

All music is black music . Whether you're swaying at an outdoor rock festival or home recording a viral dance video to the latest pop hit the sound . You're listening to all have black origins . With the help of the Smithsonian National Museum of African-American History and Culture , this show will trace modern popular music backwards and forwards through time and across the globe . We'll meet musicians , authors , scholars and fans , and together we'll discover priceless sonic treasures . I'm your host , Salema Mastella . Welcome to all . Music is black music . On this episode of All Music is black music . We are taking you to church , one of the major threads that runs all the way from the blues singers of the 1920s to the singing competition contestants of our own era is the near constant presence of the gospel . Singing stopped from Little Richard to the Staple Singers and Whitney Houston . Pop music has always made plenty of room for the ways of the Lord , or at least his disciples . And so we'll celebrate the life and legacy of the great Mahalia Jackson , whose righteous voice helped usher in the golden age of gospel . Contributor James Sullivan will trace her vast influence , unpopular singing . And I will speak with genre bending multi instrumentalist Valerie June . But first , let's start at the museum . Here to discuss Mahalia Jackson's historic 1949 appearance on Studs Terkel is Chicago interview program is the National Museum of African-American History and Culture is curator of music and performing arts . Dr. Wineland rits . Today's object is a 16 millimeter acetate film . This film was donated to the museum by Paul and Claire Blumen Field of Arlington , Massachusetts . In 2013 , Mr Blumenfeld and his wife had recently purchased a home in Arlington , Massachusetts , which belonged to Evan McLeod Wylie . The person who did research for Mahalia Jackson's book Moving On Up , which was published in 1968 and going through some of the materials that were left behind . They found this tape in a cardboard box . On the white cardboard box is a label from ABC Productions addressed to Mahalia Jackson at her home in Chicago . Handwritten on the box is the name Studs Terkel . They also found a photograph of Mahalia Jackson with Reverend Martin Luther King and an autographed copy of her book Moving On Up . The Blumenfeld obviously knew when they were going through things that they had come across something that was pretty important . And indeed , it happened to be so because this was an episode of Studs Place that even the archive had no record of . This clip you'll find in the musical Crossroads exhibition on the fourth floor of the museum . In our sacred music section , we look at the variety of sacred music forms from oratorios to spirituals , but also gospel , given its influence in the 20th and 21st century is a central part of that story . And we're proud to show one of its greatest artists as part of the musical Crossroads exhibit . Mahalia Jackson was born in New Orleans , Louisiana , and grew up singing in the church as early as age four , even though she was a devoted Christian and sung gospel music in the church . She was also influenced by some of the secular sounds of some of the blues artists like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey and their performance styles , which included a lot freer movement and more rhythm , were incorporated into Mahalia Jackson's performances , which was another way to move church music out of its more conservative congregations and framework's . Mahalia and her family moved to Chicago as a teen . She originally wanted to study nursing , but after joining the Greater Salem Baptist Church and becoming a member of the Johnson Gospel Singers , she really started to pursue singing as a career . She eventually started working with Thomas Dorsey , another great Chicago in and pioneer in gospel music . And they toured across the U.S. , cultivating an audience for Jackson , showing her talents as a gospel singer and opening up audiences for gospel music beyond the African-American community . She made some recordings in 1930s , but she had her first taste of success with her song Move On Up a little higher in 1947 . That's the time when Studs Terkel became acquainted with her playing her record on one of his radio shows in Chicago . Studs Terkel and Mahalia Jackson would soon become friends relationship that lasted for 20 years . If you don't know much about Studs Terkel , he was a journalist and television personality and a historian from Chicago . In 1949 , he had his own television show called Studs Place , which was a group of performers who had a general outline about a story idea and improvise the entire episode . This particular episode was a Christmas episode . The story takes place in the Chicago Diner . A young woman walks in . She's very distressed . Her beau is off to war . And she's sad that she hasn't heard from him over the Christmas holidays . Mahalia Jackson happens to stop by . She has been performing and her feet hurt and she just wants to order something to eat . But during the discussion and throughout the episode , she ends up singing two songs to help cheer the young woman up . First , she sings His Eye is on the Sparrow , and then she sings . Her famous rendition of Go Tell It on the Mountain was not only a wonderful discovery for the history of Studs Place , but also another opportunity to see Mahalia Jackson performing right as her career started to take off . So we are all the beneficiaries of having this episode featuring one of America's greatest artists of global significance in gospel music and American music at the height of her career , when her popularity is burgeoning across the country and across the world . Thank you , Dr. Reese . If you've seen Quest lubs documentary , Summer of Soul , and if you still haven't , what are you waiting for ? You've seen the great scene in which a young Mavis Staples sings alongside her hero , Mahalia Jackson . Nobody can sing like sister Mahalia Jackson . Mavis said she was on hand in 1997 when Mahalia was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in the early influence category . When she sang , Mavis said , You would just feel light as a feather . I couldn't get enough of it . Here with more on Mahale , his influence on gospel music is journalist and author James Sullivan . And Mahalia Jackson performed a historic set at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1958 . One of the many crowd pleaser she sang was Didn't it rain ? While the traditional spiritual about Noah and the flood was prophetic . The answer to the song's question on that night was an emphatic no . It had threatened to rain earlier in the evening , but the dark clouds held off for the great singers performance after midnight in the wee hours of Sunday morning . Only once she finished the last of her encores did the skies open up the audience , as the New York Times reported , quote , seemed quite prepared to be soaked to the skin if she would only go on singing until dawn . By 1958 , Mahalia Jackson was a national treasure , a regal ambassador for the gospel tradition , a woman whose powerful voice had almost single handedly kicked off the so-called golden age of gospel with her huge 1948 hit . Move on up a little higher . That's still acknowledged as the Best-Selling gospel song of all time . She had a weekly radio series on CBS , and she made frequent appearances on the area's biggest star making variety program , The Ed Sullivan Show . When she signed with Columbia Records , the label titled her first release with them , The World's Greatest Gospel Singer . But by 1958 , Mahalia also had to answer to some critics who felt she was moving too far afield from her deep roots in the music of the church . In 1960 , she cut a successful album with Percy Faith , the arranger whose lush string orchestration pulled so much of the popular music of the era toward easy listening . Her fame continued to rise into the 1960s . She sang at John F. Kennedy's inauguration and she performed . I've been booked and I've been scorned to the vast crowd on the National Mall in Washington , D.C . In the summer of 1963 , just moments before her friend , Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his I Have a Dream speech . For years , in fact , Mahalia had been encouraging audiences , white and black , to sit side by side . They were all Christian , brothers and sisters should say . Mahalia Jackson was born in New Orleans in late 1911 . Her grandparents had been born into slavery . She was raised a strict Baptist singing the old Protestant hymns . But there was a Pentecostal church next to the home in which she spent her early years . And the more exuberant music she heard streaming out of those doors would greatly influence her own style . In New Orleans , she also heard the music of the great blues women . And she loved the free flowing music of the city's second line funeral processions . Let's hear more on this from Mark Burford , the Arpi Wallenberg professor of music at Reed College . He's the author of the book Mahalia Jackson and the Black Gospel Field and editor of the anthology

The Mahalia Jackson Reader . Hayley Jackson is interesting in terms of her influences because she had really big ears . So she talks about she loved listening to Bessie Smith . She would listen to Bessie Smith records . She would listen to Marian Anderson records and classical singers . We might not expect to think about diction and things like that . She talks about hearing fruit vendor is on the street in the way they call on the street . She was also really interested in popular music , even though her very strict and didn't really allow popular music in the house that she and her friends , when they were hanging out on the the train tracks and and hanging out in New Orleans would sing those songs . So I think even though she was very strict later on , you know , flexibly strict because she did sing at jazz festivals and things like that , but was determined to only sing gospel songs . I just think it's really fascinating to think about this soundscape that she had in New Orleans , which she's bringing in all these different really attentiveness to sound that you really hear in her music . It sounds like New Orleans . It sounds like modern gospel . It sounds like the blues . It's all in there when you listen to her sing some years after her mother's unexpected death . Mahalia moved to Chicago to live with an aunt lonely and homesick in the new city . Mahalia Spirit's improved when she attended Greater Salem Baptist Church for the first time , encouraged by the pastor . She sang Hand me down my silver trumpet Gabriel with more embellishment than the congregation was used to . She was quickly invited to join the choir and a vocal group that featured the preacher's sons . For a time , she was accused of bringing forbidden jazz into the House of God . Church leaders scolded her for moving while singing . She had Snakehips , they said , and one vocal instructor insisted that she needed to tone down and enunciate the lyrics better , quote so that white people can understand them . Then Mahalia met the pianist and composer Thomas A. Dorsey . He played blues and jazz , serving as a bandleader for Morini before a spiritual awakening led to a career shift toward gospel , sometimes called the father of gospel music . Dorsey wrote more than 1000 religious songs , including such timeless standards as Peace in the Valley and Take My Hand , Precious Lord . Mahalia cut her first singles in 1931 . And she was soon earning a living , however modest as a performer . Steady , rising success eventually led to the attention of the Chicago area . Journalist and radio host Studs Terkel , who began playing Mahalia his music on his show , introducing her to a mostly white audience by the mid 1940s . She was traveling across the country to perform in 1950 after the success of Moven up a little higher . Mahalia headlined a gospel revue at Carnegie Hall , a first for the music and that renowned venue . The show was so well-received , it became an annual event . Here again is Professor Burford , Mahalia Jackson , Clara Ward , Sister Rosetta Tharpe , gospel quartets like the Soul Stirrers , Pilgrim Travelers , the Golden Gate Quartet . The performance aspect and thus recording comes to the fore really in the late 40s , because up to that time , I think that gospel performers really expected their live performances to speak for itself . And that's how they build their fame . Mahalia Jackson is move on up a little higher , which she recorded in late 1947 and really broke nationally in 1948 , was a moment where recordings become really important and gospel . And that really , I think , was a turning point . Though she struggled with health problems during the 1960s , Mahalia remained a familiar figure . She sang Dr. King's favorite song , Take My Hand , Precious Lord , at his funeral in 1968 on a state sponsored trip to India . In 1971 , she met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi , who declared , I will never hear a greater voice . I will never know a greater person after falling ill in Germany . Mahalia died in early 1972 . She was 60 at her funeral . Aretha Franklin returned the favor Mahalia had offered Dr. King , singing her out with Aretha's version of Take My Hand , Precious Lord . Aretha Little Richard . Sam Cooke and Ray Charles were just a few of the many rock and soul singers who readily acknowledged their debt in more recent years . Modern gospel figures such as Kirk . Franklin and the late Andre Crouch have carved their own niche in the music industry , while others , including Kanye West and Chance the Rapper , have merged gospel music with hip hop beats the way Mahalia Bent the notes sang behind or ahead of the beat , groaned and hummed and cried out and used her vibrato was just singing the way I feel , she said . However , the Lord led to come out once again . Let's hear from Professor Burford . There's a great moment in this documentary , Summer of Soul , where Mahalia Jackson kind of sings on stage with Mavis Staples of the Staple Singers . And there is this almost kind of handing off the torch . So I think the interesting thing to me about Mahalia Jackson is that on the one hand , she marks this kind of watershed moment where gospel becomes mainstreamed in a certain kind of way . But I think she identifies very much with this old guard of Dorsey in the early gospel pioneers . And I think the next generation , she kind of saw herself as as separate from , you know , in a lot of ways , but they carried forward her influence into the soul era and beyond . And yet always kind of identified as a black woman from the south , I think was in some ways indifferent to respectability politics and had this kind of incredible pride of being who she was and kind of embracing this cultural history in plain sight . Martin Luther King , after the march on Washington , wrote her a telegram and one of the thanking her for her contributions to the March on Washington . And one of the things he said , which really sticks with me is thank you for teaching black people to be proud of their history and not be apologetic about their cultural heritage . So I think when the singers kind of claim Mahalia Jackson as as a forebear and who claim black gospel as an influence , I think it's as much kind of what black gospel represents for black people as a very distinct history as as a geographic history moving from the south to the north . So , yes , I think the evidence of the influence of gospel vocal technique shows up in people like Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston and many , many others . But I think there is a there's a sense of holding on the gospel that's symbolically significant , as well as a way of kind of preserving a connection to a black cultural past that continues to provide sustenance . Valerie June grew up in Jackson , Tennessee , helping her dad , who was a music promoter . He staged local concerts with Owmy performers and gospel singers . Valerie moved to Memphis as a young woman to launch her own solo career , which has been noted for her unique blend of folk , blues , gospel and American . She released her latest album , The Moon and Stars Prescriptions for Dreamers to critical acclaim in March of 2021 . I spoke with Valerie about the influence of the golden age of gospel on her own style and the music of her contemporaries . How's it going ? This is my my home , Zoom's spot , the other place of the garden and the studio across the street . We really appreciate you taking the time when you're in your garden . What do you what are you growing ? Oh , I have so many yummy , OK , like poem . Wordly tomato's poem worthy tomatoes . Yes , that's a giant ESSA's jandro . If you put those tomatoes in the market and call them that , you could mark up and make a killing people . With that , I want to know what that . I want to know what that feels like . Oh , OK . Well , if the food or get the right guy , you're just like , oh , it was great . Is there any relation for you in growing vegetables , in food and music ? Yeah , a lot of songs come out , my hands are in the soil and while I'm working , but also when you think about the history of roots music in particular , many of our people were working in the fields . So I think a lot about the ancestors and many of the songs were generated with that motion of the body and the working of the soul and the beating of the sun . And I just think about that a lot when I'm creating , because a lot of songs come during that time . So it's a it's a deep experience to me to garden and to do music , and they just flow together to me and a lot of waste . That's so cool . I mean , I can I can picture you get in like that , the ancestral upload while you while your hands are in the soil . And it goes even deeper than that because you get a spiritual Aquilla when you're working with the Earth , you understand the connectedness of all living things . So I get the ancestral connection , but I also get the connection to people all the way on the other side of the globe , or the trees or the birds or the bees or anything sometimes of spiders . So big , a big pregnant spider with a large white sack on her back . And I was like , I messing with you , you know ? And they know more than we do . But a lot of the trees have been here longer than we have . So I'll let them kind of be my guide , you know , when I'm out there . That is beautiful . But the first word that comes to mind when I hear that is is connection , like

being able to stop , pause and be deeply connected in in the fact that everything is is related . We are all related on as we spin around here through space . It's true and it's such a remarkable thing to be here on Earth because we don't know of life other places , but I do ponder that too . When I go out at night and I look up at the stars and I even named this latest record , The Moon and Stars , because I wonder . Yes , we are here and we're so lucky . This third rock from the sun . But what else is out there ? What other magical things exist ? Then I just blow my mind to explore the multiverse then . And then I come back here and I'm like , but I'm OK with just being here . This is enough . We got our hands full . Yeah , but it's nice to tap into that as my my meditation teacher talks with the the endless and infinite amount of creativity that is happening , happening at all times in this universe and concurrent universes and like tapping up into that energy so that you can actually feel and sit in your presence when you're here . That's true . And I feel like artists like definitely artists that are doing gospel like Sister Rosetta or Mahalia Jackson tap into the deeper essence of what music can do , but also artists like Sun Ra , who went to that celestial space , or Alice Coltrane , who went to this celestial space . They are the guides for us to musically explore the multiverse , that they can try to do that with my music now . When I first started out , it was a little bit more like just learning the how to make music and how to write songs . But now I get lucky enough to get songs that have white and magic already in them . So I'm like , Oh . Thank you . And then you just you get to throw some astral seasoning in . Yeah , that's exactly . What was your earliest memory , that when you think back to to your gospel introduction music , was that you that you can be like , ooh , that was a point where I felt it . Well , there were instances of going to church on Sundays , and that happened every Sunday morning , every Sunday night and every Wednesday night . And so there was a lot of church . And the instances of being in the church with 500 members and all of us singing at once because we didn't have a choir and hearing all of these different voices and how they all would join and coalesced into something that was beautiful , even if a person sang beautiful opera soprano over here and somebody over here was just moaning and not really on the beat or whatever . And soon when they came together , it sounded amazing . So as a kid , I like to move around the church pews and sit by different people and listen to their voices and sing along . And we were commanded , according to the Church of Christ , to lift our voice to God . And if you didn't , then you were going to hail a song as loud as I could because I didn't want to go to hell . So those are my early memories of gospel music . But I got so many of them . Lift your voice is translation . You better saying you want a sign ? That's exactly true . I went to a church that we didn't have a choir either , but we all sang together . Everyone stood up and sang . And when you talk about those different style of notes , you know , and those people who sang the bad notes loud . But you write it , it melds in a way that you can't you can't orchestrate . It's true . And you want to hear their bad note out on that particular song , which you used to hear . And it is like , wait a minute , it's brother so-and-so going to come out with his father ? When I listen to you sing , first of all , I mean , the flexibility , but the casual flexibility of your voice , like you sing wherever the song is , as opposed to what am I going to do in here ? And it's the there's a simplicity in the places that your voice can go that when you describe that influence , I'm like , oh , OK , that's that's that's where that that casual feeling , I guess , comes from . Yes , that is where it comes from . And I like to think of those 500 teachers as my they were my teachers . They weren't just people that I went to church with and brothers and sisters . They were my singing vocal coaches . And when I was very young , we went to an all black church . There might have been like three or four white folks and five hundred black folks . And then when I turned 12 , we went we moved across town and my parents were like , we're not driving all the way across town because just because we black when there's a church goes right down the street . So we went to Ballwin and it was five hundred white folks with a seven black voters , OK . And so the singing was different at the white church in the black church . But we sang from the same song lyrics in the same songs . It's just the white church . When I remember walking in there and the first time I heard them saying it was like . Versus at the black church is more like , hey , you know , so from the head versus from the lower diaphragm . And I thought that was really cool to learn how to sing for 12 years from my lower register and then go and be around people who are singing from the head and the nazel side of their voice . They're learning how to sing from that place . And then stir it all together and then on top of that . Church influence you also . Your dad worked in music . He was a promoter , right ? Yes . And he loved gospel music . People like Rand Allen or , you know , of course , he loved all the old the gospel of Mahalia Jackson and and different singers like that . But he would try to bring some gospel acts to our town . And then he brought people like Prince to Martin , Tennessee , and Bobby Womack to Jackson , Tennessee , and different people . But he constantly had music playing and was constantly listening to music . And because of the way Church of Christ was structured , not being able to have choirs , there would be in the black churches in particular , saying things that happened every few months . And so they'd be like , there's going to be a singing at Highway 45 Church Christ up in South Fulton . So everyone would drive there and you would hear different groups doing their singing . And that would be like more like a choir situation because we weren't in service . So if you were to do a choir in service , then that was against the rule . But if you were to do it outside of service , you and some of those groups that came to the sanctions , oh , they would make their own tapes like , you know what ? I'm talking about the cassette tape . Yeah . Salamat , the thing is that we have some tapes where I learned every single voice and my brothers and sisters learn their voices and we'd be like the Jackson five . You can , you know , bit this and then we sing the parts . Wow . And I imagine that there was like a . That healthy , that healthy competition within the spirit , when people came to sing like we're coming to to show what it is we've got . Oh , yeah . And that kind of flowed over into the food because some of the sanctions would be potluck and some show up with their bath doost . And then the groups joked with their vast throngs and it was just like a competition of sorts of a good , wholesome Southern fine . It's what I call it . That would be our Sunday going to sing it . The way you describe your relationship to music growing up is , you know , it's like as as important as food . Oh , yeah , definitely . I had a lot of soul and my father and mom are to blame for all of it because they got us started in listening , singing early , but no instrument . That was something that didn't come until I got out of my parents' house . And my grandfather gave me an instrument when I was 14 , but I didn't learn how to play it until I was around 19 or 20 . Outside of the house . And I moved to Memphis and I learned a couple of chords and 19 doing anything . I put it there until about twenty four when I got divorced , and that's when I sat down with it . And I was like , I have to learn how to play this song at twenty four . Yeah . I got married the first time when I was 19 . It's like its own story here . That's amazing . That is that's amazing . As you were learning the play , imagine that the amount of study that you had in the musicality or the instrumentation of voice and all those different inflection points you talked about , you were able to apply to learning how to physically play . I was , but I didn't go that route when I first started to play , because nobody tells you when you pick up an instrument or you go to a library and get a book or you look on YouTube how to play an instrument . They don't tell you . Just follow your voice . What they do is they say there's a theory , these are chords , these are notes and all of those things . But when I put all that aside , because it was so hard for me to learn how to play that way , and I just said , you know what I'm going to do ? I'm going to go back to my first instrument , which is my voice . And I started picking out just like I was singing . And that's how I learned to play . Ultimately , I even tried to get lessons . There was a guy that I adore and the artist was a great guitar player and Zico . And I try I honestly try it , but I have to be the worst student in the world . It wasn't until idea which you say it would just went back to the voice and started picking out all those 500 voices with the instrument , you know , that I started to really learn . That is so cool . My father was a trumpet player and he owned a flugelhorn player

, and it was similar for him . And he studied regimented . And musical study , but at the end of the day , it always came back to how he learned to sing . Traditionally , he grew up in South Africa and applying those those those rhythms and song styles to how he how he played his horn . That is so cool . I love African music . Me , too . I'm going to go play there . You would love it . You would absolutely love it . I mean , and as you travel around the continent , you know , whether it be South Africa , Ghana , Kenya . I've got I've gotten to go to to all those places . You hear . You hear the roots of . Of of American soul , gospel music , you hear the the the connection across the water line in all these different ways , you're where you're like , oh , that's where this comes from . Oh , yeah , definitely . And being a person who plays the banjo , I connect with that a lot . With what ? With Broad across the water and the root of it . And in studying the blues and studying people like R.L. Burnside or Junior Kimbrough , or just to make him feel the similarities between African music and the Delta blues and the hill country blues styles is just so common , least similar to me . But I couldn't separate the two . I was like , yeah , this is so Kutnick . It comes back to earlier when we were talking about oneness and connectivity in music . I think it was Quincy Jones who said it best . Like said , there's only 12 notes . And if you try to tell me that these 12 notes happening over here and these 12 notes over here and these over here on all in the same body , I don't know what you're talking about . Exactly . It's all the same soup . Were there any specific songs or artists from that gospel end of of of your life that that stuck with you or that were your major influences ? Oh , yeah . Like I go back to the songs a lot and that were actually pretty bad because I stole some songbooks . So I was doing some of the songs . But one of the favorites that I performed a lot of my shows I performed at this last week of This World is Not My Home . And I also like the song Home of the Soul . I love Precious Lord Jesus is coming soon . I mean , I got a list of favorites , at least a hundred favorites . OK , by bye by when the morning comes . I mean , there are so many is endless Simone hilltops of glory . I have days where it's just like I'm just going to sing some gospel sounds . And and with this world is not my home are always connected to that one because I have always lived in my mind in the multiverse and in the spirit realm more than we have in the physical realm . I'm definitely connected more with the ether and the astral . But I know I'm here and I'm physical , so I've always been here . But it felt like it wasn't my home , that my home somewhere laid up with some fairies , playing with the flowers and in the garden . I love it . But when you hear someone like Mahalia Jackson's voice , like you hear her , you know , drop in on the first notes of how I got over for me , my eyes are closed . I'm on . I'm I'm on . I'm transcending someplace else . Even if you're not , quote , unquote , a believer . You can't help but be lifted and transported to a spiritual plane if it affects the agnostic , even in the way where they're like , I don't know what that was , but I feel it . And I walk differently today as a result . Exactly . And one magical moment . Have you seen Summer Soul ? Yeah , I'm in it . Okay . Well , look , I watched like I had a I had a full beard out in summer . So but at the end , the portion about Hugh Masekela , that's my father . That's what I was wondering when I was looking at your name and your face . So I'm like , OK , it's like shoot me now . I'm totally freaking out because I love you . It's so cool . Oh , that's so sweet Valley . That is so amazing . And you know , the part where my hair comes out . This is awesome . With Mavis with a certain point . Oh , I'm in tears on the couch on Sunday after I cried five , six times in that movie before we even got to to dad's part . I mean , I just couldn't stop crying from joy . And that was one of those moments as well for me . It was joyful . And soon as I got to the end of the documentary , I immediately texted Mavis and I was like , OK , I'm on the couch , soaked in tears . Thank you for that moment with Mahalia Jackson . And she said , I've had a lot of great moments in my career , but that was one of the highest moments I've ever had with singing . And I'm like , I could not even imagine what that must feel like . You said uplifting . She was like equipped to the stratosphere from just being this young singer , looking up to this amazing just role model . And later that Mahalia was in the way she gently like laying down Mavis and passed on that microphone to her . It was just a beautiful transition between the two of them . But it just lets you know a lot about her heart , that she had a good heart , you know , because music can be a super competitive at each other's throats type of thing , like , oh , no , this young person coming up trying to take my spot . No . Yeah . Well , you could see that Mavis face when she gets the torch passed to her from her . She's like , oh , because she's in that performance . She's definitely like , I'm up here with you . And that that that spirit that you speak up with Mahalia where there was . Yes , I have all this power , but there's no ego in this comes from someplace else . We're going to do this together . I thought that was amazing , and then you got to get that back from me . Come on now . I know that your . For what it has done and what it does , as you say it beyond , for the agnostic to for the atheist . You just feel you just feel . And when you feel , it opens your heart . And that's the power of music in general . And that , in turn , is what makes us better as a collective that of whatever it is that we can be in common place to collectively feel . Yes . And when we saw when I saw the sea of colorful faces all in a place of joy and celebration , I felt so grateful for just being in this body , for my heritage , for my ancestors , for all the years that brought me to this moment , to be able to share collectively , which are our victories , you know , because we have had a lot of them , and there's still a long way to go . But I think music has a big part of like igniting that joy and keeping the movements kind of energized . We're in the middle of like Black Lives Matter movement and all of these positive changes who wish to see systemically and music . The spirit of it can help infuse movements and keep them in a place of power . And you see that when you see something like Summer of Soul and this collective group of people just enjoying life , that's how we're going to make these changes . Is joy and love a man to all of that to think that that's that . You know , in a basement for 50 years and then it comes in . It got to come out . At this time , it was almost like a time capsule because it needed to be received now . Exactly . When you . When you when you when you spoke , you talked about , you know , Sundays , church twice , Wednesdays , new church , church , church in it , where it becomes just a way of life . What was it like when you decided to make that transition or what gave you the power to be like , I'm going to take this and I'm also going to move out and explore the rest of what what music is ? Well , I was always a I was probably the least favorite student in Bible class because I would ask questions about like things like , well , if everyone else is going to hell , who doesn't believe the way that we believe , then how how is that even possible ? What if they never hear the word of God according to the Church of Christ ? They're just going to burn in hell forever and ever . And I just couldn't understand that if you were born Buddhist or Hindu or whatever , you might have been born across the planet and never received a missionary who is teaching you about Church of Christ . Then you're just going to burn in hell . That was unbelievable to me . So I had a question or a question for my teachers and our preachers . And what I've started to do was take the essence that started to extract what is the good and what is the love and what is the message of Jesus . And I started to see that message in Jesus's voice , but also in Buddha's voice and in many of the poets like Rumi or Hafeez , you know , all kinds of different connections of multi religions , all leading to one space in their space , being a place of love and uplifting . And that's what I started to carve my life around . And as I started to carve my life around that my music or experiences expanded . And I began to sing a gospel song and flip the melody into a story about everyday life , you know , and and and then I'd weave the gospel song back into the song I was singing . So I made these connections with the spirit and what I was doing in folk and in root . And as I've grown , I've done it in rock and roll and in soul in different ways , just always connecting back to that place of what is essential to me for what religion's really trying to do , which is just love all the other rules dropping , you know , all the other complications just drop . Just like you say when she's singing , it doesn't matter if you're atheists or agnostic , you feel uplifted . And that is the power of what I try to do with music and what I've learned from watching people like her and Sister Rosetta , I would join that church .

So you just described the no , no , no rules . The rules . Everyone's on the same frequency . It's all love . International . Oh , yeah . Or intergalactic . Yeah . Now , now , now , now . Yeah . In your journey , you know , you you've continued to work with as many of the legends as you can in various sounds and root music and soul music . Sharon Jones , Booker T. Jones , what what is it about staying close to those those original stewards that is important to you ? Well , I feel so lucky that I have been able to work with people like Sharon Berger and like , say , Mavis and Carla Thomas . And I think that it is that the elders , they have like gifts and messages . And what we saw in the documentary was Mahalia giving that gift to Mavis . And every time I work with those who are older than me , who have been sharing music in their craft for years , they always give me a gear . They always open some part of me like a portal to being able to succeed in my dream . And I think that we carry those messages just through just hanging out in the room and hearing their stories , because Carla has so many stories about her father , Rufus Thomas , and just work in its stacks and working at how records is really made through and all of them . And just listening , you don't have to say anything . Just walk in the room with these elders and hear what they . Listen to the story so that you can carry the story to the next person in the next generation . And I loved the oral way we can we can share our history and especially our music history . And so I think that's why I've linked to the elders . But also , I'm an old soul , like most most of my friends have always been like 10 to 15 years older than me . And so I've always felt comfortable with friends who are older . And and I think there are musicians . My two are working with the younger . And then there are the ones who were working with their peers . I tend to want to work with my elders . And I think we all are bringing something to this modern time , but the people we choose to work with . But that's my main focus , our elders , that that that power of exchange is priceless . I know you like to work with your elders , but I imagine that young musicians also come to you and in in the same way , what what kind of advice do you offer to to those who are they find themselves in the next wave of what this roots of gospel sound is going to be ? Usually I only have the advice of tiny steps , just tiny steps . And being in each one of those do so living mindfully , because the journey of music , if you're looking at it professionally , it's a long road for many people , you know , like it has lots of twists and turns . And you need to be doing it because you have this passion and this love . And if you can see the love in each little tiny step along the path , then you're getting what you need from it and your audience is coming to you . They're coming years . You're not singing in vain . Every show you're connecting , even if it's just one or two people in the crowd , you are making that connection that you're meant to make with your music . When you made that transition from from music being something that you were doing for fun to being like , OK , I was going to figure out how to love this , but also sustain myself and be a professional . Do you remember some of those tiny step lessons ? Well , there were a lot I probably , you know , ecstatic about having a dream school , which is where we would study the art of manifesting injury , because dreams are huge . They're so much bigger than us that there are like things like , for example , just keeping a journal . And if you're juggling day jobs , then like writing down every single thing that you spend and like making sure that you cover that , but also carve the time for your music or your art . It doesn't have to be music . And by doing that , you say , well , if I work this many hours , I'm getting this much and these are my bills . So making a general budget for that , but also doing it in a way that says this takes up this much time in my life . So I actually have 10 minutes a day that I can see and learn and acore and writing all of that down and seeing and having like a general plan for each day of how you're going to get 10 to five minutes and for your dream . It's powerful . And important is the tiny step that after years it multiplies . And before you know it , you're waking up and you're on the banjo . Like , did it do get to that just because you spent 10 minutes a day for 10 years in between jobs ? You know , so it's like making little tiny plans to be where you wish to be in the ten years to come , you know , calling that forth and live in there . In your mind , even though you have obligations of today , where do you want to be and already be there in your mind's eye and call it four in tiny steps ? You know , I felt that in my whole soul . I think Masterclass will be calling and be like , hey , Valerie , can we talk to you about that dream school ? Oh , yeah , that's powerful . That's beautiful . And it's it's all the all the greatest sort of solutions for life are so simple . Executing them is requires much . But at the end of the day , they're very simple . And I love the way that you put that in the context . Thank you so , so , so much for this conversation . I'm so honored to meet you . And likewise to Brooklyn . Let's all get together and have dinner . Oh , that would be amazing . I had no expectations . And you smashed whatever they might have been . So thank you very , very , very much . You are you are a very important , wonderful vessel . Thank you . Thank you for listening to all music is black music . Our theme music was composed by a singer , songwriter and multi instrumentalist Mobley . You can find all music is black music exclusively on Pandora , Stitcher and the Sirius XM app . And be sure to hit Kaleck Follow or favorites . So you won't miss an episode .