the total academic package, rather than an activity that one does on weekends or after homework.

By giving me the space to be a multifaceted creative during my school day, Sidwell confirmed my parents' lesson that there was real, inherent value in my creativity. I believe this understanding strengthens my studio practice even now.

Though I made art throughout my youth, I began to take visual art seriously during college. While at Tufts University, I studied studio art and took classes at the School of Museum of Fine Arts. I participated in a few exhibitions there and after I moved back to DC. After a few personal tragedies,

I became unable to paint when I was 25. I took many years off from an active art practice. Oddly, it was during this hiatus that I admitted to myself that at my core, I am an artist. This admission changed everything. It enabled me to place my many artistic interests under the umbrella of "Artist" and to build an active, thriving art practice.

Now, I am a mixed media artist. I use water, water-based paint, natural fibers (especially cotton and silk), and organic



elements (like dried flowers, porcupine quills, and cotton stalks) to create a visual network linking the past to the future. I often incorporate floral and aquatic themes into my work. I am interested in visually representing the legacies of the descendants of African, Indigenous Turtle Islanders, and Europeans in America. Much of my work begins with interviews with people from the Central Rappahannock region of Virginia and visits to historically significant sites and waterways, like the North Anna River and the Potomac.

The lens through which I view the world shapes the art I make. In this way, my Blackness is necessary to and influential of the work that I make, but I also actively choose to make work about Black life and American identity.

Much of my work is driven by a desire to restore vibrancy and beauty to stories the broader society has deemed unfit for retelling. I do this in a variety of ways, and I am always looking for a new way to tell our stories and bring color to a black and white memory of our history

Though my artistic practice centers around visual art, I also have an active social practice focused on community building. My latest project is an online gallery and community of women artists called Abstract Sisterhood. Also, within the Sisterhood, I convene a small collective of DC- and Baltimore-based artists who meet monthly to collaborate and encourage one another. Finally, I am also Co-Clerk of the Steering Committee of the Black Alumni Alliance.

Cheryl Derricotte

TELLS US HER
BACKSTORY AND ART
JOURNEY

STATEMENT AND IMAGES BY
CHERYL DERRICOTTE '83

I knew I was an artist as a child and “officially” considered myself an artist since I was a teenager. I started singing in choirs at 13, and when I came to Sidwell Friends for high school, I continued to sing in the choir and the smaller chamber voices. I was a frequent soloist in the annual musicals.

I fondly remember Hunt Prothro's pottery studio. I am sure those memories inspired me to return to studio art in my 30's first in ceramics and a few years later to glass, where I have remained. And, although I never studied with him, Percy Martin was also a revered upper school art studio teacher during my time at Sidwell, and I now truly know the important place he holds in the history of Black printmakers.

I continued to sing my first year of college in NYC and audition for Broadway shows. I quickly learned that I could finish my degree or have a musical career. I succumbed to family and financial pressure, choosing to get a “degree that will allow me to get a job more easily.” And then I got a 2nd degree—a master’s degree—in that 2nd choice/not artistic field (Urban Affairs/City & Regional Planning).

My adult life began to shape itself around those choices. I was fortunate that I loved my 2nd choice and have enjoyed many years of great work in my field. Along the way, I also learned an important lesson about being an artist. It doesn’t go away, no matter how hard you try to suppress it. So, about 15 years after I stopped singing, I found myself in a ceramics studio.



“Along the way, I also learned an important lesson about being an artist. It doesn’t go away, no matter how hard you try to suppress it.”

A couple of years after that, I found my way to a glass studio and my life changed forever. Now I get the best of all worlds – to be a practicing visual artist and developer of creative workplaces.

My artwork is infused with a sense of place. I grew up in Washington, DC when it was approximately 72% Black. (It felt like 95% and Parliament sang about “Chocolate City” in 1975 as a result). In a country that believes I am a minority, my own personhood is deeply rooted in a sense of being in a majority. This enables me to take on difficult topics in my work. Identities shaped by home (or homelessness); natural beauty (or disasters), memories of happiness (or loss) inspire my artwork. This results in works on glass and paper. Both materials are translucent and seemingly fragile, yet they are hearty enough to survive the passage of time between civilizations. I make art from research. This type of inquiry also leads me not just to economic but also environmental concerns. Observations of current events, politics, and urban landscapes are my entry into these issues. I am a contemporary political artist.



An Interview with Misha Davidson (’97)

Below, McKenzie Davis (’21) conducts an interview with Misha Davidson ’97 who shares his experiences at Sidwell after spending his early years in Pennsylvania and moving to Washington, D.C. in the late 1980s. He describes Sidwell as “a whole new world” and Rickey Payton, former music teacher, as an impactful man who embodies “the real DC”. Mr. Payton created a “safe space” for Davidson and many other DC residents, in addition to helping Davidson to “see the world outside of Sidwell.”

YOU WERE INVOLVED IN THE BSU AT SIDWELL IN SPITE OF NOT BEING AFRICAN AMERICAN; WHAT DREW YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BLACK STUDENT UNION BLACK HISTORY MONTH PRODUCTION?

I began my tenure at Sidwell Friends in the 7th grade, in the early 90s. I was fortunate enough to land in Rickey Payton Sr.’s music class. My first encounter with Mr. Payton was nothing short of transformational; his presence could - and did - immediately light up a room. I wasn’t the only one who felt this way either; my classmates and I often watched and listened with rapt attention during class, transfixed on this man and the seemingly effortless creative energy that emanated from him. As a result of being his student, I had the opportunity to participate in the Sidwell “minimester”, whereby me and my contemporaries performed in a student musical with other students from the now-shuttered middle school Stuart Hobson. We produced a full musical with song, dance, acting, and improvisation in 3 days. The experience was deeply transformational for me; I had managed to find my home at Sidwell within this creative community of fellow students. From the beginning of 9th grade onward, I began participating in the BSU as a means of remaining connected to the music, and to Mr. Payton as well. Members of the Black community at Sidwell did and continue to blow me away musically, artistically, professionally - I am deeply in awe and inspired by the level of excellence they exude.

WHAT ROLE DID MR. PAYTON HAVE IN YOUR DECISION TO PURSUE A CAREER THAT INVOLVES MUSIC?

One day, during 8th grade, I assumed my usual position at the piano to practice my improv skills before music class started. Although this started out like any other day at Sidwell, I'd soon find out that it was different from the others. Mr. Payton happened to notice me playing and fervently urged me to continue learning and practicing. He saw my talent and passion for the piano, and consequently invited me to play with him at Sidwell's 8th grade graduation that year. I was ecstatic, and eagerly agreed. After graduation, as high school loomed on the horizon, he asked me and my parents if I would be interested in joining him as a private music student. High school was creatively expansive for me, in large part to Mr. Payton and his family. In fact, I connected so deeply with Mr. Payton and his teachings that I hesitated when it came time to decide what to do, or where to go, after high school. During my senior year in particular, I became enthralled with gospel music. I asked Mr. Payton to be the faculty supervisor for my senior project, which culminated in a performance with Mr. Payton and three other phenomenal singers from his church. I felt, and continue to feel, that Mr. Payton's musical sensibilities informed so much of my own creative foundation, and connected me with the past, present, and future of music in DC. He taught me that music was to be shared across all boundaries. He showed me that anyone and everyone has the ability to sing, given a little direction and encouragement. He emphasized that music is about bringing people together from all abilities and all walks of life. People share their heartfelt experiences through the power of music, and this is the root of music's transformative power. I went off to NYU in the late 90s with a developed sense of self, and a determination to bring the knowledge I had gained from him with me. After college, I spent several years on the East Coast as a musician, producer, and creative before moving out west to Los Angeles. In LA, I reaffirmed my connection to the piano and to the lessons that Mr. Payton taught me. Despite being thousands of miles away from DC, the quintessential DC sound stayed with me - the swing of the buckets, and the echoes of Gogo sound. Although I wasn't "of" DC music culture by birthright, it has left an indelible impression on my musical sensibilities.

After leaving Sidwell, Davidson got his degree in music technology from NYU. The program allowed Davidson to finally facilitate his own productions. Through this interview and his music, Davidson hopes to give back to the people who invented the genres of American music that he loves so much.

IF YOU COULD TALK TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT AFRICAN AMERICAN BUT WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING THEIR BLACK CLASSMATES OR THE BSU, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

First things first - just do it. Support Black students by helping to create a space for yourself and others. This is critical. If the desire is within you already, run with that and don't be afraid to show your willingness and eagerness to be of service. Consider your own privilege and strive to intentionally seek out other perspectives that are different from your own. This is how we grow. Now, what do I mean by "create space" specifically? Listen before you speak, and listen openly. Allow someone to feel safe enough to share their unique experience. Also, hold on to the sense of idealism you have about creating lasting change in our world. As privileged as I was and still am, I feel even more privileged to have been able to share in the Black experience at Sidwell and even more so to be welcomed into it. As an adult, I'm working to create that space in my creative community for artists of color who have their own stories to tell.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE BAND WITH WHICH YOU ARE CURRENTLY INVOLVED, LOVE ME JEFFREY, OR IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT YOUR CURRENT WORK THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH STUDENTS?

My professional journey continues to grow, develop and change. Whether through Love Me Jeffrey, or with some of the other artists I work with, like Syd (The Internet, Fin) or Malia (Late Bloomer), the most critical thing for me at this point in my life is to prioritize self-care and my overall well-being. That's something I strongly encourage younger people to prioritize as well. Every day, I make sure that I prioritize my one-to-one connection with music and creativity via the piano. The piano provides a meditative vehicle by which I can process my own struggles, triumphs, and aspirations. As a young person, it is easy - and understandable - to seek approval from your peers. However, this can create shame, instead of personal power. The aspects of ourselves that make us different can coerce us into shrinking, in order to assimilate into preconceived notions of acceptance and false "belonging". Remember that your journey is your own, and yours alone. However you connect with your internal divine source - whether that's through writing, painting, dancing, singing, or some other vehicle, do your best to make time for that each day. Also, I would encourage students to build your community where you are. By that I mean, connect with your fellow peers who share a similar vision. Do what you can to connect with the people that inspire you. Let the light from within be a guide - it might be scary, but it won't hurt you. What makes us different is what gives us our power.

Ericka Blount-Danois ('90)

Ericka Blount-Danois '90 is a journalist and author, and also teaches at the University of Maryland. In 2013, Blount-Danois published her book *Love, Peace and Soul* which shares the history of the popular television program "Soul Train." Through a collection of stories and anecdotes from the show's hosts and cast, Blount-Danois displays the power of black music and dance on television. Below is a brief interview with Blount-Danois as well as an excerpt from the preface of *Love, Peace and Soul*.

WHY IS MUSIC SO IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I think it's just been a part of my everyday life for my entire life. My father had a record collection numbering in thousands. I fell asleep to the Quiet Storm and woke up with Donnie Simpson on the radio in the morning. I partied on the weekends at house parties and clubs. I helped my father at concerts as a stage hand. We met artists at in-stores at Kemp Mill Records where my father worked. I danced with my mother on Sundays to music as she cleaned the house. I think for most people of African descent it's hard to imagine a life without music.

DID YOUR TIME AT SIDWELL INSPIRE YOU IN ANY WAY?

My time at Sidwell definitely inspired me. It gave me the confidence to pursue my twin passions of writing and music with English teachers like Ms. Lanouette and art teachers like Percy Martin.

Excerpt

"When I began to think about writing Soul Train, it was a result of a culmination of many things—a reverence for a childhood spent sitting on my deejay father's lap listening to his hefty record collection with earphones that I had to hold to keep on my tiny ears. It was the first visceral reaction I had to music,

crying at the gorgeous sounds of Minnie Riperton's five-octave vocal range. It was spending Sundays mimicking my mother's dance moves as she cleaned the house to the lyrics of Chaka Khan and later the 12-inch club hits she and my father bought from their nights spent at Larry Levine's garage nightclub in New York. It was spending countless Saturday afternoons in front of our broken-down black-and-white television set (with the hanger in place of an antenna and a pair of pliers used to turn the knob) watching Soul Train with my sister in the '70s, Soul Train was "appointment television"—a cultural bonding necessity.

While watching some of the television shows my daughters watch, I wanted to write about the lack of cultural programming on television today. I wrote a tongue-in-cheek "Where are they now?" piece—searching and finding Soul Train dancer Cheryl Song (the "long-haired Asian chic," to most fans). But the book took root over a battle about my Best of Soul Train DVDs. My colleague, Dr. Todd Steven Burroughs, was salivating at the chance to take them home and watch them on interrupted over Our Thanksgiving break in 2009. My family was expecting to bring them to our annual get-together. Todd and I compromised by splitting them up. But the tension this created served to turn on the proverbial lightbulb. We couldn't be the only two families desperate for the nostalgia of live performance, eclectic fashion, feverish dancing, and a superbly cool host spanning three decades of the best music.

We watched Soul Train through the '70s, where regional dances and the golden years of soul, disco, and funk music were given a national platform. We watched as the alternately sexualized and conservative culture of the '80s brought back boy bands, New Jack Swing, and a new culture dubbed hip-hop. And through the '90s and the 2000's when the show struggled to maintain an identity while it mixed all of these genres together, resulting in a sometimes disjointed but still entertaining product.

From my perch in front of the television set, I couldn't see the struggles behind the scenes or that the iconic Soul Train Scramble Board was fixed was something that was born out of necessity..."

John B. B. B.

Chloe Fick

Brooke Hart

Brooke Hart

Adeoluwa

Ms. Harris

Khalab B. B. B.

Charles Jacobs

Seether

Doneta

Anize

Layla Davis

NO

Earnest Williams

W. Williams

Josephine

Makayla Curtis

Delany

Jadyn Donovan

Amir J. J.

Kiya R. D.

M. J. J.

Savannah Stewart

Joshua Ihegikur

Spencer Tyson

Mrs. Matthew

Marissa Michel

Jayla Matthews

Christopher Madempe Tyson

Emi Marshall

Bradley Porter

Bedi Mari

Nia B. B.

Matthew H. B.

McKenzie Davis

M. T. Davis

Ms. Moore

