

Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College Chicago
Columbia College Chicago Department of Music
Università del Salento

Present

KICK VOCALITY

**Cultural Memory, Identities, & Practices of
African-American Singing Styles**

Concert Hall
Columbia College Chicago
1014 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

September 24–25, 2013

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Center for
Black Music Research
at Columbia College Chicago



**UNIVERSITÀ
DEL SALENTO**

Black Vocality: Cultural Memory, Identities, and Practices of African-American Singing Styles

The Black Vocality symposium is part of the three-year project ROTVOSCIAME (The Role of Traditional Vocal Styles in Reshaping Cultural Identities Related to African Diasporas in America and Europe). Designed by Gianpaolo Chiriaco, the research is being supported by a Marie Curie-International Outgoing Fellowship, financed by the European Union. The project looks at the history and anthropology of African-American singing styles across genres, and it aims to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of the different developments and connotations of vocality within the African diaspora.

Considering the singing voice as a complex means of expression (not only a musical instrument nor just a vehicle for the language), as the ultimate locus where cultural connections still exist and operate, the project aims to track the presence of vocal traditions developed within the African diaspora in America and Europe. It also looks at how specific vocal styles have been (and are) functional in expressing and reshaping new cultural identities.



Tuesday, September 24

8:00–9:00 a.m. **REGISTRATION AND COFFEE**
Concert Hall Lobby

9:00–9:45 a.m. **INTRODUCTION**

Black Voices in North America and Europe: Project ROTVOSCIAME
(Presenter biographies are provided on p. 6.)

Monica Hairston O’Connell (Executive Director, Center for Black Music Research), *Reflections on Black Voices in a “Post-Racial” Era*.
Gianpaolo Chiriaco (University of Salento, CBMR Resident Fellow), *I Sing Forever: Perceptions and Performances of a Black Vocality*.

10:00 a.m.–noon **SESSION I**

Gospel Vocality, Identity, and Popular Music

Session I will explore the various connections between what can be considered as an African-American vocality, with roots in gospel, and the broader field of popular music. Questions related to gender, identity, religion, and performance practices of specific vocal styles (e.g., melisma, falsetto) will be addressed.
(Presentation abstracts and presenter biographies are provided on pp.6–9.)

Alisha Lola Jones (University of Chicago), session chair

Alisha Lola Jones, *Gendered Sound and Black Vocal Performances in Contemporary Gospel*.

Patrick Dailey (Boston University). Performative presentation. *The Anatomy of a Black Voice: Peculiarities, Challenges, Regional Differences*. (With Anthony Vinson, piano.)

Katherine Meizel (Bowling Green State University), *Making the Song Your Own: Discourses of Race, Authenticity, and Melisma in the Twenty-First Century Pop Voice*.

1:30–2:30 p.m. **OPEN HOUSE**

CBMR and CBMR Library and Archives
618 South Michigan Avenue, 6th Floor

3:00–5:00 p.m.**SESSION II****Talkative Ancestors: Improvisation and Cultural Memory**

Session II will address the different ways in which cultural memory (languages, traditions, sounds, religions, etc.) interacts with a spontaneous creativity in the extemporaneous act of vocal improvisation. Presenters will draw from their experiences as performers and teachers in order to describe this interrelation. (Presenter biographies and presentation abstracts are provided on pp. 9–11.)

Nathan Bakkum (Columbia College, Music Department), session chair
 Bobbi Wilsyn (Columbia College Chicago, Music Department), *The Soul of a Jazz Singer: Recollection and Response.*

Fabrizia Barresi (vocal performer and vocal teacher, Paris), *Multilingualism as a Source of Inspiration.*

Wednesday, September 25**9:00–10:00 a.m.****REGISTRATION AND COFFEE****Concert Hall Lobby****10:00 a.m.–noon****SESSION III****Words and Sound—Poetry and Storytelling**

Session III will focus on how words might be used in creative ways as a source of multiple meanings and as sounds, during a performance and beyond. Presenters will explain their main influences and how their techniques are rooted in an ancient heritage. Qualities related to the sound of voices will be discussed from the point of view of poets, singers, and storytellers, all within African-American traditions. (Presenter biographies and presentation abstracts are provided on pp. 11–13.)

Sage Morgan-Hubbard (Columbia College Chicago, Dance Department), session chair.

Sage Morgan-Hubbard and Stacy Rene Erenberg (Chicago State University), performative presentation, *Sounds of Words: Within and without the Language.*

Maggie Brown (Vocal performer, Chicago), *Creating a Personal Story: Songs and Narratives.*

Tim'm West (poet/performer/activist, Chicago), *Deceptions of Old Glory: Hip-Hop as a Critique of Memory, Nostalgia, and Nationality.*

2:00–4:00 p.m.**SESSION IV****Beyond Textuality: Black Music and Extended Vocal Techniques**

Session IV will investigate the concept of a black avant garde in relation to vocal styles and techniques, from the specific perspective of two accomplished female vocalists and composers. The discussion will be rooted in the way their work reflects a broad sense of identity, as well as a profound social consciousness. (Presenter biographies and presentation abstracts are provided on pp. 13–14.)

Gianpaolo Chiriaco (University of Salento and CBMR Resident Fellow), session chair.

Mankwe Ndosì (vocal performer and activist, Minneapolis), *Question the Frames? Activate the Everyday: Vocal Creativity and Its Resources.*

Pamela Z (performer and composer, San Francisco), *The Art of Performing: Voice, Body, Electronics.*

All are invited and encouraged to return to this location for full performances by Mankwe Ndosì and Pamela Z at 7:30 p.m. Doors will open at 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday, September 25

7:30 p.m.**PERFORMANCE**

Concert Hall
1014 South Michigan Avenue

Mankwe Ndosì, with Aimee K. Bryant**Pamela Z**

Performer biographies are provided on pp. 13–14.

INTRODUCTION (September 24, 9:00–9:45 a.m.)**Black Voices in North America and Europe: Project ROTVOSCIAME**

Monica Hairston O'Connell is executive director of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College Chicago. Before joining the CBMR, she worked with David Bury and Associates, a New York firm specializing in fundraising and development for arts organizations. She holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from New York University and her dissertation is titled “The Wrong Place for the Right People: Gender, Race, and Jazz at Cafe Society.” It utilizes black feminist theory and practice theory to examine the politics of performance within the frame of the Popular Front and New York jazz culture in the 1930s and 40s. Broadly speaking, Hairston O'Connell is interested in black expressive culture, the African-American musical vernacular, and the infrastructural issues and challenges that face artists and scholars of color. She was a 2011 Chicago Community Trust Fellow and, during fall 2012, a Visiting Fellow at the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University, where she worked on a project titled *Re/Sounding the Black Music Archive*.



Gianpaolo Chiriaco is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Center for Black Music Research. He has been awarded a Marie Curie Fellowship for project ROTVOSCIAME. Chiriaco, who has earned the MA degree in Music Journalism and Criticism, has primary interest in Black Music in America and Europe, specifically in the Mediterranean region, and vocal techniques. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of Salento, 2010) is titled “The Cultural Heritage of Moresca. African Presence and Stylizations in Italian Renaissance Music.” His most recent publications look at the relationships between popular music and practices of traditional vocal styles in the Mediterranean area, as well as within the African diaspora (www.afrovocality.com).

SESSION I (September 24, 10:00 a.m.–noon)**Gospel Vocality, Identity, and Popular Music**

Alisha Lola Jones is a 2013–2014 Mellon Dissertation fellow, CSRPC-CSGS Residential fellow, Martin Marty fellow, Stuart Tave Teaching fellow, and a University of Chicago GSA Innovation Grant recipient in the ethnomusicology Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago. Her dissertation

research focuses on black men's performance of gender and sexuality in gospel music. Her research interests include musical masculinities, music and theology, business and the music industry, music and mysticism, Western art music, international vocal pedagogies, and African-American musics. As a social entrepreneur, Jones founded InSight Initiative, Inc., which is a live concert production and talent booking agency that focuses on programming in low income, high minority communities. Visit www.InSightInitiative.net.

"Gendered Sound and Black Vocal Performances in Contemporary Gospel." Countertenors are typically men who perform music that matches the vocal range and timbre of female contraltos and mezzo-sopranos in the Western art music tradition. These men are typically trained to deploy a full-bodied vocal delivery such that listeners are unable to determine whether the sound is emanating from a male or female body. Black male operatic countertenors who perform in Christian churches and other gospel settings must contend with a distinct set of cultural tensions to demonstrate their performative competency. Music ministers also face challenges in choosing repertoire for countertenors, particularly when those ministers lack experience working with men with that vocal designation. Shared anxieties concerning uses of the body in performance reveal the ways in which black male gesture is a contested component within gospel contexts.

Drawing on a case study of a black male countertenor and ethnography of his performance, this paper explores perceptions of a sexually indistinguishable vocal sound. I highlight the socio-theological complications that arise as sonically ambiguous performances of gender compete with longstanding hetero-normative constructs. In what ways do countertenors negotiate their performances of sexuality and gender in gospel performance? How do bio-musical perceptions shape notions of communal identity and belonging? I suggest that bio-musicality offers a fresh way of approaching these questions and the broader role of gendered sound in black performance.



Patrick Dailey, a native of Nashville, Tennessee, is a national winner of the National Society of Arts and Letters' Shirley Rabb Wilson Award in Voice, a finalist in the 2010 National Classical Singer Magazine University Vocal Competition, and a first-place winner in the Harlem Opera Theater Vocal Competition. In 2009, he sang a featured duet with Aretha Franklin as the finale for the annual Let Freedom Ring Celebration at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In 2012, Mr. Dailey was named a Young Artist Scholar of the Marian Anderson Historical Society and was a member of Opera Saratoga's Young Artist program. In September 2012, he toured Latin America with the

Harlem Opera Theater. Orchestral and concert repertoire performed includes Bach's "Magnificat," Handel's *The Messiah*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, and Mozart's *Requiem*. Dailey was featured in a lecture performance of "Too Hot to Handel" with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, among many other concert appearance. Operatic roles include The Spirit and Sorceress in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Oberon in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Most recently, he was invited to Opera New Jersey's Victoria J. Mastrobuono Emerging Artists program as is its first countertenor and is a winner in the New Jersey Unit of the 2013 NANBPWC Vocal Arts Competition, formally the Leontyne Price Vocal Arts Competition. He also performs with Cook, Dixon, & Young, formally known as Three Mo' Tenors. Dailey received his BA in music degree with a minor in Dance Education from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, and now attends the Boston University School of Music, where he is a candidate for the MM degree in Vocal Performance and Opera.

"The Anatomy of a Black Voice: Peculiarities, Challenges, Regional Differences," is a performative presentation that will explore aspects of the "black voice and sound" as it relates to singing. Many would say that the "black voice" is instantly recognizable when compared to voices of other races, while others believe that the different quality comes solely from the experiences and convictions of the singer and not of his or race. This presentation will look at the make-up of standard human vocal anatomy and the practices of proper singing, while investigating how the "black sound" and musical traditions apply to classical music, opera, pop, and jazz. The presentation will include musical examples ranging from operatic repertoire to rural church music. It will also include commentary from noted performers and educators in the field of singing and will examine black singers and styles from beyond the African-American experience.



Katherine Meizel is Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at Bowling Green State University. She earned her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and also holds doctoral, master's and bachelor's degrees in vocal performance. Her publications include the book *Idolized: Music, Media, and Identity in "American Idol"* (Indiana University Press, 2011), an essay about vocality in *Voice and*

Speech Review (2011), a recurring blog feature for *Slate* magazine, book chapters for Ashgate Press and America University in Cairo Press, and articles in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Popular Music and Society, Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology*, and *eHumanista: Journal for Iberian Studies*.

“Making the Song Your Own: Discourses of Race, Authenticity, and Melisma in the 21st Century Pop Voice.” Vocality is an exquisitely fraught concept. It encompasses not only the act of vocalization but also the profoundly complex social world in which such an act resonates, comprising a set of vocal sounds, practices, techniques, and meanings that factor in the making of culture. In the history of American popular music—which is also the history of race in America—ideas about vocality have carried particular significance, and even the smallest vocal gesture can articulate the brutal dynamics of racialization, appropriation, and power that have shaped U.S. identity politics. One such gesture—melisma—has come to encapsulate these intricate workings as they are understood in the early twenty-first century. It is an aural symbol of racial and national authenticities, a polysemic sign of blackness and of Americanness at a moment when both are at the forefront of public political discourse. This presentation discusses the role of melisma in the difficult negotiation of American identities, highlighting the importance of how we use and how we hear voices.

SESSION II (September 24, 3:00–5:00 p.m.)

Talkative Ancestors: Improvisation and Cultural Memory



Nathan Bakkum is Assistant Professor of Music at Columbia College Chicago, where he teaches courses in music history and popular music studies and coordinates the department’s offerings in music history and music appreciation. His research interests include music historiography, the production and reception of musical recordings, and intersections between history and anthropology. He has presented papers at local and national conferences. As a bassist, Bakkum has studied with jazz legend Richard Davis and Chicago jazz stalwart Larry Gray. His most recent article, “Out but In: Between Discourse and Practice in a London Jazz Quartet” is included in the Spring 2013 issue of *Black Music Research Journal*.



Bobbi Wilsyn is Senior Lecturer at Columbia College Chicago, where she teaches voice-related subjects and private lessons. A native of Los Angeles, she relocated to Chicago after traveling nationally with the Milt Trenier Show. As a singer-actress, Wilsyn has appeared in several musical productions including *Beehive*, *Sophisticated Ladies*, *It Ain’t Nothin’ But The Blues*, and Sheldon Patinkin’s *I Didn’t Know What Time It Was*. Wilsyn has gained international recognition as the featured jazz-blues vocalist with the Chicago Jazz Ensemble, founded by the late William Russo, the Orbert

Davis Quintet, the Thomas Gunther Sextet, and Symphonic Jazz International, with conductor Richard Dunscomb. Wilsyn, Dunscomb, and guitarist Bill Boris were featured with the Big Band del Conservatorio at Pescara Jazz Festival 2013. Boris and Wilsyn also performed at the Bussi Jazz Fest and at Fortezza Civitella del Tronto. She is a frequent guest soloist with Orbert Davis's Chicago Jazz Philharmonic and Jeff Lindberg's Chicago Jazz Orchestra. Wilsyn facilitates Jazz Vocal workshops for The Straight Ahead Jazz Camp, sponsored by The Jazz Institute of Chicago. Her most recent residency was at Conservatorio Statale di Musica "Luisa D'Annunzio" in Pescara, Italy. Wilsyn's all-female jazz group, She, performs their original compositions and jazz standards at Chicago area colleges and jazz-clubs, and Wilsyn has performed with the multi-media Cerqua-Rivera Dance Theater. She has released her CD recording "It's About Time" and teamed with trumpeter Orbert Davis on his CD "Priority."

"The Soul of a Jazz Singer: Recollection and Response." The traditional music of the black church has been the basis for many contemporary singing styles. Steeped in the music of slaves and based purely on traditions passed down from generation to generation, most performers develop a repertory of sounds that include a storehouse of musical memories. These musical choices, often used as the basis for improvisation, have been developed through repetition, rather than through the application of theoretical practices. Recalling these memories and utilizing them in performances is the response to the spontaneous creativity that is often referred to as "soul."



Fabrizia Barresi is a jazz vocalist, improviser, and researcher. She has taught at Siena Jazz, the National Academy of Jazz in Italy, for fifteen years, and toured extensively as a performer and as a teacher in Europe and in the United States. Ms. Barresi is currently based in Paris, where she leads classes and workshops and performs with different projects in France and Belgium. Ms. Barresi is part of an international scientific team that is conducting research on biology and quantum physics, exploring relationships among vocal sounds, body, and space. She has released four recordings: "Pithecanthropus e altre storie" (quartet), "Estrela Da Tarde" (big band), "Choice" (quintet), and "Feedin' Inner Urges" (duo).

"Multi-Lingualism as a Source of Inspiration." Building upon the personal search for a vocal identity, the presentation aims to investigate scat vocabulary in a multi-lingual environment. As the sounds of each language have peculiar resonances, the focus will be on how these resonances can enrich the melodic and rhythmic construction of a vocal solo and enhance musical communication.

In this context, jazz has been conceived as a tool for improvisation. The specific approach has led to a wide range of collaborations, both with performers (singers as well as actors) and with scholars in scientific areas such as quantum physics and biology.

SESSION III—(September 25, 10:00 a.m.–noon)

Words and Sound—Poetry and Storytelling



Sage Xaxua Morgan-Hubbard is the Academic Partnership Coordinator in the Dance Department at Columbia College Chicago and is a multidisciplinary artist, poet, activist, and educator. She was the Cipher Organizer for Words, Beats & Life's inaugural Midwest Hip Hop Teach-In, "Remixing the Art of Social Change" at Columbia in 2011. She served as the Outreach Director of Young Chicago Authors and as a

teaching artist throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, instructing kindergarten through college-level students in jail and beyond. She earned her MA in Performance Studies at Northwestern University and is a graduate of Brown University, where she studied Performance Studies: Socially Conscious Art of the Everyday and Ethnic Studies. She was a member of Real Talk Live Chicago poetry collective, the founder of WORD! spoken word artists and activists in Providence, Rhode Island, a youth poetry slam coach in Washington, D.C., and one of the original members of Spoken Resistance and the performance group Sol y Soul. Morgan-Hubbard and Stacy Rene Erenberg are currently touring their autobiographical two-woman poetry and song performance piece about growing up as black and Jewish women entitled, "Mixed Mamas Remix Vol 1.5."



Stacy Rene Erenberg is a community organizer, activist, healer, and socially conscious songstress from the northside of Chicago. Since her Chicago debut in 2006, she has performed in various musical groups at legendary Chicago venues such as The Jazz Showcase, The Metro, and The Park West. Her style and delivery is as diverse as her cultural background. She is

influenced by jazz, soul, R&B, pop, hip-hop, and most importantly folk music, which fuels her passion for telling the people's history through her music. Erenberg was a 2011 recipient of the Illinois Arts Council Professional Development Grant and is preparing to become a music teacher in the fall of 2013 at Chicago State University. Erenberg is co-owner and healer at worker-owned sliding scale wellness center Sage Community Health Collective.

“Sounds of Words: Within and without Language.” This performative presentation explores the multiple meanings and sounds of words; the musicality of both spoken and sung words within African-American and African diasporic vernacular poetry and songs. Diving deep into the heart of investigations of vocality within diverse musical genres and aesthetics (such as jazz, blues, gospel, R&B, and hip hop), we will explore questions such as: How have words played and vibrated within various black communities over the past century? What is the power and usefulness of experiencing words as music and songs as poetry? Is it important to categorize our art forms as separate categories, or could it be productive to let them blend and flow into each other more organically? This presentation will focus on personal work, artists we each were inspired by and how our artistry, perception and identities connect and intersect with larger trends within African-American music.



Maggie Brown, a Chicago-based singer, performer, and educator, is the daughter of Oscar Brown, Jr. From her father—a world renowned composer, poet and social activist—Ms. Brown drew inspiration to create an original approach that aims to both entertain and educate. For more than 20 years, she has toured nationally with her one-woman show “Legacy: Our Wealth of Music,” which follows the history and evolution of African-American music and covers a wide range of musical forms. Brown has worked with Abbey Lincoln, Orbert Davis, and has been a long-time featured soloist with two Center for Black Music Research performance organizations—Ensemble Stop-Time and the New Black Music Repertory Ensemble. (Photo: Larry Lapidus.)

“Creating a Personal Story: Songs and Narratives.” The presentation will address how, drawing from the tradition and from words by other authors, it is possible to create a personal story that can communicate to a nowadays audience. Using “Legacy” as an example, the possibility to tell a story that is ancient and contemporary at the same time, using songs, sounds, poetry and words, will be explored. But the story told is also a narrative of personal research, intended to motivate people to search for their own roots.



Tim'm West, a poet, rapper, writer, and performer, was a co-founder of the now disbanded but critically acclaimed rap group DDC. In 2004 he began his career as a solo hip-hop artist, releasing "Songs from Red Dirt" on Cellular Records in the same year. Four other recordings followed, the most recent being "Snapshots," released in

April 2013. Black, gay-identified, feminist, POZ, and working class, West occupies a unique position among the provocative voices and critics of the contemporary hip-hop landscape. As a writer, his work has been published in several anthologies and journals. West has worked substantially within academia, teaching writing pedagogy and philosophy, as well as directing projects in youth advocacy and leadership development, HIV/AIDS activism, and community mobilization.

In "Deceptions of Old Glory: Rap as a Critique of Memory, Nostalgia, and Nationality," West ventures into a cross-pollination of hip-hop, blues, and gospel in order to sonically bridge the sometimes sharp generational schisms that dichotomize black vocality. As a scholar, Tim'm writes often about the choice to choose not to choose as a mark of personal freedom. A man navigating his truth between black and queer identities, a preacher's kid, a hip-hop artist, and non-profit professional, Tim'm chooses not to choose street over scholarship, the secular over the sacred, singing over rapping, but purposefully engages the both/and, rather than the either/or, as a way of honoring a continuity of black experience. What emerges between the Southern Baptist deacon call and the boom bap, is the sound of freedom.

SESSION IV (September 25, 2:00–4:00 p.m.)

Beyond Textuality: Black Music and Extended Vocal Techniques



Mankwe Ndotsi, a former student at Harvard University, has been working in the Twin Cities and in Chicago for more than fifteen years as a musicmaker, performer, educator, and culture weaver focused on sound, story, and expanding the vocabulary of singing. She seeks to re-infuse creative practice into the worlds of healing, sustainable economic development, education, and new-village community building. (Photo: S. Nixon.)

In "Question the Frame/Activate the Everyday: Vocal Creativity and its Resources," Ndotsi examines the resourcing of a creative life, and addresses weaving a life of performance and social transformation through improvisation, relationship, and intuition.



Pamela Z is a composer/performer and media artist who makes solo works combining a wide range of vocal techniques with electronic processing, samples, gesture activated MIDI controllers, and video. She has toured extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. Her work has been presented at venues and exhibitions, including Bang on a Can (New York), the Japan Interlink Festival, Other Minds (San Francisco), the Venice Biennale, and the Dakar Biennale. She has created installation works and has composed scores for dance, film, and new music chamber ensembles. Her numerous awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Creative Capital Fund, the CalArts Alpert Award, the MAP Fund, the ASCAP Award, an Ars Electronica honorable mention, the NEA/JUSFC Fellowship, and a Djerrassi Resident Artist Program residency. Visit www.pamelaz.com. (Photo: Donald Swearingen.)

“The Art of Performing: Voice, Body, Electronics” will explore how voice, body, and electronics might be interconnected with each other, and how they interact in the art/act of performing. Moreover, it will investigate how the use of technologies and extended vocal techniques allows the performer to draw from any source of inspiration, without limitation, related to language, identity, or nationality.

Appreciation

The producers of Black Vocality symposium are grateful to Gianfranco Salvatore (Università del Salento), who is the scientific coordinator of ROTVOSCIAME.

Many thanks also to Valentina Marangi and the staff at the Department of Cultural Heritage (Università del Salento).

And appreciation to the faculty and staff of the Columbia College Department of Music, particularly Steven Hadley, Joe Cerqua, Nathan Bakkum, Rosita Sands, Bobbi Wilsyn, and Carol Loverde.