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**RETHINKING “THE BLACK MOZART”: “IT”-IFICATION, MYTHIFICATION AND
CANONIZATION**

A Thesis in

Music

by

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799) was a highly respected Parisian violinist, composer, and conductor. Though he was admired for his outstanding musical abilities, Saint-Georges was also a virtuoso of the sword, and was known as one of France's best fencers. Despite the professional reputation that he garnered during his lifetime, his musical achievements are relatively unknown today, save for being known as "Le Mozart Noir" or "The Black Mozart." This moniker, though perhaps helpful at first to contextualize Saint-Georges's music, operates on the basis that Mozart—and by extension his white, Austro-German heritage—are the golden standard in Western music against which all other composers from this period are measured. It implies that his artistry can only be understood in relation to Mozart's. Furthermore, it highlights the disturbing lack of racial diversity in both the pedagogical and performing canon in Western art music. In this thesis, I will apply Martin Buber's philosophical framework of the dialogical "I-It" and "I-You" relationships in an attempt to deconstruct "The Black Mozart" and argue that Saint-Georges and his music should be understood on their own terms. Then, I will investigate the intersection of racial politics and canonicity more closely, by engaging with the persistent claim that Beethoven was black, a notion that does a disservice to Saint-Georges's place in music history. Lastly, I will discuss the formation of the Western art music canon, why composers of color have typically been excluded from it, and how we might come to achieve a more equitable version of it.

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INTRODUCTION

Joseph Bologne, the Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799), was a late 18th-century virtuoso violinist, composer, fencer, and officer of the French National Guard during the French Revolution. Born the son of an African slave and a French nobleman in the West Indies on the island of Guadeloupe, he was taken to Paris by his father when he was young. Although his race barred him from becoming a true aristocrat, his father's status did allow for certain privileges. As a musician, Saint-Georges was a first-class violin soloist and conductor; he often performed his own concertos to great acclaim, and he was the conductor of two of Paris's most important orchestras, first the *Concert des Amateurs* and later the *Concert de la Loge Olympique*. During his lifetime, he was called (and marketed on concert advertisements as) *Le Mozart Noir*, or "The Black Mozart." This moniker has stayed with Saint-Georges since his death and continues to influence the reception of his music today.

While the characterization—or branding—of Saint-Georges as "Le Mozart Noir" has long defined his legacy, it has yet to be examined in detail. What is gained through such a comparison, if anything, and what is lost? Most importantly, how might a better understanding of this aspect of Saint-Georges's reception help us to appreciate more fully his contributions to music history? In this thesis, I will draw on philosophy, reception history, and broader issues of the canon to address the mythos of "the Black Mozart" and the ways in which it has shaped perceptions of Saint-Georges and his music. As I will argue, this moniker has led to a reductive and even harmful historical perspective on Saint-Georges's rich contributions to music history, one that has prevented his music from receiving the attention that it deserves.

My thesis will include three chapters, each of which builds upon the last in terms of the scope of analyzing the reception history of Saint-Georges. Chapter One will focus on what I call

the “problem” of calling Saint-Georges “The Black Mozart.” Firstly, I argue that it upholds whiteness, and to a certain extent, Austro-German heritage, as the standard for greatness in classical music. “Le Mozart Noir” denies Joseph Bologne, the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, any artistic agency. It not only deprives him of his name but also reduces him to being understood through the lens of his race. Ultimately, I believe the use of this name is reductive and objectifies Saint-Georges in an unhelpful way. I will then turn to 20th-century philosopher Martin Buber’s seminal work *I and Thou* to use his analytical framework as a way to begin understanding Saint-Georges in his own right.¹ Buber’s basic premise in *I and Thou* is that there are two ways in which humans relate to the world: through an “I-It” or an “I-You” orientation. Something or someone becomes an *It* when we focus too closely on outward, observable features like appearance or personality. These interactions are superficial and can lead to a lack of genuine human interaction. In his view, institutions (universities, governments, even society at large) regulate how we identify ourselves to the outside world but further reinforce the idea of being identified only as in *It*. An I-You relationship, however, is more meaningful and is based on standing in relation with someone regardless of their outward traits. In this thesis, I will explore how we might enter an I-You relationship (or as close as is possible) with Saint-Georges through the experience of listening to his music. Achieving this requires moving beyond his association with Mozart and listening to his music as the creative output of Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, a classical-era composer of mixed heritage whose contributions to music history are significant, substantial, and deserving of our attention.

The second chapter will explore the intersection of racial politics and the musical canon, by focusing on the ways in which ideas of blackness have influenced the reception histories of

¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Martin Kauffman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

Beethoven and the Chevalier. For many years in Beethoven scholarship, there was speculation that Beethoven might have been black. Though it has been entirely disproven, there are interesting implications inherent in even posing the question to begin with. What knowledge can be gained if he was black? Who benefits if it is true? As Nicholas T. Rinehart points out in his recent article “Black Beethoven and the Racial Politics of Music History,” there has been a curious uptick in the number of “armchair” internet commentators who have begun to trot this idea again.² More distressingly, these anonymous commentators engage in debates about which specific traits of Beethoven’s might point to his “Negroid” heritage, “as if the racialized typologies of yesteryear’s physical anthropology had reared their ugly heads.”³ But what does it mean that the topic of Beethoven’s race has, according to Rinehart, “remained under the radar despite its stubbornness?”⁴ Ironically, while many have tried to claim Beethoven as a black composer, Saint-Georges—the most significant and successful black composer of his generation—has received little scholarly attention. Nor has his music entered the canon as Mozart’s or Beethoven’s has. I will also cite both recent and historical critical racial philosophies posed by Naomi Zack⁵ and W.E.B. DuBois⁶ to demonstrate that the argument of Beethoven’s blackness is based on the idea of biological racial essentialism, which in turn has its own history of negative implications.

The last chapter focuses more broadly on the idea of the canon at large. More specifically, I will use William Weber’s three categories of the “scholarly,” “pedagogical” and

² Nicholas T. Rinehart, “Black Beethoven and the Racial Politics of Music History,” *Transition: An International Review* 112 (2013): 117-30.

³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵ Naomi Zack, “The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism and Its Legacy,” *Confluence: Journal of World Philosophies* 1 (November 2016): 85-98.

⁶ “The Conservation of Races,” by W.E.B. DuBois, *Teaching American History*, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-conservation-of-races/>.

“performing” canon and his categorization of the canon as a “*moral, spiritual and civic force*”⁷ that asserts a white, Eurocentric “assertion of cultural supremacy”⁸ to illustrate how performing arts institutions and scholars justify their exclusion of composers of color from the canon. This kind of discussion invariably also brings up the topic of the white, Austro-German composer as “genius” or “hero.” I will turn to K. M. Knittel’s⁹ discussion of the “myth” of Beethoven, in addition to citing Bruno Nettl’s article “Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture (an essay in four movements).”¹⁰ Nettl brilliantly begs us, the denizens of the “Music Building,” to consider the hierarchy of composers that we consider great—and how we have collectively arrived at that decision—from the outside perspective of an ethnomusicologist from Mars who is going to spend a few days at a fictitious “Music Building” observing how we operate. Lastly, I look to the writing of current composer and activist Anthony R. Green to propose a more equitable version of the canon.

The conclusion will focus on classical music’s current relationship with black composers and performers. The story of one modern black female conductor, Jeri Lynne Johnson, resonates with Saint-Georges’s own experience, showing how many of the issues that he faced are present, albeit in different forms, more than two centuries after his death.

I believe this research is valuable in many ways. Firstly, Saint-Georges deserves to stand on his own two feet as a composer and not in Mozart’s shadow. The application of Buber’s philosophical framework is not only helpful in deconstructing our inherited perceptions of Saint-Georges, but could also lead to insightful new ways of thinking about other composers.

⁷ William Weber, “The History of Musical Canon,” in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everest (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 351.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁹ K.M. Knittel, “The construction of Beethoven,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, edited by Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 118-50.

¹⁰ Bruno Nettl, “Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture (An Essay in four movements),” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21, (1989): 1-16.

Secondly, the exploration of classical music's contemporary issues with race illustrates that for as much change has happened in society, many things stay the same. This is apparent in both Saint-Georges's and Jeri Johnson's case where the color of their skin kept them from obtaining high-profile employment. Lastly, I believe it is vitally important that scholars and performers challenge themselves to question the inherited traditions of why they study the music they study, and to consider the benefits that can arise from a broader and more inclusive view of the musical canon.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM WITH “THE BLACK MOZART”

Martin Buber was one of the most influential Jewish European philosophers of the 20th century. His landmark book, *I and Thou*, was published in 1923 and first translated into English in 1937. Its impact continues to be felt to this day: “*I and Thou* proved influential in other areas as well, including the philosophy of education. The work of Martin Buber remains a linchpin of qualitative philosophical anthropology and continues to be cited in fields such as philosophical psychology, medical anthropology, and pedagogical theory.”¹¹ In this chapter, I will give an overview of the central argument of Buber’s writing. Then, I will analyze how his philosophical framework applies to classical music, focusing in particular on Saint-Georges and the problematic nature of referring to him as “The Black Mozart.”

I and Thou centers around the concept of dialogue. While on its face, dialogue may seem to mean strictly the act of communication between one or more parties, Buber sought to expand this definition: “Buber gives expression to the intuition that we need to withstand the temptation to reduce human relations to the simple either/or of Apollonian or Dionysian, rational or romantic ways of relating to others. We are beings that can enter dialogic relations not just with human others but with other animate beings, such as animals, or a tree, as well as with the Divine Thou.”¹² In Buber’s conception of dialogue, we are not individual beings operating in the world in isolation, but instead we are beings always acting in relation to others as an “It” or a “You.” Buber calls this the “twofold” nature of man:

The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

¹¹ Zachary Braiterman and Michael Zank, “Martin Buber,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/buber/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.
 The basic words are not single words but word pairs.
 One basic word is the word pair I-You.
 The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or
 She takes the place of It.
 Thus the I of man is also twofold.
 For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It.¹³

In this framework, there cannot be an “I” *without* a “You” or an “It”:

There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and I of the basic word I-It.
 When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I.
 And when he says You or It, the I of one or the basic word is also present.
 Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words are the
 same.
 Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it.¹⁴

But what constitutes an It and a You? Buber believes that we encounter something or
 someone as an It when we experience and observe only those qualities of something that are
 easily observable on the surface level. More simply, an It is something that we can observe,
 define, and categorize based on its outward appearance and observable traits:

I contemplate a tree.
 I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green
 traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.
 I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the
 sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce
 with earth and air—and the growing itself in its darkness.
 I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its
 construction and its way of life.
 ...But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the
 tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It.¹⁵

The last line of the above quote constitutes Buber’s conception of a “You.” When we see beyond
 an object or person’s outward traits, that object or person becomes a You. Even more
 importantly, we must come to stand in relation with that object or person. This relation is

¹³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Martin Kauffman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

essentially dialogical in nature, as Buber continues by writing “[O]ne should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity.”¹⁶ It is also important to note that the boundaries between an I-It or an I-You relationship among things is fluid, in that the relationship can change several times over the course of an interaction with an object or a person. This is illustrated in the above excerpt when Buber says that the tree becomes a You to his I when he contemplates the totality of its existence and does not focus on its individual parts. Conversely, the I-You relation becomes an I-It relation when one re-focuses one’s attention on observable traits:

Even as a melody is not composed of tones, nor a verse of words, nor a statue of lines—one must pull and tear to turn a unity into a multiplicity—so it is with the human being to whom I say You. I can abstract from him the color of his hair or the color of his speech or the color of his graciousness; I have to do this again and again; but immediately he is no longer You.¹⁷

Why are these distinctions important to Martin Buber, and how might this framework be useful in critiquing the idea of “The Black Mozart?” Part Two of *I and Thou* focuses heavily on Buber’s diagnosis of what he calls “the sickness of our age.”¹⁸ In his view, this sickness is caused by each generation’s gradual yet perpetual move towards an It-oriented social culture: “...the It-world of every culture is therefore more comprehensive than that of its predecessors...the progressive increase of the It-world is clearly discernable in history.”¹⁹ Additionally, these It-oriented cultures have become more about experiencing objects and people as Its rather than standing in relation to those things as a spiritual You.²⁰ He writes “[T]he basic relation of man to the It-world includes experience...and use, which leads it toward its multifarious purpose—the preservation, alleviation and equipment of human life.”²¹ The

¹⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁸ Ibid., 94.

¹⁹ Ibid., 88.

²⁰ Ibid., 88-9.

²¹ Ibid., 88.

difference between experiencing something or someone and relating to them as a You is an important distinction in Buber's framework. Essentially, a Buberian understanding of "experience" is a monological one, in that there is no reciprocity between a person and that particular experience (of a person or object) as there would be if they were to stand in relation to one another as in an I-You relationship:

Those who experience do not participate in the world. For the experience is "in them" and not between them and the world. The world does not participate in experience. It allows itself to be experienced, but is it not concerned, for it contributes nothing, and nothing happens to it.²²

The improvement of the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's power to relate.²³

This shift towards an It-oriented world based on experience, has, for Buber, led to a breakdown in what he calls public life.²⁴ Instead, Buber views "institutions" as the predominant force that has replaced public life. Institutions, in this framework, consist of "where one works, negotiates, influences, undertakes, competes, organizes, administers, officiates, preaches...[the] coherent structure where, with the manifold participation of human heads and human limbs, the round of affairs runs its course."²⁵ In more specific terms, I believe institutions are more generally to be understood as governments (and all of their inherent bureaucratic structures), universities, religious bodies, businesses, charities, and so on. I would posit that there are also several types of institutions that represent Western art music: conservatories and schools of music, opera houses, symphony orchestras, and the societies which represent academic musical scholarship such as the American Musicological Society and the Society for Music Theory.

²² Ibid., 56.

²³ Ibid., 92.

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ Ibid., 93.

In what ways do institutions contribute to the “It-ification” of our modern life? Firstly, our lives are defined by our interactions with institutions. Take, for example, all of the identifying factors that are present on driver’s licenses, an object administered by a governmental institution and required to operate a motor vehicle. One is identified by one’s name, age, height, weight, address and even the status of their vision. But all of these factors combined do not a person make. They identify a person by their outward features, all of which are necessary for the government to keep track of who is legally allowed to drive a car, but the sum of that person’s humanity is immeasurably greater than those parts. Or, as another example, consider a college town on a home football gameday. Those who support the home team are most likely to be wearing an item of clothing that identifies them as supporters of their team. Then, consider those who might have traveled to see that game in support of the away team, who will also most likely be wearing regalia indicating their support for the away team. These fans are then able to single out those wearing clothing of the opposite team as a sort of enemy, even though they will most likely not know one another. How easy might it be for those two fans to automatically be suspicious of one another just based on their support of the opposing teams? And, how much more likely is it that a friendly disagreement between them about the course of the game devolves into violence, simply based on the fact that they support different teams? Would this happen in another context, one in which the team allegiances did not influence their socialization? Each of these fans views the other as an It, dictated by the institution of sports, and thus each struggles to relate to one another as a You.

How is this framework applicable to the institutions of Western music, what can it tell us about the It-ification of Saint-Georges? Firstly, the ways in which we think about which composers are worth our attention are dictated by the institutions of Western music. When

prominent symphony orchestras continue to program the same works by a small handful of composers year after year, they communicate that those works and those composers are the only ones worthy of being heard. This message, in turn, is received by music schools and thus affects what pieces are taught and performed in those environments. The academies of music history and theory further reinforce which composers are worthy of attention and which are not—consider for example the amount of scholarly attention that is paid to Beethoven compared to the relative dearth of scholarship on Saint-Georges. These ideas will be further fleshed out in Chapter 3, but suffice it to say that the programming of major performing institutions and the prevalence of white, male composers in the musical academic discourse have shaped the modern musical landscape in ways that we are only just now beginning to reckon with. Secondly, the ways in which we talk about composers are almost always in an It orientation. Haydn was both the father of the string quartet and the symphony; Mozart the prodigious child genius; Beethoven the heroic, revolutionary; Schubert the master of lieder; Brahms the conservative; Tchaikovsky the sexually repressed master of melody; Dvořák the nationalist; Wagner the grandiose and egocentric; Mahler the eccentric and lovesick; Schoenberg the breaker of tonality; Stravinsky the musical chameleon. While these traits may in fact be helpful in allowing us to categorize the contributions to music history made by these composers, reducing them in this way makes it harder to relate to them as human beings. For how are mere mortals meant to relate to these gods, those who have given us the gifts of their transcendental and timeless art?

In the context of “The Black Mozart,” Saint-Georges is problematically reduced to existing as “the black one.” Though “The Black Mozart” may allow for Saint-Georges’s contextualization in the course of music history, this name reinforces Mozart’s prominence in the historical discourse while simultaneously transforming Saint-Georges into the token black

composer of the classical period. By upholding Mozart as the standard against which Saint-Georges is evaluated, “The Black Mozart” implies that in order to be hailed as a great composer, one must be white and of Austro-German descent. Through this moniker, Saint-Georges has been completely represented as an It. Furthermore, it robs Saint-Georges of his own artistic agency, and even of being known by his own name. During his lifetime, Saint-Georges was a highly celebrated musician. He was friends and colleagues with François Gossec, the Rameau protégé who founded the *Concert des Amateurs*, the orchestra that Saint-Georges would eventually come to conduct when Gossec left in 1773 to take over the *Concert Spirituel*. “Moreover, Gossec...admired the way the younger man [Saint-Georges] produced with his violin, what he, Gossec had wanted to express in his scores. One composed the music and the other gave it life, and between them grew a feeling of friendship that got stronger each day.”²⁶ And when Gossec founded the *Concert des Amateurs* in 1769, Saint-Georges was immediately named “first violin and timekeeper.”²⁷ In this role, Saint-Georges attracted much attention, as the timekeeper played a valuable supporting part to the orchestra director. And as first violin, “Joseph had the privilege of playing standing up during the performance. Since the orchestra director was only occasionally present during concerts, the first violin frequently replaced him and conducted in his stead.”²⁸ His first concertos for violin and orchestra, premiered in 1772 at the Hôtel de Soubise in front of “[a]ll of Paris society,” were met with an “enthusiastic” response.²⁹ In the eight years spent directing the *Concert des Amateurs*, Saint-Georges was consistently praised for the orchestra’s musical accomplishments. But perhaps one of the most

²⁶ Alain Guédé, *Monsieur de Saint-George: Virtuoso Swordsman, Revolutionary, A Legendary Life Rediscovered*, trans. Gilda M. Roberts. (Picador: New York, 2003), 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

enduring markers of success came in 1775: “the *Musical Almanac* called the Concert des Amateurs ‘the best orchestra for symphonies that exists in Paris and perhaps in Europe.’”³⁰ During his tenure, advertisements for Saint-Georges’s concerts often alternated with those of Mozart’s, implying that, at least in the eyes of the Parisian public, the two stood on an equal musical footing.³¹ But Guédé notes that Saint-Georges is suspiciously absent in Mozart’s letters to his father during Mozart’s second residency in Paris:

The best violinists of the century—such as Rodolphe Kreutzer, to whom Beethoven dedicated his famous sonata—were eager to perform [Saint-Georges’s] works. In the prolific correspondence Mozart maintained with his father and others... he never once mentions Saint-George’s [sic] name. Was this a case of jealousy on the part of a composer, who was often loath to acknowledge any talent in his rivals? Very possibly. And yet Wolfgang’s letters refer to musicians considerably less admired at the time than was Saint-George [sic].³²

Although Guédé suggests that Mozart felt threatened by Saint-Georges there is no evidence to substantiate this claim. However, the absence of Saint-Georges in Mozart’s letters points to the fact that the sense of spiritual connection between these composers implied by the term “Black Mozart” is not founded in any actual relationship between the two men.

As the only composer of color to emerge from the Classical period, it is vital that Saint-Georges be allowed to stand separate from Mozart and not in his shadow. In virtually no other case in the history of Western classical music has a descriptor like this been used to describe the life of a composer in terms of his relationship to one of their contemporaries. Johannes Brahms was not “The Conservative Richard Wagner,” nor was Gustav Mahler “The Jewish Richard Strauss.” Yet in Saint-Georges’s case, the simple act of being alive during Mozart’s time *and*

³⁰ Ibid., 110-1.

³¹ Ibid., 139.

³² Ibid., 139.

being a person of mixed heritage was enough for this moniker to be used both during his own lifetime and during ours, nearly 220 years after his death in 1799.

I believe that it is possible to re-center our perceptions of composers from an It orientation to a You orientation. While Buber's concepts are meant to work with a person with whom you can interact with in the present, his views on the creation of art provide a possible path forward with re-centering this orientation. For Buber, art arises and is created from the deepest part of a person's being:

Art, too: as he beholds what confronts him, the form discloses itself to the artist. He conjures it into an image. The image does not stand in a world of gods but in this great world of men. Of course, it is "there" even when no human eye afflicts it but it sleeps.... As in a dream it looks for the encounter with man in order that he may undo the spell and embrace the form for a timeless moment.³³

Through this conception on the origin of art, I believe it is possible to view works of art or pieces of music as expressions of a person's innermost You. Therefore, it is through the music that Saint-Georges wrote that we might be able to begin relating to him more fully as a You rather than an It. Music is an especially well-suited art form for this change to occur, in that through the act of performing music, one enters into a kind of dialogue with one's audience. While a work of art too may be understood as an It in terms of its aggregate qualities, Saint-Georges's music (recordings and published scores) are the only way in which we can enter into a "dialogue" with Saint-Georges himself. Buber emphasizes throughout *I and Thou* that there can be no I without an It or a You, that all interactions between humans are dialogical in one sense or another. This holds true especially in the context of music— it is an art form that must be written down, performed *and* heard in order for its true essence to be understood. But it is important that one does not study and listen to the music in an It-centered way, the same way one must not see

³³ Ibid., 91.

Saint-Georges as simply “The Black Mozart.” In the teaching of music history, students are trained in gaining the ability to critically listen to an unknown work and being able to accurately discern approximately when it was written, what genre it is, and who might have written it. While this is a useful skill, it also reflects an It-centered approach to entering into a dialogue with a piece of music. Buber also believes that the I-It orientation is oriented in the past, in that we expect our interactions with others to follow closely to what we have experienced with them in the past. It leaves one closed off to the possibility of standing in *nowness* and *You-ness* with another person. This holds true in listening to the Chevalier’s music only in the context of knowing him as “Le Mozart Noir.” While it does give one clues as to the general style one can expect of Saint-Georges’s music, one will inevitably end up understanding his music within the context of Mozart, one of the most enduring figures of Western classical music. I propose that in order to stand in any sort of *You-ness* with Chevalier’s music, we must consciously force ourselves to forget about “The Black Mozart” and focus on the ways in which he expresses his own artistic agency through his music.

The institutions (universities, opera houses, symphony orchestras, presenters, etc.) of classical music would be well-served by reframing their relationships with composers and with the canon. Despite increasing awareness of these issues, women composers and composers of color continue to be overlooked in favor of classical music’s traditional heroes. Attempts to incorporate diverse voices at the highest levels of the industry are often seen as symbolic and not representative of systemic change. Too often, composers are celebrated in an It-oriented way, favoring the “myth” over the facts of their lives and music, which I will be examining in both Chapters 2 and 3. This leads to erasure of identity and the inability to have a nuanced conversation about the history as it stands, and is especially true in Saint-Georges’s case. He

deserves to be known by his full name and appreciated for his contributions to music by his own merit, not Mozart's. It is my hope that those operating in the world of classical music try their best to encounter each composer and their music as a You, to listen more clearly, and appreciate the rich contributions to our art form that have been made by people of all backgrounds, creeds, colors, and genders.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK BEETHOVEN

Since his death in 1827, Ludwig van Beethoven has become one of the most enduring figures of Western music. His music is often hailed as revolutionary—the mark of a heroic genius who, through the strength of sheer will, was able to conquer his hearing loss to write some of the most iconic music in the Western tradition. The ability to write music despite his disability has only added to his status as a lone tragic hero whose music, often seen as an expression of his own inner turmoil, also ultimately often reflects the hero's triumph over his personal struggles. It is for this reason that for a significant portion of the mid-20th century, radical American civil rights leaders were interested in staking the claim that Beethoven was black. How might a statement as provocative and false as “Beethoven was black” begin to change our perceptions of who Beethoven was? And what does it say about musicology and the ways in which it interacts with composers who weren't white men of Austro-German descent?

In addition to covering these topics, this chapter will also focus on the origins of the claim that Beethoven was black, and the importance of this claim to radical Civil Rights figures in 1960s America. Furthermore, I will use an article by Nicholas Rinehart to demonstrate that the claim of Beethoven's black heritage never fully disappeared at the end of the Civil Rights movement, and how the internet and its hordes of “armchair scholars” have given new life to the claim. Next, I will examine the main points of evidence used to support the claim of Beethoven's blackness, which are threefold: Beethoven's mother's genealogy, his general appearance both in person and in paintings, and bizarrely enough, certain musical features that Beethoven incorporated into his music. I then turn to critical race theory to contextualize claims of Beethoven's blackness, and to demonstrate how different definitions of race fail to prove that

Beethoven was black. The last section of this chapter will focus on how all of the above discourse on Beethoven's race ultimately does an historical disservice to a composer from the time period who was actually black, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, who to this day I firmly believe has been critically underrepresented in the general discourse of music history.

Michael Broyles devotes a chapter of his book *Beethoven in America* to the idea of Beethoven's blackness and points to four prominent black figures who were vocal proponents of Beethoven's purported black heritage. The first is African-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who, in 1907, was one of the first to posit that Beethoven was black. Coleridge-Taylor's claim is supported by two main points: first, that Beethoven was friends with the biracial violinist George Polgreen Bridgetower, and second, that, according to some of his acquaintances, he had a "dark" appearance.³⁴ That Coleridge-Taylor thought Beethoven's friendship with Bridgetower somehow reflective of Beethoven's own racial background is, of course, nonsensical at best. Beethoven became enamored of Bridgetower once Beethoven had the opportunity to hear him play when the pair met in 1803. Their friendship seems to have been genuine, if short-lived, but their relationship can in no way be used as evidence about Beethoven's own racial background. Coleridge-Taylor's claim about Beethoven's "dark" appearance requires further comment and will be discussed below.

The second proponent is Joel A. Rogers, a journalist who immigrated to the U.S. in 1906 from Jamaica. Broyles writes that Rogers was "[A]n autodidactic scholar," who "sought through extensive research to counter what he considered a Eurocentric bias in Western writings and to highlight the achievements of people of African ancestry."³⁵ In sum, his research led him to the

³⁴ Michael Broyles, *Beethoven in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 269.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

conclusion that several important figures in history were in fact black, or at least contained some trace of African ancestry: Pushkin, Dumas, Charlotte Sophia of the British Royal Family, five American presidents and of course, Beethoven.³⁶ As we will see later, the evidence James uses to support these claims is also problematic.

The next two proponents were important leaders in the radical wing of the American Civil Rights movement—Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. Like James, Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael were both concerned with the “whitewashing” of history, or the process by which black accomplishments and contributions to history are erased or downplayed.

Furthermore, X and Carmichael believed in a “hard Afrocentrism” that asserts “that most (for some, all) of Europe’s accomplishments came from Africa, and their African origins or sources were purposely suppressed by whites.”³⁷ The following excerpt from a speech Carmichael gave in 1967 to a predominantly black high school in Seattle is an excellent example of this hardline stance:

The problem is that our [black] culture is not legitimized. They [whites] have made us ashamed of it. Forget it! They have never had any culture! They have always stolen ours. That’s a fact. The blues ain’t theirs. Come on, be serious! Ha! Be serious. Don’t let them get away with that. The Blues... We might let them get away with Bach. Beethoven was black. They won’t tell you that in school. He was a Spanish Moor—black as you and I, but they don’t tell us that. It’s calculated, it is calculated.³⁸

Malcolm X stated his belief in Beethoven’s blackness three years prior to Carmichael’s speech in an interview with *Playboy* magazine, wherein he claims that “Western history as written by Western historians reflected a ‘history-whitening process,’ in which black accomplishments were either left out or blacks who succeeded ‘had gotten whitened’ in the historical record.”³⁹

³⁶ Ibid., 270.

³⁷ Ibid., 280.

³⁸ Quoted in Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 268.

³⁹ Ibid., 267-8.

Even though the idea of Beethoven's blackness reached its zenith the 60s and 70s, it never fully dissipated.⁴⁰ In his 2013 article entitled "Black Beethoven and the Racial Politics of Music History," scholar Nicholas T. Rinehart writes that though this idea "has been rehashed over the course of several decades," it "has remained somewhat under the radar despite its stubbornness."⁴¹ Though he cites Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer's 2007 short story collection *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black: And Other Stories* as just one contemporary account of the persistence of the myth, his article focuses mainly on how the internet, and particularly the "blogosphere," has breathed new life into the myth. He singles out one anonymous post specifically that made its rounds on the internet to highlight the ways in which these "armchair scholars" are attempting to write their own version of history:

In an age where history is seriously being rewritten, new information is coming forth that is shocking intellectual sensitivities. What was once considered written in stone is melting away with the discovery of facts that heretofore have been hidden or omitted; things so different that they are generally classified as controversial or unusual. That brings us to the topic of this post; the true identity of Ludwig van Beethoven, long considered Europe's greatest classical composer. Said directly, Beethoven was a black man.⁴²

Much of the online discourse surrounding Beethoven's blackness is based on the same slapdash evidence cited by Rogers, Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael. Additionally, internet culture has created the perfect environment for the dissemination of these types of historical falsehoods. Though the idea that Beethoven was black has been debunked several times over, it is all too apparent that many still regard this claim as true. In rejecting the scholarly evidence of this fact,

⁴⁰ Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 274.

⁴¹ Nicholas T. Rinehart, "Black Beethoven and the Racial Politics of Music History," *Transition: An International Review* 112 (2013): 117.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 119.

Rinehart says that these would-be “scholars” participate in the “complete desecration of [the] historical and scholarly method disguised as righteous detective work.”⁴³

Claims about Beethoven’s blackness rest mainly on three points: the genealogy of Beethoven’s mother’s family, first-hand accounts of Beethoven’s appearance and, strangely enough, the musical features of a select number of works that Beethoven wrote. Genealogical theories of Beethoven’s blackness have hinged on the claim that he was part Moor. Historically, the Moors were Berbers, an ethnic group that can trace its origins to Northern Africa and who also settled in Spain. Rinehart writes:

The logic goes something like this: Beethoven’s family, by way of his mother, traced its roots to Flanders, which was for some time under Spanish monarchical rule, and because Spain maintained a longstanding historical connection to North Africa through the Moors, somehow a single germ of blackness trickled down to our beloved Ludwig.⁴⁴

Without a more extensive genealogical study of Beethoven’s mother’s family, it would be impossible to prove Beethoven’s blackness. And without the possibility of running any sort of DNA tests on Beethoven’s remains, this piece of evidence based on the geographic origins of his mother’s family will remain circumstantial and unverifiable.

I will now turn to the evidence based on Ludwig’s appearance. Beethoven’s contemporaries like Schindler, Grillparzer and others used words like “brown” and “dark red” or even “short, ugly, dark” to describe Ludwig’s appearance. Even more simply put, Beethoven wasn’t black, but he was “swarthy.”⁴⁵ In addition to these accounts, Rogers also draws on representations of Beethoven in paintings and sketches in support of his claim. Broyles brings attention to one engraving in particular: an image created by Blasius Hofel based on an 1814

⁴³ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 119.

Figure 1



pencil drawing by Louis Letronne (Figure 1). Here, Beethoven is shaded darker than he is in normal artistic representations. But as Broyles points out, “Hofel’s engraving was reproduced frequently in Beethoven’s time and exists in various shades of light, darkness, and color. The Beethoven-Haus in Bonn has put six versions online and the chiaroscuro variety can easily be seen.”⁴⁶ Rogers, though, has a way to explain these variations away: “[A] dark tint, however, will bring out Negroid features, if there are any, as they do in this picture of Beethoven—a reason, perhaps, why this one is often reproduced in a shade much lighter than the original.”⁴⁷ Rogers seems to assert that the reproductions of this engraving in which Beethoven is shaded lighter are part of a plot to erase any traces of Beethoven’s “black” features, suggesting that a literal “whitewashing” has occurred. The use of the darker-hued version of the engraving is hardly rock-solid proof that Beethoven might have been black.

In addition to the general appearance of his skin tone, Beethoven’s facial features have also been used as evidence of his blackness. In fact, Coleridge-Taylor’s biographer Berwick Sayers says that Coleridge-Taylor pointed out that he thought he shared a “remarkable likeness” to Beethoven, especially “in brow and the outlines in general expression.”⁴⁸ Another facial feature that has been used as evidence in this regard is Beethoven’s nose, which, according to the creator of Beethoven’s death mask was “broad, [and] flat.”⁴⁹ This is one of the more troubling pieces of evidence used in support of the claim because it relies on racial stereotypes to prove its point. Rinehart points to the fact that online commentators have continued to debate “whether

⁴⁶ Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 274.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁹ Rinehart, “Black Beethoven,” 120.

Beethoven's appearance was truly 'Negroid'—as if the racialized typologies of yesteryear's physical anthropology had reared their ugly heads."⁵⁰

The last pillar of evidence on which the idea Beethoven's blackness is built is the use of certain musical features in a select number of his works. Of all the evidence used to support the claim, this group of ideas is perhaps the least convincing. Deborah D. Moseley, author of "Beethoven, the Black Spaniard" is one writer who associated typical rhythmic features found in Beethoven's music with traditionally black genres such as gospel and jazz:

Moseley associated the syncopation that is typical of Beethoven's style to the offbeat accent that is 'intrinsic and integral to Black people's music making, which gives it a unique vitality and kinetic energy.' She then cites specific Beethoven compositions. According to Moseley, the second movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, op. 111 'sounds like the genesis of jazz,' and the finale of the *Waldstein* Sonata, op. 53, 'has a syncopated bass, which might inspire clapping in gospel music. It is also the same off-beat pattern used in reggae and Hip-Hop music.'⁵¹

Clearly, gospel, jazz, reggae and hip-hop are genres that rely on the use of syncopations and offbeats. But these features are by no means unique to black music. The more important question to ask is "what is it about Beethoven's use of these rhythmic features that could possibly connect it to genres that developed in black spaces well after Beethoven's death?" For Rinehart, "[T]hese claims are so ridiculous that they verge on laughable. To attempt to reveal a musicological link between the *Waldstein* sonata and reggae is pure absurdity, nothing less."⁵² The invocation of typical rhythmic gestures found in Beethoven's music and traditionally black genres is similar to the use of his facial features as proof of his blackness. The features themselves may be similar, but this does not imply that there is similarity in the origins of these features.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁵¹ Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 284.

⁵² Rinehart, "Black Beethoven," 121.

Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael's claim also rests on the idea of biological racial essentialism. Philosophers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant were proponents of this ideology, and argued that it is possible to define race through various "racial essences, based on core metaphysical concepts."⁵³ These in turn became the source of "racial hierarchies...during the early days of modern anthropology and biology."⁵⁴ According to the theory of biological racial essentialism,

There are human races; each race is distinct from all other races in important ways; members of each distinct race have either a general trait that causes all of their other racial characteristics or a set of racial traits that is the "essence" of their racial identities. Racial essences may be limited to physical traits or, as prevalent over much of modern western modern intellectual history, include cultural, moral, and aesthetic traits.⁵⁵

While understanding race in this way may at first seem convenient, Zack goes on to write that for most of history, this ideology "was a convenient tool for creating doctrines of white racial superiority and non-white inferiority during the Age of Discovery when Europeans began commercial projects of resource extraction, appropriation, domination, and slavery."⁵⁶ Thus, those who support the idea that Beethoven was black based on certain facial characteristics (broad nose, dark skin, etc.) are in fact calling on a philosophical definition of race that has been used to justify the oppression of people of color for centuries. And although Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael used Beethoven as a political tool to represent the whitewashing of history, it is ironic that they too would have subscribed to this definition of race, seemingly unaware of the implications of this ideology. Zack goes to great lengths to debunk biological racial essentialism:

⁵³ Naomi Zack, "The Philosophical Roots of Racial Essentialism and Its Legacy," *Confluence: Journal of World Philosophies* 1 (November 2016): 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

Nothing has been found in human blood, physiology, or genes that can, independently of social ideas of race, support a scientific taxonomy of human races. Racial phenotypes are determined by genotypes that do not get inherited together but disperse and recombine at conception. There is more variation of those traits within social races, that is, the groups that are considered races within society, than between or among social races and it should perhaps be emphasized that this fact in itself precludes the possibility of scientific race, *a priori*. Some phenotypes are more frequent in some human populations than others, but populations are not well-defined groups and vary in number from under ten to hundreds of thousands...[T]he geographical location of ancestors also fails to ground race because it bears no verified causal connection to those phenotypical traits considered racial in society.⁵⁷

In this rebuke of biological racial essentialism, Zack raises two important points. Firstly, biological racial essentialism treats race as a monolithic force, as it states that all people of a certain race share outwardly visible physical traits. As Zack writes, it does not take into account the various ways that genes can express themselves within populations of people. One also need only be reminded of the ugly American tradition of minstrelsy and its focus on exaggerating various features of black bodies such as the lips, nose, and hips, to observe how a definition of race based on outward appearance can be used in a harmful and derogatory manner. Secondly, Zack reinforces Rinehart's rebuke of the evidence that Beethoven might have been black simply based on his mother's ancestry. If indeed that area of Belgium's population had been influenced by Moorish blood via Spanish occupation of that area, then a geographically-oriented definition of race would make Beethoven Flemish (which he was to begin with). Yes, Beethoven may have had broad features and darker-hued skin. But those who contend that Beethoven was black based on these features should be cautious when justifying those assertions with this type of ideology because of the ways it can and has been used as a force of oppression.

But what about other definitions of race not based on biology or outward appearance? American writer W.E.B. DuBois offers one alternative to biological racial essentialism in his

⁵⁷ Ibid., 93.

essay entitled “The Conservation of Races,” written in 1897. Like Zack, DuBois acknowledges biological racial essentialism— “[M]any criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language...”—while also swiftly denying them:

All these physical characteristics are patent enough, and if they agreed with each other it would be very easy to classify mankind. Unfortunately for scientists, however, these criteria of race are most exasperatingly intermingled. Color does not agree with texture of hair, for many of the dark races have straight hair; nor does color agree with the breadth of the head, for the yellow Tartar has a broader head than a German; nor, again, has the science of language as yet succeeded in clearing up the relative authority of these variously contradictory criteria.⁵⁸

DuBois’s solution to the biological definition of race is to propose an alternative definition based on a shared sociocultural heritage, which he calls “the race spirit.” He describes this as: “a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses.”⁵⁹ In DuBois’s conception of race, Beethoven could not be considered black because he and his family did not share in the common history of blacks living in Europe.

As mentioned earlier, X and Carmichael were proponents of a hard Afrocentrism, whose central claim was that many of Europe’s cultural accomplishments were based on African contributions that have since been erased by the whitewashing of history. In contrast, a soft Afrocentrism “means that blacks have a rich African cultural heritage that remains an important part of African American culture.”⁶⁰ Hard Afrocentrism was further articulated in George James’s *Stolen Legacy*, wherein he claimed “that virtually all Western culture was ‘stolen’ from Africa.”⁶¹ If X and Carmichael could therefore “claim” Beethoven as one of their own, it would

⁵⁸ “The Conservation of Races,” by W.E.B DuBois, Teaching American History, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-conservation-of-races/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Broyles, *Beethoven in America*, 280.

⁶¹ Ibid., 280.

have been a powerful rebuke of the Western canon, which reveres Beethoven as one of its gods.

Broyles writes that

[T]he most obvious answer might be that to claim Beethoven was black was to claim metaphorically the entire Western musical heritage... consistent with Afrocentrist assertions. Throughout the nineteenth century Beethoven was so venerated and influential that many composers considered him a force that they had to fight against to keep from being enveloped.⁶²

One need only look at the struggle Brahms underwent while composing his first symphony to see how the shadow of Beethoven loomed over composers in the 19th century, even well after Beethoven's death in 1827. Even more simply, the radicals of the 1960s used found Beethoven "useful" because "[T]he claim that he was black was sure to draw a backlash and to provide a point of pride for all African Americans. If he could be claimed as part of the African community, then the whole European world was topsy-turvy."⁶³

Sadly, all of this focus on Beethoven's alleged black ancestry serves to obscure the rich and underappreciated legacy of Joseph Bologne. While Beethoven has been falsely championed as a black composer, Saint-Georges—one of the most successful composers of his generation and a person of African descent—has been largely ignored. Additionally, the fascination with Beethoven's alleged blackness has ironically privileged the accomplishments of a white composer over those of a black composer from the same era. As with the description of Saint-Georges as "The Black Mozart," it "makes a black man a footnote to a white man... it erases the name and life's work of a black man and replaces them with those of a white man."⁶⁴

Historically, our discipline has given little credence to the voices of the past that do not fit the traditional mold of what for a long time was considered to be a "good composer." In Rinehart's

⁶² Ibid., 283.

⁶³ Ibid., 286.

⁶⁴ Rinehart, "Black Beethoven," 128.

words, composers like Saint-Georges remained “confined to the realm of trivia and esoterica exactly because of their race, [and] must be remembered only by the names of others.”⁶⁵ In many ways, Saint-Georges would have been a more impactful figure for Malcolm X and others to celebrate because of the undeniable fact that he was a black man who succeeded in a white society that still participated in and relied on slavery for economic purposes. It is clear that Saint-Georges led an exceptional life in Paris as a musician of color, and that his music was greatly appreciated in his day. And yet, for all of its brilliance, it has never been fully embraced in the canon, remaining both underperformed and underheard. Chapter 3 will explore the reasons for the marginalization of Saint-Georges’s music and suggest a more inclusive approach to canon, one that better reflects the broad spectrum of voices that have sounded throughout music history.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 128.

CHAPTER 3

CANONIZATION

The canon, as understood in terms of Western music, is comprised of pieces that are taught and performed the most regularly. Canonized works are also generally considered “masterworks,” written by the great masters of the past. But who decides which pieces are worthy of this status? And how did it come to be that the shift from performing new works to almost exclusively old ones happened? This chapter focuses on William Weber’s distinctions between the types of canon and how they have developed over time. Additionally, I cite K.M. Knittel and Bruno Nettl to address the implications of both the mythification and deification of composers and how that in turn effects the construction of the canon. Lastly, I turn to composer and activist Anthony R. Green to propose a path forward for making the canon more equitable.

Scholar William Weber traces the development of the canon in “The History of Musical Canon,” a chapter of *Rethinking Music*.⁶⁶ Essentially, the idea of performing “old” music developed and was codified during the 19th century: “[o]ld music had moved from the musician’s study to the concert hall: it had become established in repertoires throughout concert life, dominating many programmes, and was legitimated in critical and ideological terms.”⁶⁷ The 16th century, in contrast, saw music older than a generation disappear save for a few pieces that “formed part of [the] pedagogical traditions known by a small group of learned musicians.”⁶⁸ Weber lays out a brief chronological timeline of the development of the canon that is divided into six distinct time periods of Western music history. The most pertinent to this discussion is

⁶⁶ William Weber, “The History of Musical Canon,” in *Rethinking Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everest (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 336-355.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

the third time period, 1800-1870: “the rise of an integrated, international canon that established a much stronger authority in aesthetic and critical terms, and that moved to the centre of musical life.”⁶⁹ Music from this time period and slightly after has come to dominate the repertoires of classical music institutions and music schools throughout the world. Beethoven is the leading composer that represents this particular period. Rightly or wrongly, his music became the benchmark against which succeeding generations of composers compared themselves. The story of his life, of a deaf musician dedicating his life to his craft despite his disability, wove itself into the fabric of German nationalism after his death. He is celebrated as a genius and has been afforded the status of a deity. The dominance of Beethoven and a handful of other male, primarily European composers has come at the expense of both women composers and composers of color like Saint-Georges. According to the website Bachtrack, the largest classical music events finder online, Beethoven was the most performed composer in 2018.⁷⁰ In fact, the top 10 most performed composers of that year were all dead white men: Beethoven, Mozart, Bernstein (2018 was his centennial year), Bach, Brahms, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Schumann, and Handel.

In Weber’s view, there are three specific types of canon that developed over time. The first is a scholarly canon, wherein music is “studied in theoretical terms,” and can be traced back to “antiquity” and the “medieval quadrivium.”⁷¹ More specifically, music was studied in terms of its “philosophical and scientific” properties.⁷² This was music that was not primarily meant to be taught or performed. But by the end of the 18th century, the scholarly canon was “transformed

⁶⁹ Ibid., 341.

⁷⁰ “Classical Music in 2018, The Year in Statistics,” Bachtrack, 2019, <https://bachtrack.com/files/96739-EN-Classical-music-statistics-2018.pdf>.

⁷¹ Weber, “History,” 339.

⁷² Ibid.

fundamentally... as scientific and philosophical study gave way to new theoretical study of harmony and early music.”⁷³ The next type is the pedagogical canon, which entailed students of music learning the craft of composition through the emulation of composers of the previous generation. This tradition developed out of sacred music, involving “the musically most prominent cathedrals and chapels”⁷⁴ with the goal of preserving sacred polyphony. The pedagogical canon remained in the hands of a small number of trained musicians, and thus, retained an elite status that kept it within the academy. Weber writes that as the canon became codified around Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms in the 19th century, the “process of emulation [became] even more common and explicit than before.”⁷⁵ The emulation of this group of Austro-German composers fuels the idea that only the music written by those composers or those that tried to emulate them is worthy of study and performance. While the music written by these composers is important, its overwhelming dominance has marginalized and even silenced the voices of many of their contemporaries. The institutional focus on the canon—specifically Mozart—has paradoxically granted Saint-Georges, “the Black Mozart,” a kind of fringe status in the musical world. That is, the connection with Mozart has at the very least prevented him from falling into complete obscurity. At the same time, the paradigm of “the Black Mozart” has severely handicapped the way we approach his music, since our primary mode of encountering it is through the lens of an Other.

The last of the three points that forms the triumvirate of Weber’s conception of canon is the idea of the performing canon. This canon is formed by the “presentation of old works organized as repertories defined as sources of authority with regard to musical taste.”⁷⁶ I believe

⁷³ Ibid., 339.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 339.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 340.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 340.

that it is important to focus on the latter half of Weber's definition, that the dominance of works that make up this canon further reinforces the canon's inherent exclusionary nature. The defense for maintaining the canon as it stands now (white, male, Euro-centric) boils down to the argument that this music was composed by "geniuses" and that each work is a "masterpiece." The performing canon retains its exclusionary authority when it is dominated by a small group of composers deemed "the best." I agree with Weber's argument that this type of canon has the farthest-reaching effect because it involves the wider listening public, and not just those who participate in the study of music in the academy. This canon has the ability to shape the tastes of the listening public. But when all they are exposed to is Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and Brahms, I believe it reduces the audience's capacity for tolerating music *not* written by those composers.

Weber further points out that the idea of the canon has become a monolithic force that dominates performing and scholarly life: "[T]he performance of old music and the idea of musical classics have simply been taken for granted: to ask why, or even when, these practices began has been so far from disciplinary convention that it would seem more than a bit perverse."⁷⁷ The idea of the canon has become so commonplace that even modern calls for diversifying (or eliminating it all together) are met with hostile reactions. Take, for example, the case of Dutch musicologist Kees Vlaardingerbroek, who responded to a tweet by American musicologist Doug Shadle, Associate Professor of Musicology at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University. Vlaardingerbroek was responding to Shadle's tweet criticizing the League of American Orchestras's CEO. Shadle's tweet reads: "[N]othing like hearing the CEO of the League of American Orchestras pontificate how orchestras aren't pillars of white supremacy...while using the fact that non-white people play in orchestras as 'proof.'"⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., 336.

⁷⁸ Doug Shadle (@DougShadle), September 8th, 2019.

Vlaardingerbroek responds: “In the 30s Nazi musicologist Heinrich Bessler fought against the Great Evil: ‘The Jew’. Nowadays some American musicologists likewise want to purge the world of music. Their Great Enemy: ‘The White Male.’ So their approach is not just racist, but sexist as well. Progress indeed.”⁷⁹ Shadle’s work focuses on the lack of diversity in classical music. In an article called “Systemic Discrimination: the Burden of Sameness in American Orchestras” published on *I Care if You Listen*, Shadle tackles the issue of the mind-numbing repetition of composers and works presented by modern American orchestras: “Simply put, lack of diversity on concert programs is built into the institutional structure of American classical music organizations, leading to systemic discrimination against women, people of color and other historically underrepresented musicians.”⁸⁰

Because of the nature of the modern classical industry as Shadle describes it, I believe Vlaardingerbroek’s response operates on two levels of false equivalency. A call for a more inclusive classical music industry is not a call to eliminate white men from it completely. What Shadle and many other musicologists (myself included) call for is better representation for groups of performers and composers (of both the past and today) whose music remains on the periphery of the canon: women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Historically, Western music has been dominated by white, European men, as has been the case for the majority of world history. The music of these composers is unlikely to face significant barriers to performance. The second level of false equivalency is borne from Vlaardingerbroek’s invocation of the Holocaust. To equate calls for diversity with the genocide of a people is

⁷⁹ Kees Vlaardingerbroek, (@KeesVlaar), September 8th, 2019.

⁸⁰ Douglas Shadle, “Systemic Discrimination: the Burden of Sameness in American Orchestras,” *I Care if You Listen*. February 8, 2018. <https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/2018/02/systemic-discrimination-burden-sameness-american-orchestras/>.

irresponsible and dangerous, and it implies that American musicologists are so insistent on getting their way that we would resort to physical violence to achieve our ends. American musicologists like Shadle who ask for more equitable representation do not ignore the influences of Beethoven or Haydn or Mozart. Instead, they simply ask academia and the modern classical music industry to recognize that great music was and is written by people of all colors, nationalities, sexual orientations, and genders.

True to its conceptual origins in religious hagiography (the writing of the lives of saints), the musical canon has also contributed to what might be called the “mythification” of composers such as Beethoven and Mozart. In her article “The Construction of Beethoven,” K.M. Knittel attempts to deconstruct the musicological discourse about the “heroic” Beethoven by pointing out that many of the anecdotes of Beethoven’s personality that paint him as “the isolated, eccentric genius committed to his art” are simply false.⁸¹ She goes on to point out that many of these tales were retold by close associates of Beethoven’s many years after his death. Take, for example, the account of the so-called “Teplitz incident” that Knittel cites early in her chapter. In a letter Beethoven wrote to Bettina Brentano describing his meeting with Goethe (which Brentano helped arrange), Beethoven writes that he:

had refused to cede the road to the approaching Austrian imperial family—including the empress and her son the Archduke Rudolph (Beethoven’s patron and composition student)—to make room for him. In recounting these events, Beethoven emphasizes his own “nobility” based on his talent, implying that Goethe clings to the older idea of the “natural” superiority of the aristocracy. This “Teplitz incident”...has come to exemplify our image of the independent, strong-willed Beethoven.⁸²

⁸¹ K.M. Knittel, “The construction of Beethoven,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, edited by Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 118.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 119.

Knittel then quickly paints Brentano as an unreliable source, pointing out that of the three alleged letters between her and Beethoven, only one from 1811 exists in Beethoven's hand, "suggesting that she was the author of the other two."⁸³ Therefore, this tale, "so *characteristic* of Beethoven, is thus almost certainly a fabrication."⁸⁴ Perhaps even more troubling than the fabrication of this incident is that to some, it seemed not to matter that Brentano was an unreliable source—scholars like William Kinderman used her misleading accounts in their scholarship while casually dismissing concerns about their dubious source.⁸⁵ All of this is to say that in the general musicological discourse, it is easy to accept the "myth" of the composer and his genius while failing to engage more critically with any aspects of that composer's life that do not fit neatly within our inherited ideas of who that composer was and what his music represents. Any aspects of his life or works of music that do not fit uniformly into those ideas are dismissed as an anomaly. Knittel explains why this "mythification" can be troublesome:

The problem is not that authors are unaware that a Beethoven myth exists...but rather that the myth itself is compelling: Beethoven, the fiery genius, perhaps the greatest musical mind ever known, loses his *hearing*, the one sense a musician cannot do without; yet somehow he perseveres, making his accomplishments that much greater for having originated in a life so filled with pain and sadness. We find Beethoven's ability to overcome his circumstances reassuring—for ultimately are we not simply suckers for a happy ending?

Even if the Beethoven myth contains a kernel of truth, however—he did, after all, continue to compose despite his deafness—it nevertheless reduces him to a cipher: within the myth, Beethoven is not a human being, but rather a symbol of a larger aesthetic doctrine...[T]he myth ignores anything—biographical facts, musical works, real suffering—that cannot reify the happy ending.⁸⁶

Knittel's statement that "within the myth, Beethoven is not a human being" largely echoes Buber's philosophical I-It framework. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the reduction of a person to

⁸³ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

an “It” is ultimately harmful and prevents us from engaging with another person in a meaningful way. Though we can never enter a true Buberian dialogue with these composers, the process of “conscious forgetting,” as I posited in Chapter 1, is an important step in the direction of engaging more fully with their music and their lives. The tradition of studying Beethoven and Mozart is important, but it is necessary, I believe, to challenge the tradition in order to avoid becoming complacent in our scholarship and performance practices.

The omnipresence of Mozart and Beethoven in musicological scholarship and the performing canon speaks to another point that Knittel makes later in her chapter. “Beethoven’s influence transcends chronology...and the generations following Beethoven suffer in comparison to him, both during their own lifetimes and in our present histories. Only by understanding and acknowledging that the Beethoven myth controls the way we think about music in general can we open the way for alternative histories.”⁸⁷ I agree with Knittel’s bold claim that the Beethoven myth seems to control our understanding of music history in a broad sense. Mozart and Beethoven have long held a prominent place in the musicological discourse. Their contemporaries, like Saint-Georges, are merely understood as less than, no matter how outstanding their contributions to the musical cultures in which they lived.

The late Bruno Nettl addresses similar issues in his article entitled “Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture.” In a slightly unusual approach, Nettl examines the study of Western music and its composers through the lens of an “ethnomusicologist from Mars’ who has the task of discerning the basics of Western art music culture as manifested by

⁸⁷ Ibid., 121

the community of denizens of a fictitious...Music Building.”⁸⁸ What might this

ethnomusicologist learn about the values of these denizens? He writes:

Walking around the Music Building, he sees names engraved in stone around the top: Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Palestrina...and a more hierarchical, much longer list clearly featuring Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Haydn, and Wagner...

Confronting the Music Building one is quickly exposed to a number of guiding principles of Western art music...Importantly they include the concept of hierarchy—among musical systems and repertoires, and within art music, among types of ensembles and composers. There is a pyramid, at the top one of two or three composers... There is great value placed on innovation, but it is the old and trusted, the music of the great masters of the past, which is most respected. In particular, our visitor is struck by the enormous significance of the concept of the master composers, a concept of which the figure of W.A. Mozart is paradigmatic.

...So far he has been confronted by Mozart as a composer, or perhaps, more properly, Mozart as a group of pieces. Denizens of the Music Building think of a composer in these two forms, forms that are partly congruent but sometimes also conflict...

...The Music Building denizens are concerned about the *kinds* of persons to whom they have accorded the great master status, but they have not resolved certain dilemmas. Are great composers great souls, and does the music come from divine inspiration, or are they just excellent technicians? Is it better to be a genius who comes to his accomplishments effortlessly or someone who achieves by the sweat of his brow? Who should properly be loved by God?⁸⁹

Nettl focuses his attention on the Music Building’s narrow scope of composers that are celebrated as “great.” In calling attention to the Music Building’s preference for the “trusted” music of the old masters, Nettl also provides a possible justification explaining why the music of historically marginalized composers has had a hard time becoming a part of the canon. Nettl also speaks to the pseudo-spiritual aspect of the celebration of the “greats”—that they are somehow divinely inspired—and therefore implies that listening to and performing their music makes one a morally upright person. And, in his statement about the reduction of Mozart from a person to simply “a group of pieces,” he echoes Knittel’s sentiment that the mythification of composers ultimately leads to a reduction of composers into objects.

⁸⁸ Bruno Nettl, “Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture (An Essay in Four Movements),” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21, (1989): 2.

⁸⁹ Nettl, “Mozart,” 3-4.

In addressing the dominance of a small number of composers that comprise the Western canon, Nettl continues by saying that there are

a dozen or so figures who are the deities of the culture. As geniuses, they exist on a different plane from other musicians. In the symphonic and chamber repertoire, their works occupy some 65% of performance time...An elite within a segment of musical culture already elite, they stand out because they wrote only great music, and when they did not, it must be explained. Beethoven's works are accorded universal status as masterworks, and when a *Wellington's Victory* appears special excuses have to be made: He didn't mean it, was playing games, composed the work only for money. Although there are borderline composers, for those individuals not in this group, one or two major works are regarded as masterworks while the rest are essentially ignored.⁹⁰

The "explaining away" Nettl addresses recalls Knittel's point that any works that do not fit in with preconceived notions of a composer and his works are tossed aside and not treated seriously. I argue that this dismissal is easier when we view composers as a Buberian "It," a figure with which we interact in a surface-level way, failing to engage with the totality of their life experience.

What would a more equitable version of the canon look like, and how would that implement itself in modern practice? The first step, I believe, would be to realize that the canon, and Western music itself, upholds the inherently racist roots of its founding. While this may be an uncomfortably bitter pill to swallow, it is an unfortunate truth. One need only remember Wagner's virulent anti-Semitism, Mahler's writings on the black people he encountered when he lived in New York, or the dismissal of Dvořák's call for American composers to integrate Negro melodies into music to create a truly "American" sound by the Boston musical elite in the 19th century to be reminded of the subtle ways in which racism has pervaded Western music throughout history. But, as is the case in formulating solutions to fundamental problems in any field, acknowledging the truth is only the first step to rectifying them. Scholars have begun

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.

considering how the canon might be transformed in light of mounting critiques of its reductive and discriminatory nature. The composer and activist Anthony R. Green, for instance, has offered several strategies for diversifying the canon in a piece recently published on *NewMusicBox*.⁹¹ Though he specifically focuses on ways in which the new music community can become more racially equitable, his ideas might be fruitfully applied to the classical canon as well:

- 1) **If you are an active soloist or are in or run an ensemble of any size, program music by black composers.** Program all of it, not just the “socially aware” music. Program as part of events that happen in months other than February or March. Arrange portrait concerts. Arrange a non-“social justice”- themed concert and program works by black composers which fit this theme, and don’t make a big deal about the identity of the composers. After performing these works once, perform them again, and again, and again for many years. Make them regular works on concerts. Give them to your students to study.
- 2) **If you do not know any music by a black composer, create a playlist and have weekly listening sessions.** Listen often. Listen to music that you do not like. Find music that you like and love. Engage with it critically, but respectfully. Mention black composers in conversations; when you are talking about how cool Gunther Schuller was, don’t forget Ed Bland or Julia Perry. When you are talking about how cool Chaya Czernowin is, don’t forget Tania León or Marcos Balter.
- 3) **Share what you know and what you have learned about black composers.** Outside of sharing this information with students and in conversations, write blog posts. Write articles. Make vlog posts and podcasts. Make memes and post them on your social media channels. Share stories and information and anecdotes on social media channels. Share YouTube and Vimeo videos of performances and interviews. Hold listening parties. Spread the word about helpful resources, ensembles, organizations, and other entities doing suck work in a powerful, significant way. Encourage people in your community to engage with this work, and be curious.
- 4) **Demand more from your musical sources.** Write to your radio stations, to your favorite YouTube channels, to your favorite ensembles; ask your teachers to include more music by black composers in the theory classroom, in the history classroom, in your private lessons. Those who have power will not know what the demand is until the demand is made. If there is really a demand, then make it known.

⁹¹ Anthony R. Green, “What the Optics of New Music say to Black Composers,” *New Music Box*. November 14, 2018. <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/what-the-optics-of-new-music-say-to-black-composers/>.

- 5) **Support black composers and the soloists, organizations, and ensembles that program their music.** Castle of our Skins⁹² (of which I am a co-founder) is one of a handful of organizations whose season programming regularly consists of at least 90% music by black composers...and it is, contrary to popular business-model or donor-related expectations in music, a successful organization. If you are in a position to commission or create an opportunity for a composer for a project, consider reaching out to a black composer, then work with that composer, support that composer financially, professionally, and emotionally. Do not give up on that composer, because perhaps that composer already feels abandoned by the new music and classical music communities.
- 6) **When a black composer is expressing a grievance, listen with all you have.** While conversations about black underrepresentation in classical music are generally positive and well-meant, such conversations are almost pointless if they do not include the voices of black people. Trust these voices. Be critical, but respectful. Engage in exchange. Be patient. We want to talk...[B]ut when our work is blatantly ignored, disrespected, not studied, and not programmed, our voice is all we have.⁹³

Green does not advocate for the removal of white men from the discourse, but rather asks that black composers and performers of the past and present be shown an equal amount of representation on the concert stage. His practical strategies offer a helpful path forward in both the concert hall and the classroom. Adapting these strategies to the classical canon would have a major impact on the ways in which we engage with black composers from the past, such as Saint-Georges. As Green notes, Saint-Georges would be an ideal composer to celebrate:

Why not, for example, include Chevalier de Saint-Georges in a general music history class? After all, his career begins before Mozart's...his orchestra did commission and present the world premieres of the six *Paris Symphonies* by Haydn (all of which Saint-Georges conducted), and his own music was highly praised during and after his life. Yet his and other black composers' non-existence in academic institutions tells black composers that we are not wanted, no matter how much success we gain.⁹⁴

In order to avoid tokenizing black composers in the canon, the focus should instead be on normalizing their presence. Black composers should be taught and performed not as anomalies,

⁹² The mission statement for Castle of our Skins reads: "Born out of the desire to foster cultural curiosity, Castle of our Skins is a concert and education series dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. From classrooms to concert halls, Castle of our Skins invites exploration into Black heritage and culture, spotlight both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present."

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

but as musicians who were (and are) just as talented as their white counterparts. Their lives should be contextualized so as to illustrate how and why their race has kept them out of the canon, and what that says about how history is written. Encouraging signs of progress are being made. The inaugural International Florence Price Festival is scheduled to be held in August, 2020 in Washington D.C. Price was a prolific African-American composer and is not only the first woman composer of color to write symphonic music, but also the first to have a work performed by a symphony orchestra.⁹⁵ Sadly, after her death in 1953, her music fell out of fashion and was lost to history. But the 2009 discovery of a large number of her works in an abandoned home in Illinois has led to a renewed scholarly interest in her life and works. While this is just one example of normalizing black composers, much work remains to be done. The mounting of an international festival—which includes performances of Price’s work in order to “ensure her works are considered, consistently, among other masterworks”⁹⁶—points to a future full of promising change.

⁹⁵ International Florence Price Festival, “About Florence,” <https://www.pricefest.org/florence-price>.

⁹⁶ International Florence Price Festival, “About Us,” <https://www.pricefest.org/florence-price>.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to address Western classical music's complicated relationship with race on both the macro and micro level. In using Martin Buber's framework of I-It and I-You relationships, I posit that the ways we interact with composers is situated in an I-It relationship. This "It-ification" is reductionist, in that we come to appreciate the lives of composers by focusing on a few selective outward traits that allow us to compartmentalize them, without having to critically reflect on the fact that they each led unique and complicated lives. Representing Saint-Georges as "The Black Mozart" throughout history also represents an It-ification of Saint-Georges, allowing him to exist in history as the black version of one of Western music's most celebrated composers. No matter how successful his own career, he must first be understood through the lens of a white contemporary and not through his own merit. Though it may be helpful at first to reduce composers' lives to just a few memorable bullet points, viewing a composer as an It allows for us to "use" their lives and music to propel narratives that do not always necessarily reflect the truth. This is certainly the case of "Black Beethoven," as I presented in the second chapter. The proponents of the claim that Beethoven was black used Beethoven to serve a political agenda: to prove that, throughout history, the contributions made by people of African descent have been whitewashed in order to uphold the white, colonialist narrative of history. Beethoven is the ideal Western composer for this type of agenda; the It-orientation of the scholarship on his life promulgates the notion that he was a revolutionary figure in music, one whose universal appeal and iconic stature represent the absolute pinnacle of musical achievement. That he was also able to overcome his deafness and continue composing represents the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, a trope that has

maintained Beethoven's appeal to performers and audiences for the 193 years since his death in 1827. This thread continues into Chapter 3. Knittel presents the case that much of the mythification of Beethoven has been built on false accounts of his personality but has been permissible because these anecdotes fit neatly within the inherited ideas of who Beethoven was and what he represents. This certainly represents just one case of the It-ification that allows for the continued exclusion of composers of color from the performing canon. Nettle similarly points out that his "ethnomusicologist from Mars" would almost immediately notice that the composers worshipped in American music buildings are primarily white men of mostly Austro-German descent. Even more importantly, he argues that composers like Mozart aren't even necessarily represented by their lives; they have simply been reduced to a group of pieces that constitute our understanding of who Mozart was. Lastly, I propose a more equitable version of the canon that includes composers like Saint-Georges by citing Anthony R. Green. His proposals amount, essentially, to the normalization of the music of black composers through a conscious effort to program and perform them more often, and not just during the month of February.

I would like to conclude this thesis with a discussion of Jeri Lynne Johnson, an accomplished African American conductor who in the course of her career, experienced an instance of racial discrimination that uncannily parallels a similar event in Saint-Georges's life. Johnson is a highly accomplished conductor and pianist based in Philadelphia, who has trained with such prominent conductors as Sir Simon Rattle, Daniel Barenboim and Marin Alsop. In 2005, she was named a fellow of the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship, the mission of which is to "mentor, support, and promote women conductors as they advance in their professional careers."⁹⁷ From 2000 to 2004, she served as the assistant conductor of the Chamber

⁹⁷ "About," Taki Concordia Fellowship. <https://takiconcordia.org/#about>.

Orchestra of Philadelphia to great critical acclaim.⁹⁸ Other conducting engagements include performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony, and the Weimar Staatskapelle.⁹⁹ In 2008, she founded the Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra, based in Philadelphia. The group's mission is "to take the audience beyond spectatorship to participation in the musical experience by combining artistic excellence with cultural diversity and innovative community engagement."¹⁰⁰ The BPCO was founded out of necessity; it was never Johnson's intention to create such a group. As a black woman, Johnson had trouble finding a permanent conducting position with more prominent American orchestras:

When I came back to America, I was trying to get jobs with bigger orchestras, but they were not interested. One orchestra told me they like my conducting and thought I had great ideas, but they didn't know to market me... When I asked him for clarity, the guy on the search committee basically said "You just don't look like what our audience expect a conductor to look like." That's when I founded my own orchestra.¹⁰¹

In an interview I conducted with Johnson in the course of my research, she stressed that diversity was one of the guiding principles of BPCO, both in terms of the musicians she hires to play and in the repertoire the orchestra plays. "[It was] incumbent on me to have diversity in the group, dispelling the myth that brown and black musicians aren't good enough."¹⁰² Furthermore, she says that "many people hadn't seen a black woman conduct an orchestra, and [as BPCO's chief conductor] I'm exploding the myth of what a conductor can look like."¹⁰³ On the lack of diversity in the Western canon, Johnson said that it's not an issue of the music itself—instead she

⁹⁸ "Jeri Lynne Johnson," Taki Concordia Fellowship, <https://takiconcordia.org/fellows/jeri-lynne-johnson/>.

⁹⁹ "About Jeri," Jeri Lynne Johnson. <https://www.jerilynnejohnson.com/about-jeri>.

¹⁰⁰ "About," Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra. <https://www.blackpearlco.org/about>.

¹⁰¹ "How She Made it: Jeri Lynne Johnson, Founder of Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra," Makula Dunbar, May 2012. <https://madamenoire.com/171361/how-she-made-it-founder-of-black-pearl-chamber-orchestra-knows-what-business-sounds-like/>.

¹⁰² Johnson, Jeri Lynne. (Founder and Music Director of Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra), phone interview with author. October 24, 2019.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

blames what she calls the classical music industry's "thought leaders," those who make programming choices for the country's most elite performing arts organizations:

The canon is the canon... [there are] standards of excellence and beauty that should be adhered to, standards of excellence and beauty of aesthetic. More people should be deciding on the canon. What orchestras play what composers? What orchestras play women composers, composers of color? If [the] Boston [Symphony] did it, then it must be good. [These] standard-bearers set the standards. Thought leaders should have a more flexible mindset about who is included in the canon. [These are] not musical issues, it's people issues. People making the decisions about who is making the music.¹⁰⁴

When I asked about the exclusion of black composers, Johnson's answer was blunt: "Skin color is the main factor. Pure and simple racism. The classical music industry in general is beginning to wake up to the perception among other artists: [the classical canon upholds the] white, European cultural hegemony. Artistically, people need to not feel like the canon is some kind of religious culture, [the] canon should be a living expression of diverse voices."¹⁰⁵ Since its founding, BPCO has become a vital cultural institution in Philadelphia, performing regularly sold-out concerts, proving that skin color is no barrier in producing artistic excellence.

In 1776, operatic life in Paris was threatened by a dire financial predicament: "[T]he demands of a public clamoring for spectacular productions, whose cost could never be met by ticket sales, was the eternal nemesis of the successive managers of the [Paris] Opéra. The fact that Gluck's operas were invariably sold out indicated that it could be otherwise."¹⁰⁶ In response, "Louis XIV...had turned the Royal Opéra into a concession to be auctioned off to the highest bidder."¹⁰⁷ Saint-Georges had by this time transformed the *Concert Spirituel* into one of Paris's best orchestras. And as a devout "Gluckiste"... seemed the only one who could retain those

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Gabriel Banat, *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Virtuoso of the Sword and the Bow*. (Hilldale: Pendragon Press, 2006), 177.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 177.

standards [set by Gluck] and make the Opéra solvent.”¹⁰⁸ Had Saint-Georges attained this position, he would have become one of the most influential musicians on the Parisian scene. But in an overt act of racism, the three leading ladies of the Opéra, Sophie Arnould, La Guimard, and Rosalie Levasseur presented a petition to Marie Antoinette wherein they stated that they would never take orders from a “mulatto” like Saint-Georges.¹⁰⁹ Though Gabriel Banat proposes that there were many other factors behind the scenes that set orchestrated this rebuke of Saint-Georges¹¹⁰, it is sufficient to say that this incident was indeed a huge setback to his musical career. And, as Banat writes, it represented “as far we know, the most serious setback yet he had suffered because of his color.”¹¹¹ It is not known how Saint-Georges reacted to this rejection, as there are no extant letters or diaries. His career continued despite this “public humiliation [that] he could neither fight nor forget.”¹¹² In fact, the immediate period after this rejection saw Saint-Georges produce a flurry of works, including a *symphonie concertante* and five violin concertos, in addition to receiving lodgings and a pension from the duc d’Orleans.¹¹³

In both of these cases, Johnson and Saint-Georges suffered career setbacks due to the color of their skin. Though many would like to say America has become a “post-racial” society, Johnson’s case underscores the fact that African Americans still suffer from racial discrimination. But where might those “audience expectations” of what a conductor should look like come from? Who has been allowed to set that standard? Why is it permissible to reduce a musician of Saint-Georges’s stature to a name based on the color of his skin, instead of simply calling him by his name? Who benefits from the exclusion of black composers from the canon?

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 19 of Banat’s biography for a complete account.

¹¹¹ Banat, *Chevalier*, 181.

¹¹² Ibid., 191.

¹¹³ Alain Guédé, *Monsieur de Saint-George: Virtuoso Swordsman, Revolutionary, A Legendary Life Rediscovered*, translated by Gilda M. Roberts. (Picador: New York, 2003), 138.

Why are black composers performed only during Black History Month? The answers to these questions are complex and require complex solutions. It is my hope, in posing them here, that scholars and performers begin to work towards a more inclusive and diverse telling of history.

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