

BORN Inaugural event

Black Experiences in Opera: Perspectives from South Africa, Europe, and the US 21 August 2020, Zoom

Participants:

Naomi André (moderator)

Louise Toppin

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Njabulo Madlala

July Zuma

Naomi André: It is a deep honour and pleasure to introduce the Black Opera Research Network (BORN) in a public way—welcome to our inaugural event, ‘Black Experiences in Opera: Perspectives from South Africa, Europe, and the US’.

I’m going to say a few opening words here about BORN—the network and website, handle a few housekeeping details for this Public Panel Conversation, and then get on to setting up the topic and hearing from our wonderful panellists.

The Black Opera Research Network as an idea was born about a year ago when my long-time research collaborators (who now have also become dear friends)—Professors Innocentia Jabulisile Mhlambi (we know her as Brenda) and Donato Somma (both are professors at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg—Brenda, Donato, and I met Dr. Hilde Roos (a professor at Stellenbosch University—which is outside of Cape Town); we met in late June 2019 in Stellenbosch. We had all read and admired each other’s work about operatic activities in South Africa and thought that we’d like to start some sort of research collaboration. We then realised that a network that could be a resource for scholars would be great as opera in South Africa has been getting more attention since the dismantling of apartheid in 1994.

Now, I realise that we have people here in the webinar, who might not be very familiar with things in South Africa. Hence, I will try to make quick explanations, when I can. Since I remember not knowing much at all about South Africa, before I got into this research 10 years ago. We have seen a flowering in the late 1990s with South African opera. In a country that had opera from the nineteenth century as an all-white activity, we were seeing operatic energy in South Africa being expressed in new ways for Black and ‘Mixed Race’ singers. Now, a quick little aside: ‘Mixed Race’ is the term I feel most comfortable using as an African American. In South Africa ‘Coloured’ is a term that had an official meaning in the apartheid government. Today it seems to be reclaimed by many and is still widely used in South Africa, so I’ll be using both ‘Mixed Race’ and ‘Coloured’.¹

¹ In 1950, the apartheid government introduced the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, which divided the South African population into three racial groups: White (or European), Native (Black), Indian and Coloured. Later, ‘Indian’ was specified as a separate race classification. Membership of the different race categories was determined by a mixture of biological and cultural factors, which were often arbitrarily applied. ‘Coloured’ referred to people of mixed race, descendants of imported slaves, indigenous populations of the Cape’s coastal and interior regions, and a range of other racial identities that did not fit neatly into the binary of ‘white’ or ‘black’. Apartheid-era race

Back to Stellenbosch: as we met in Prof. Hilde Roos's office at Stellenbosch a year ago, Dr. Lena Van der Hoven (a Professor at the University of Bayreuth in Germany) immediately came to our minds as somebody to include in our collaboration, given her own pioneering work on opera in South Africa. Additionally, nearly all of us had already worked with her in some capacity. The other early members of our Working Group were the people we knew who were earlier in their academic careers, yet were very active presenting at conferences and writing doctoral dissertations—Dr. Mia Pistorius (now a recent PhD from Oxford University and currently a post-doc at the University of Huddersfield in the UK), and Allison Smith (currently working on a dissertation at Boston University).

As we have been meeting this past year—over Skype and now zoom—our ideas developed and grew. From an early point, we knew we did not want to exclusively focus on opera in South Africa, even though that is a big part of what initially brought us together. Instead, we have further explored this construction of 'Black Opera' to be capacious, and to include opera that had connections to Blackness—through Black composers, librettists, performers, and production teams. We are interested in operas that are on Black topics and provide a more informed expression of Black experiences that counters negative stereotypes that extend back to minstrelsy (and beyond). To support what we have written on the BORN website, I give this basic introduction here not as an iron-clad definition of 'Black Opera', but to open up a space for discussion. While many of these operas may fit within traditional genre parameters, this is also a place where works might challenge much of the perceived 'whiteness' of opera as a genre.

I do not want to give too long an opening here, but I want to point out 3 more things:

- First, we started out as a group of scholars. We represent most of the leading scholars working on South African opera—most, not all—and issues around Blackness in opera (in Europe and the United States).
- Second, we are eager to include a broader group of people in the opera world—singers, composers, librettists, administrators, directors, production crews—and the wider universe of those committed to opera performance and scholarship.
- And third, we are painfully aware that we do not have enough people of color on our working team. Since we started as a group of scholars, we have to acknowledge the dearth of people of color who have access to getting into the 'opera pipeline' and who are nearly invisible in leading roles around opera (as singers, as administrators, as scholars, as board members, as trustees ...you get the picture). We are working to fix this—more generally in the world, and very locally within our group. Currently we have a few invitations out to BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) to be involved with the Network as working team members and as affiliates—people who we are inviting to not have to 'do' so much of the work behind the scenes (though if you want to do that, that's great!), but also people who can help us as consultants.

Please look around our website.² Let us know what you like and let us know what you'd like to see. We welcome your feedback.

classifications have had a contested afterlife; many citizens have disavowed these residues of a violent regime, while others have sought to reclaim and reinscribe them.

² <http://blackoperaresearch.net/>

A couple of housekeeping [arrangements] for this Webinar: we plan to have this conversation between me (as the moderator) and the panellists for about an hour, followed by about 20 mins for Questions. Some questions have already been submitted at Registration, and many thanks for those—those have helped us shape some of the general, bigger themes that we'll be talking about. You may also type a question or comment in the Q&A and we'll try to consider and share these with the panellists, if we have the time. There is a link to a live transcript in the Chat box, should you desire or need captions. We are happy to let you know that we are recording this panel. A recording of this panel with captions and a transcript will be uploaded to the BORN website sometime in September. We're still working on this technology, but we're hoping that this can be available for people to see, perhaps being used for teaching and just for information.

Ok, I want to set the scene—make a few comments about our panellists and then get into the topics for this conversation. On the BORN website (under Events) and in the text that appeared when you registered for this event, you have seen the general set of issues and questions that led to this panel, 'Black Experiences in Opera: Perspectives from South Africa, Europe, and the United States'. We have seen several terrific panels and podcasts in the US around opera and the Black Lives Matter movement this summer.³ This panel is meant to complement those, but to also do a few different things. We are creating an international dialogue between four Black panellists who have leading careers as top-level opera singers, as well as being active in community engagement and social justice and education. All have worked in Europe, sung on leading opera stages, and have won prestigious awards.

Louise Toppin and Patrick Dailey were born in the US and are professors at the University of Michigan and Tennessee State University, respectively. The University of Michigan is a PWI (Predominantly White Institution) and Tennessee State University is an HBCU (Historically Black University).⁴

Njabulo Madlala and July Zuma were both born in South Africa (coincidentally both in Durban). Both have lived and worked extensively in Europe as well as throughout South Africa. Njabulo Madlala is a founding director of the Voices of South Africa International Opera Singing Competition. July Zuma is the Director and founder of the Kwa-Mashu Community Empowerment Organisation, based in Kwa-Mashu Township (in the KwaZulu-Natal province outside of Durban).

To give a few quick and very broad statistics: in the US Black people make up about 15% of the population. In South Africa, the Black and Mixed Race ('Coloured') populations make up about 85% of the population. We all know that South Africa and the United States

³ See, for instance, tenor Lawrence Brownlee's 'The Sitdown with LB' series, hosted on Facebook live; mezzo J'Nai Bridges's Facebook live event, 'Lift Every Voice: A Conversation Hosted By J'Nai Bridges'; 'The Enduring Legacy Black Singers in Opera', hosted by Tanisha Mitchell for the Metropolitan Opera Guild podcast (episodes 157 and 158); and Patrick D. McCoy's 'I Too, Sing America' series.

⁴ Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) may be regarded as remnants of American higher education segregation. 'HBCU' refers to those institutions founded before 1964 to afford tertiary education for Black students, who were excluded from enrolment at existing colleges and universities. 'PWI' refers both to current institutions of higher learning where more than 50% of student enrolment is white, and to historically white institutions—that is, universities and colleges that did not allow Black students to attend.

have very different stories around Black-White relationships and histories of oppression. The period of the transatlantic Middle Passage history of slavery in the US was officially ended with the Civil War in the 1860s.⁵ However, moving through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, the war on Drugs and its resultant increased incarceration for people of colour (in fact, some call this period from the '80s and '90s on, the 'New Jim Crow') has brought a millennium that has not served people of colour, and especially Black people, with justice.⁶ As cell phones have been able to record acts of horrific police violence, we have seen the formation and continued energy of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In South Africa, the colonial systems date back centuries to the arrivals of the Dutch and the British as early as the 17th century (1600s).⁷ In the mid-twentieth century, the National Party (an Afrikaans Party) came into power and transformed the colonial system into their own version, the brutal system of apartheid.⁸ With the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic elections in South Africa—which made Nelson Mandela President—in 1994, the era of apartheid ended. Yet the promises of better opportunities especially for Black and Mixed Race ('Coloured') populations have still not been completely fulfilled. In 2015, the #FeesMustFall movement among South African university students was not only a protest for lower tuition rates, but also for delivery on the promises of a better life for all. The movement also included a statement demanding the decolonisation of the curriculum that broadly covered the need to have an honest accounting of history—one that included the achievements of Black South Africans, the brutality of colonialism and

⁵ The Middle Passage refers to the trans-Atlantic journey made by enslaved Africans on their way to being sold into servitude in the Americas. It was so called because it was the second leg of European ships' triangular trade route between Europe, Africa, and the so-called 'New World'. The American Civil War, fought between 1861 and 1865, was effectively a conflict on the legitimacy of slavery: Southern states had seceded into a Confederacy following the election of Abraham Lincoln, who supported the abolition of slavery, to be President of the United States of America. They entered war with Northern states loyal to the Union.

⁶ 'Reconstruction' is the period (1865-1877) in US history following the Civil War, during which attempts were made to redress the inequities of slavery, and to advance towards interracial democracy. 'Jim Crow' refers to legislated segregation in the US between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century; the name 'Jim Crow' is believed to be derived from a Blackface caricature developed by white performer Thomas D. Rice. The Civil Rights Movement is the decades-long struggle by black Americans for equal rights. Though the passing of civil rights legislation in the mid-to-late 1960s nominally ended the movement, black Americans' fight for equal rights and equitable treatment continues to this day.

⁷ South Africa was first officially colonised by the Dutch in 1652, when Jan van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape of Good Hope to establish a victualing station for the Dutch East India Company.

⁸ The National Party was elected into power in 1948. It immediately set about expanding the country's existing segregationist policies under a political system called 'apartheid', which promoted the absolute segregation and 'separate development' of different races. Afrikaans is a language developed at the Cape under Dutch colonial rule; it derives from the Dutch vernacular of Holland, but with significant influences from enslaved speakers' mother tongues, including Malay, Khoisan languages, Portuguese, and other indigenous Southern African languages. Under apartheid, the government enforced Afrikaans-language instruction in black schools; this legislation was a direct cause of the 1976 Soweto Uprisings, during which police murdered hundreds of Black school children. Currently, Afrikaans is spoken by 13.5% of the South African population; the language retains a contentious socio-political status due to its association with the apartheid regime.

apartheid, and the establishment of more indigenous languages to be utilised in classrooms, newsrooms, and published materials.⁹

In history that is recent enough for our parents and grandparents to remember, opera was a segregated space in both South Africa and the United States. Recently, on both sides of the Atlantic, we're seeing Black opera singers and composers write themselves into history. This is where we are going to begin. So as the first topic for the panellists, I want us to think about finding your own operatic voice. All of you have important and successful careers as professional singers. I'm interested: what was your specific entry into singing and Opera? And as I've mentioned to the panellists ahead of time, let's start with Louise Toppin.

Louise Toppin: Thank you. I'd like to thank you, first of all, for an opportunity to be a part of this first event for BORN. What a wonderful organisation that you have. So congratulations to you and all the others who have been organising such an important resource. It is because of you that I know so much, I would say, about what has gone on in terms of opera [in] South Africa. I want to send greetings to my colleagues in South Africa. I have not been to South Africa—I've worked in West Africa—but a lot of what I do know is from your work and having sent students to South Africa, actually, as singers.

My journey was one of not being a singer. And I've said that to people before, that I went to ... I studied to be in medicine, and was going to be a surgeon and that. So, my voice came late. I did sing in church choir in the Episcopal Church as a child. We had a child's choir, but we didn't particularly sing solo so no one knew I could sing. And went through my undergrad, that you do in pre-med, as well as singing in choir as required by my degree, but no one really heard my voice as a solo voice. I did have some ... and looking back, I can see some experiences, such as growing up on the campus of Virginia State University, which was ... which is an HBCU, at a time when important composers and musicians such as Undine Smith Moore was there.¹⁰ But also opera singers like George Shirley¹¹ ... I actually found many years later, he had come through to present concerts as African Americans came to Historically Black universities and churches to present programs. So I realised, many years later, as I helped my best friend whose father was Clarence Whiteman the organist,¹² I was going through his papers and there was a reel to reel recording of George Shirley, which I actually gave him later. So I must have seen him as a child. Willis Patterson¹³ was on the

⁹ South Africa has eleven official languages. Due to infrastructural constraints, however, the majority of educational and media offerings are restricted to English and Afrikaans.

¹⁰ Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) was an African-American pianist and composer from Virginia, known especially for her vocal output. Her 1981 oratorio, *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and premiered at Carnegie Hall.

¹¹ George Shirley (b. 1934) is a famed operatic tenor, and was the first African-American tenor to sing leading roles at the Metropolitan Opera. He received the National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama in 2015.

¹² Clarence E. Whiteman (1927-1989) was professor of organ and theory at Virginia State College. An interview between Whiteman and Eileen Southern, titled 'Organ-Music Collector', appears in *The Black Perspective in Music*, 6:2 (1978), 168-187.

¹³ Willis Patterson (b.1930), bass-baritone, is emeritus professor of voice at the University of Michigan. He has edited collections of spirituals and art songs by African-American composers, including *The New Negro Spiritual Collection* (2002), *Art Songs by Black American Composers* (1981) and *The Second Anthology of Art Songs by African American Composers* (2002).

faculty with my parents—my father was a historian, my mother was an English teacher—so I grew up in a culture and an environment in which African American music or musical Blacks was an important part of daily life. I met Duke Ellington.¹⁴ So I met the jazz people, I met Ella Fitzgerald,¹⁵ Sarah Vaughan,¹⁶ they all came through as well. So I had that richness in ... in the heritage.

And another event that I would say was seminal to me, that I realise now, was that as a child I picked up a recording ... my mother and father loved opera (my father is of an immigrant family) and they loved opera. They took us to operas—Virginia had the children go to the opera and the symphony, that was just a part of our education, but everybody I saw there was white. But I remember picking up a recording one day and it was ... I don't know if I can screen share. Oh, but I found it. Let me see if I can do a quick screen share to show you ... no ... so I'll just tell you what it was. I found a recording of Leontyne Price singing *Aida*.¹⁷ And I didn't realise until much later ... okay, somebody's made me a co-host. Let me do it real quick—I have it right here on my desktop and I can show you. This recording [fig. 1] is the one that my parents had at home, and it was that moment ... as a young girl, not even knowing I would be a musician, because as I said I was exploring medicine. But seeing that important recording told me that, 'wow, Black people, a Black woman in opera'. Because that was ... I had seen some men, as I said, George Shirley, Mr Dean Patterson ... but having that experience of seeing a Black woman singing a Black character, as my parents explained to me what *Aida* was, and who this person was ... and I even have a colouring book I found in my parents' house recently that was on *Aida*, so I knew the whole story as a child. And so, I would say those were my foundations that pulled me toward an interest in opera. I started singing, actually, at the age of 25. I studied for the first time as I was finishing my first Masters in piano and accompanying. I started a second Masters in voice at 25, and so my life went from there. And, you know, teachers like George Shirley was the person really, the first Black teacher I had and the person who so much has mentored me throughout my career. I'll stop there and let my colleagues ...

¹⁴ Duke Ellington (1899-1974) was an African-American jazz composer, pianist, and band leader; his legacy endures as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century.

¹⁵ Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) was an African-American jazz singer whose legendary career spanned six decades; she is often referred to as 'the First Lady of Song', or 'the Queen of Jazz'.

¹⁶ Sarah Vaughan (1924-1990) was an African-American jazz singer popularly nicknamed 'the Divine One'. Regarded as one of the greatest of all jazz singers, she won four Grammys, including the Lifetime Achievement Award.

¹⁷ Leontyne Price (b.1927) is widely regarded as the first professional African-American operatic soprano to gain widespread international fame. She built an illustrious career around the world, and has been recognized by numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964), National Medal of Arts (1985), and twenty Grammy Awards.

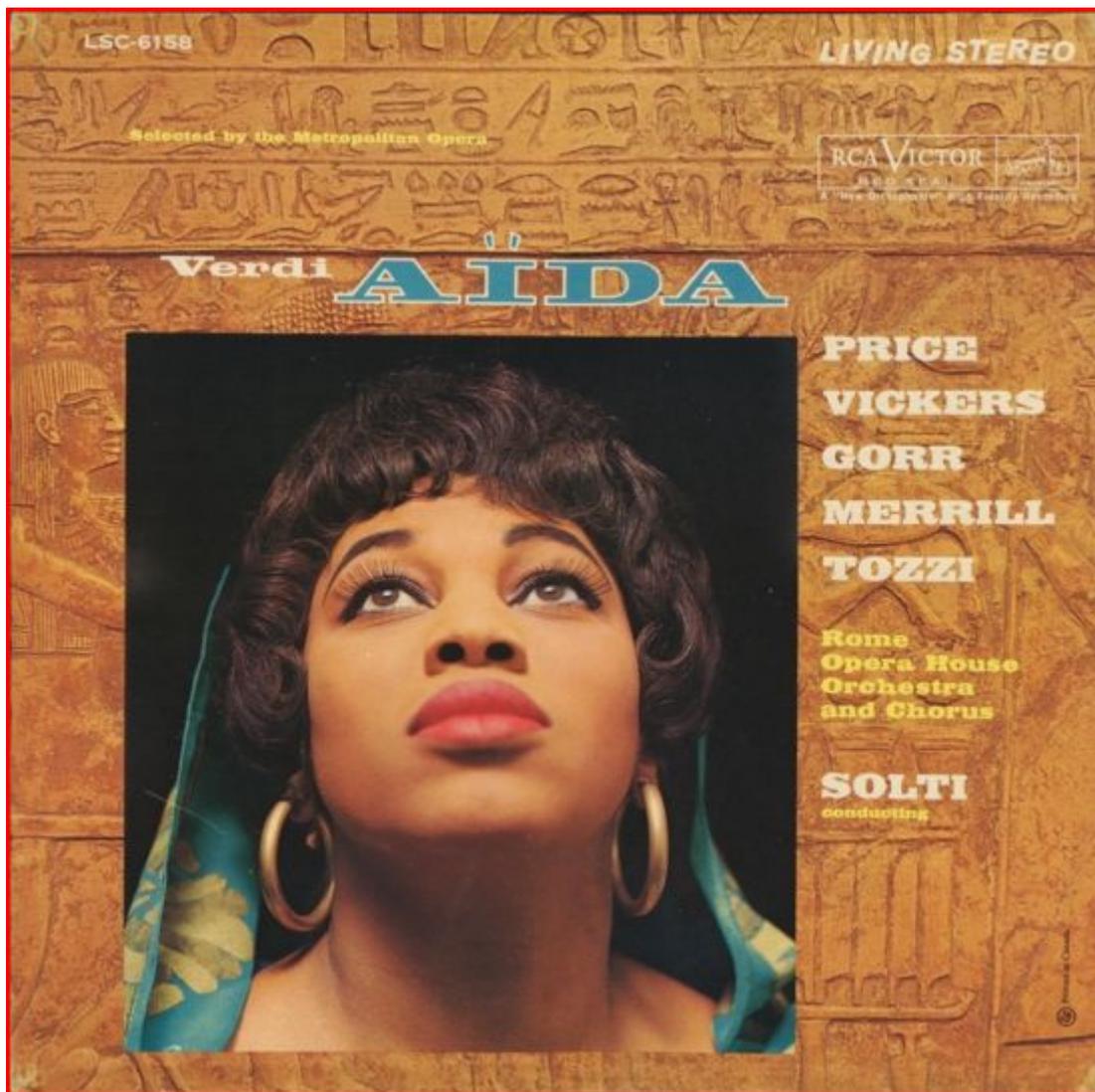


Fig. 1: Louise Toppin's *Aida* recording, with Leontyne Price at the Rome Opera House under the baton of Georg Solti.

Naomi André: Thank you so much, Louise. I've known you for a while and there's so much of that story I didn't know. Wow. And your first teacher was George Shirley, how amazing! Wonderful. And I'm so glad to get this sort of story of you as a young African-American girl growing up on the edges of the Virginia ... University ... what that was like. Let's now go across the Atlantic and to July Zuma, who was born in Durban, and let's hear your story of how you became interested in singing and finding your voice.

July Zuma: Well, first of all, I'd like to say thank you. Thank you so much for this prestigious event. It's such an honour for me to be sitting here and having this opportunity to interact with you and congratulations on the organisation and everybody behind the scenes. So my story is slightly different—I think everybody's story is different, of course. I will start just to give a broader picture about South Africa: we are ... in the Black community, we are very much surrounded by the choral culture. So we are the choral culture ... I would say ... 'babies', in a way. So my first experience in singing was at the school in really like first or

second or ... third grade, I think. At primary. And then I moved to the next level of school, and then for me it was just like ... it's not something that I was like really ... was, 'oh my god, this is amazing', because when I ... it's like ... it became like a ... like a ... when you have like an arranged marriage, where you get ... somebody chooses who you're going to love, and then you grow to love a person. So that's what happened to me. So a teacher walked into class in the classroom one day; he says you and you and you and you after school, you have to come to this choir practice. I said, 'what is he talking about?', and then ... and during those days, we grew up under the corporal punishment days. So you knew very well, if you are not at that choir practice you're going to have it the next day. So I went to the choir practice with other people, other students as well. And some did not like it. And then, lo and behold, I did like it, then I came back the next day and then that was it. That was my introduction to the choral singing and then from there I was in the high school choir and I had a wonderful opportunity to be groomed by this amazing teacher of mine, Mr Qinisela Sibisi ... such an amazing gentleman, I would say.¹⁸ So he was the person that really inspired me to really learn more about classical ... classical musical things. And then after that, I left the school and then I studied mechanical engineering. [laughs] And that I did not finish because there was this strong force and pull towards music. Sometimes you just don't know what it is ... you cannot explain it that much. But there was a strong pull. And then a friend of mine, Hleniswa Dlamini, he had found a way to go through to Cape Town University, where he was studying. So I think during those days, it ... it was just after certain years where Black students could be admitted into the opera course. So ... and then he found a way ... he said, 'hey, I think you have something there, and then come and I'll try to organise you to get into this group'. And that's how I landed into university level and proper training.

But my inspiration also comes from the people that have walked the path before me. When I was still a student, I mean, singing in a choir [in the] community, we got lucky. In KZN [KwaZulu-Natal] there was something, Njabulo will remember, there was something called KZN Chorale. So we ... I was ... I happened to ... another friend of mine introduced me to this and it was also another way of making money, in a way, because for the first time, you can go and sing and be paid. That was amazing. Because as the choral people we always did it for the love of it, of which, that was also beautiful as well. But you find another way of earning a little bit of money and also having fun. And it was just so touching—it was the first time I encountered orchestra. I'd never seen [an] orchestra before because we ... we are not surrounded by such things as Black people who live in Black townships. You know, our scope of this Western classical music is really limited, because we have nowhere to really ... associate it with. And I remember back in the days you sing the ... my first ... opera ... singing with orchestra was the *Messiah*. The *Zulu Messiah*.¹⁹ KZN Philharmonic, they used to hire people and then ... Raphael Vilakazi usually did the bass solo.²⁰ So that was very,

¹⁸ Qinisela Sibisi (b.1963) is a South African choral composer and choir director best known for his monumental *Zulu Mass in B Flat*.

¹⁹ Sam Shabalala's Zulu translation of Handel's *Messiah* was first performed in Pietermaritzburg in 1993, under the baton of Richard Cock.

²⁰ Raphael Vilakazi (b.1968) is a South African baritone, 1992 Standard Bank Young Artist Award-winner, and founder and director of Bravo Africa Entertainment, which produced *Ubuntu – The Opera* in 2015. The KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra is a professional orchestra based in

very inspiring to see one of our own in front of this big orchestra. Behind, everybody is white, and then in front you have this Black guy who's getting ... and so many more; a lot of singers that I'm forgetting. Njabulo will, of course, remember, most of them. And it was ... and then that's how singing found me. And then I realised there's talent there and I started at University of Cape Town under Angelo Gobbato²¹ and then from there I went to ... I worked for Cape Town Opera as well ... in managerial position for almost four years and then after that I decided ... there was this strong pull again, because I'm in an office work and ... it's good—it gave me a lot of insight behind the scenes. As a singer, then I can understand most of the things: both worlds, the singer's and also then managerial position. So then I resigned from my job and people thought I was crazy. In South Africa, in a place where everybody is striving to get a job, here am I, I have a job and then I'm saying, 'I'm leaving my job. I'm just going to venture into the unknown'. So and then I left; I went to Barcelona to continue my studies at the Conservatori Liceu. And then from there, it was a jump to Berlin, where I live and I'm freelancing. This is my base for now. I am sorry to take so long.

Naomi Andre: No! Thank you! I want to get the texture of your stories, and especially since here in the US, it's like, 'how does somebody who was just coming out of the edges of the struggle with apartheid, become such an international singer?' No, thank you so much and I'm thinking to continue this story in ... coming out of Durban in South Africa ... to move to Njabulo Madlala.

Njabulo Madlala: Well, thank you so much for having me here. And thank you so much for the work that you are all doing which is very important. Thank you for this. Especially at these times, we need to have these kind of dialogue. So thank you, really, thank you. Well, like July I was born in Durban. My journey was ... was a tough one, but I guess like many people in South Africa. I was born in Inanda, which is a township north of Durban, and there I went to a school very close to my house—about five minutes out my door, the school was there. And as July has said, it's part of our upbringing, really, when you go to school, you expect mostly to end up being in the choir. And that's how it started. I started off being in the choir at school and ... I didn't like it. I was very shy. I was very quiet as a child and ... and also, the family situation was a very tough one: were very poor. And so I think, as a result of that as well, I was very ... I was very withdrawn as a child, and I think I spent a lot of my time thinking really, 'how can one get out of this situation?'. And it so happens, my grandmother was a domestic worker. She worked for a white family and she is the one that really took care of the family. But it so happens that her Madam, her employer—I don't know how you call those people in the States—but her Ma'am, you know, whoever she worked for ... loved opera. And from time to time, they would get rid of things; they would throw things

Durban; it is the integrated successor to the state-funded Natal Philharmonic Orchestra, a whites-only orchestra under apartheid.

²¹ Angelo Gobbato (b.1945) is an Italian-born bass-baritone and opera director in South Africa, and former director of the University of Cape Town Opera School. During South Africa's transition to democracy, Gobbato helped transform the opera department of the apartheid-era Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) into Cape Town Opera—an independent, professional company credited with developing some of the country's most successful singers and productions.

away and my grandmother would pick stuff up and bring it ... bring it home. And one day she brought back these cassettes, which they'd thrown out. And one of them had opera. It had *La Fille du Régiment* on it. And as I was singing in the choir at school, and as I was listening to this, I would listen to it when no one was at home. I don't know ... we would play ... we would go through everything that she brought and we would play. We played the tapes and, you know, and I heard opera, and secretly I think I put the tape aside. And whenever the parents, the adults, were not at home, and I'd come back from school, I'd put it on and I'd listen to it and I'll attempt to sing along to it. And it really quickly became my ... my escape, because the parents were not at home and I could put on this tape and I could ... you know, I could dream ... because it must have been a live recording, because people would upload at the end, and you really got the sense that this was happening in the theater. And I would sing along and I would imagine myself in that situation, and it became my ... became my escape and gradually, gradually through singing along to those tapes, I think I developed my voice. So that then, when I was about 15, 16, I ... well, I sang as well in the community choir, but when I was about 15/16 I got involved with a production in our local theater, the Playhouse, which was *The Student Prince*, the operetta. And that was my first production. So at this stage, this was my first professional production—I was singing in the chorus—but it was very important on so many levels. I was ... for the first time, earning money, which was going to be supporting my family and I was going through high school at the time. And also any money—that was really responsible for getting me to school, because no one worked at home, except my grandmother. Sometimes I couldn't go to school, you know. When I went to high school, I went to a school which was a bit further away from home. So this became a thing and ... and I ... found myself in the theater in a production and I was singing in the chorus, but I started to really think, 'my god, there is something here', you know, somehow I keep meeting this thing.

So when I finished high school, I actually was involved in a production of *Carmen* that toured to the UK. It later became *U-Carmen in Khayelitsha*.²² But it toured here to the UK and I was again in the chorus there, and while we were here, somebody left. Whoever sang Escamillo, left to go back to South Africa, there was some dispute. And they had to ask the gentleman who was singing Morales to sing Escamillo, and then they had to find someone for Morales. And so ... [laughs] ... so that was my first kind of break in many ways. And at this stage, you know, I still hadn't really taken singing lessons or anything, apart from singing in the choir. But they coached me in a couple of days, and I sang Morales. And as we performed it, somebody in the audience actually one day approached me afterwards and said, 'you know, I think I could hear something promising there. You should investigate these colleges'. And she wrote down for me the Guildhall School of Music and when she wrote down, she said, you get off at the Barbican—that is the Tube stop. Or you can also investigate the Royal College of Music. And she said, you go to South Kensington, or something like that. And one day on my way to the rehearsals, the train suddenly stopped at

²² *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* is an acclaimed Xhosa-language film production of Bizet's *Carmen* by the Cape Town-based Dimpho di Kopane opera company (now called Isango Ensemble). Originally created as a stage production, the film version transports the action to Khayelitsha, a township outside Cape Town. It was released in 2005 and won the Golden Bear award at the Berlin International Film Festival.

the Barbican, and I remembered that she had mentioned the Barbican and the Guildhall. And I got off and I looked for the Guildhall. And when I got there I spoke to the security guy there and introduced myself and ask to see someone from the voice department. And they got the head of vocals studies to come down and then I explained to him that I was in London for a short period, and I would like to see if I can be heard. And he took me to a room. Of course I didn't have any arias, because at this stage I hadn't really sung an aria or a full song, you know, except for singing as part of the choir, or singing Morales. And so he played some scales and he heard me sing a bit of Morales and he heard me sing something from a choir section of *Carmen*. And he said, 'I definitely think you're a baritone, so ... but we would have to hear you sing an aria or a song.' And he took me to the library upstairs and he gave me two songs, pieces, he gave me 'Se vuol ballare' and 'An die musik'. And he said, 'if you go and learn these and come back in two weeks, we can ... I can organise a panel.' And what is important as well about this was: this was outside of the auditioning season or anything like that. And I just turned up. So, that was amazing. And I went out and I found a music shop and I bought myself a CD of Bryn Terfel. He had a CD that had some songs and some arias, and for two weeks I listened to this CD and I turned up in two weeks and I sang for them. And I was offered a full scholarship to go there. And so I did all my undergraduate there and my postgrad and opera ... opera study. So I was there in the end for seven years and ... and ... really, that's how I started, that's my story.

Naomi Andre: I so appreciate your giving this texture of it and I love it, how the two of you, July and Njabulo and also Louise, were not really planning, 'Oh yeah, I've been singing forever and I'm going into it', which ... yeah, it just says a whole lot about where voices are born. I also love this fact, which is a theme that you brought up so beautifully: in South Africa choral singing is a big part of people's world. It's for girls, it's for boys, it's for adults, it's for ... people do it. Or at least, in the past, it seems like it was a very strong thing. And I look forward—later on we can talk about choral competitions and things as they are happening today. Let's move on to Patrick Dailey; come back to the United States. And I'm particularly interested in your experience—finding your voice, which is a unique voice, an unusual voice. As we can see, July Zuma is a tenor, we just heard from Njabulo Madlala that he is a baritone. Patrick Dailey is a countertenor, which is an unusual voice to find, to figure out. It's singing in a falsetto. And particularly, it's not a voice that a lot of people know about. We happen to be living in a time where there are several Black countertenors, with Patrick Holiday²³ and Darryl Taylor²⁴ and many others. So I'm interested in your general story, but also with your specific voice. And I realise that ... man, we just need to be playing ... we need to make this a three hour session so we can hear all of you sing, with Louise and her incredible coloratura ... so okay, things to think about for the future. I turn it to you, Patrick.

²³ John Thomas Holiday, Jr (b.1985) is an African-American operatic countertenor and winner of the 2017 Marian Anderson Vocal Award.

²⁴ Darryl Taylor is an African-American operatic countertenor and founder of the African-American Art Song Alliance.

Patrick Dailey: Well, again, I echo everyone's sentiments. It's such an honour to do this. I got the email and I was like, 'what? Oh my god! I'm freaking out'. And also, I've got to apologise for all the technical difficulties, but we're back now, we're good. So, um, I always start by saying I am the great-grandson of West Tennessee sharecroppers. Ma Pearl and Daddy Fred Slocum, who raised my mother and her siblings—her dear grandchildren—and took them in at 50 or 60 years old; my great-grandmother lived to be 102. My mother is the first in the family to go to college and I start there, because it's really important. I also go back because ... you know, there was music then, for these poor West Tennessee sharecroppers. My grandmother ... in the golden age of gospel music you would you hear about the groups like the Clara Ward singers,²⁵ the Roberta Martin singers,²⁶ and groups of that nature. There was this soprano, and they called her the High Note Singer, and my grandmother, who still is living—is 92—she is the High Notes Singer. And I have an aunt who also sings. So, like music has been a part, very much, of our family history or lineage, for a long time. I also go there because my mother came to Nashville to go to Tennessee A&I State University (at the time),²⁷ and is the first in our family to go to college, and she's an educator. And it's important to note that, because she was very ... she and my moth-, she and my, and my ... my father and the ... our entire village, our church community—my home church, where I still am a member and serve—is right in front of Tennessee State. So I'm still very much a part of that fabric of the city. But it's important to note that because there has again been singing there. So my singing starts in the church. There is this video of me, somewhere around here, of me at three years old with my little toy piano preaching and singing. It's really funny. It's, it's a fool. Anyway. Then my nanny, who was one of the mothers of the church, heard me sing when I was like, about three. And she called everybody, and she says, 'he's going to sing in the Children's Choir'. And that's where it starts, right? It starts with Nanny calling all the saints saying 'he's going to sing', and ... and just making sure that happened.

Because my mother was an educator, she also saw the interest and knew how important the arts are and music is in a child's development. So when I started expressing interest in singing and dance and theatre, like anything in the arts, she started putting me in programmes. So I was ... I was being started ... I was even in visual arts programmes, Youth Theatre programmes, and there's also a programme here in Nashville called Choral Arts Link, the MET Singers, that brought young people from ... you know, public schools in the city, bringing them all together to give them the training.²⁸ And we every year we would sing with the, with the National Symphony and the Martin Luther King, 'Let Freedom Sing' concert ... 'Let Freedom Ring' concert, rather. So that was like our first foray into, you know, being on

²⁵ Clara Mae Ward (1924-1973) was an African-American gospel singer who achieved success during the 1940s and 1950s as leader of The Famous Ward Singers.

²⁶ Roberta Martin (1907-1969) was an African-American gospel composer, singer, pianist, arranger, and choir director. Her group, The Roberta Martin Singers, was one of the first mixed male and female gospel groups, and performed between the late 1930s and 1969.

²⁷ Tennessee State University, formerly known as Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State College, is a historically Black university in Nashville, Tennessee.

²⁸ Choral Arts Link (CAL) is an organization that provides choral singing opportunities for local children in Nashville, Tennessee. The MET Singers is CAL's flagship youth choir, for Middle Tennessee youth, grades 2-12. Visit <https://choralartslink.org/> for more information.

a symphonic stage with orchestra, symphony, and all of those things. But also what's important in my story ... very much of what I do—my singing, my career, my work and my purpose—it's really guided and crafted in community, it's crafted in the negro spiritual, it's crafted in HBCUs. And so that's why, like, you know, you'll see me I'm wearing this [points to t-shirt with slogan stating 'My degree is Black']. I mean, I'm going to always be an advocate in some way, right? So I started studying voice because I wanted to go to Fisk University and be a Jubilee singer. I wanted to be a Fisk Jubilee singer.²⁹ That was my primary goal. I wanted to ... I was like ... I said, 'I'm going to be a Fisk Jubilee singer, and then I'm going to go and do ... be the next Usher', and all of these things. I was going to be like the next R&B phenom, Chris Brown, who? It's going to be Patrick Dailey. My minor in high school—so I went to the National School of the Arts—was dance. And so I was dancing, I was acting. So as the story goes, and it's kind of tricky and I'm kind of get it right ... try to get right ... so, some of the first things I saw of ... like, people who looked like me doing this ... actually came from PBS.³⁰ So of course, the Jubilee singers, and people in my community—there are many, some wonderful singers in my community—and hearing the ... Bobby Jones and the Nashville Super Choir.³¹ So again ... like this idea, too, that singing, whether gospel, classical, jazz, contemporary, commercial, didn't seem too far off for me; everything kind of just seems like 'good singing is good singing'. So I kind of ... that art and style was being implanted. I also grew up listening ... my favourite singers are like Aretha Franklin, Mariah, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston. The, the women, the upper voices. And so I imitated them all the time. I'm naturally a tenor. But I was always imitating the upper voices. So that's what I felt most comfortable doing.

I saw two things: I saw Cook, Dixon & Young (Formerly of Three Mo' Tenors) on PBS.³² And I was like, 'oh my god, these men are amazing'. You know, and I heard Victor Trent Cook, who was more on the theatre side but also had the classical chops and was doing ... I just saw this show and I said 'I can do that, that's me, that makes sense'. Then I saw the Morgan State University Choir's 25th anniversary—Silver Anniversary—Concert, and that featured these amazing voices, once again, and then a countertenor by the name of Ernest Saunders—the first countertenor at Morgan State.³³ And I ... again, I looked at that and I

²⁹ The Fisk Jubilee singers are an African-American a capella ensemble consisting of students at Fisk University. First organized in 1871, the group has become a musical institution, and received the National Medal of Arts from President George W. Bush in 2008.

³⁰ PBS, or the Public Broadcasting Service, is an American non-profit public broadcaster and television program distributor. It specializes in educational content.

³¹ Bobby Jones (b.1938) is a gospel vocalist and television host, and founder and leader of the Nashville Super Choir gospel outfit.

³² Cook, Dixon & Young is a group of African-American tenors (Victor Trent Cook, Rodrick Dixon, and Thomas Young) known for their immensely popular crossover concerts. The group changed its name from 'Three Mo' Tenors' (a reference to the Placido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti, and Jose Carreras collaboration) to Cook, Dixon & Young in 2003, but is frequently referred to by the combined title of 'Cook, Dixon & Young (Formerly of Three Mo' Tenors)'.

³³ Ernest Saunders (1962-2004) was an African-American countertenor who performed widely with Morgan State University Choir in the 1980s and 1990s; his obituary notes 'his incredible countertenor range and his amazing vocal dexterity in classical, pop and Gospel music'. (<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/delawareonline/obituary.aspx?n=ernest-g-bradley-saunders&pid=146082344>; accessed 28 September 2020).

said, 'that's me, that's my voice'. So ... so a couple of things happen. I hear that the Morgan State Choir is coming to Nashville. They go ... they come and do a concert. I go to the concert. I was already starting to get really fascinated by all of these other Historically Black College choir programs and their sounds and their things like that. And so I hear them. And in that concert, there were three counters. They all sang very different pieces. They all sang very different solos. The first was the solo in the Mendelssohn *Lobgesang*. Then there was a ... there was a hymn ... no ... there was a gospel solo from another countertenor, and then there was the hymn arranged by Dr Carter at the end.³⁴ So they all sang very differently and I sat there like, 'wow, that's me, that's my voice; I get it'. Then, as I'm sitting there saying that, there was a man that came out and he was, he was open to the performing arts of the organisation called Salama Urban Ministries.³⁵ And he came out talking about what he does; what they do at Salama; his own career as a bass-baritone around Europe, and the work that they do. And as I'm sitting there, saying, 'that's my voice; I hear myself', my mother's on the other side of me, saying, 'God, I pray my son gets to work with that man'.

So fast forward: I'm in the school. My nickname at NSA (National School of the Arts) at that time was 'Bishop Jubilee', because everybody said, 'he's going to go be a Jubilee Singer', so 'There go Bishop Jubilee!'. So my nickname's Bishop Jubilee. And one of my little sisters, her aunt was the Head of Theatre at Fisk ... or *is* the Head of Theatre at Fisk. And she said, 'Hey Pat, uhm, so Fisk is doing this play, *The Gospel at Colonus*.³⁶ We know you want to go to Fisk. So come on, let's ... come audition for the show.' I'm like, 'of course!'. So I go over there, we get over to Fisk ... Fisk University. And we go into the room, everybody's around, we're going through the warm ups—the dance and the movement—we all sing and all of that. But who was sitting there when I walk in, as the music director: it's that man, William Crimm.³⁷ Throughout the production, you know, they put ... they had me singing all of the higher parts. So there's a little song in *The Gospel at Colonus*, 'Fair Colonus', and it's like a little falsetto thing that's acapella, and you know he had me in that. They had me doing all of the higher parts. He then pulls me aside as we're getting ready to go open and he says, 'So, you're going to study with me; you're going to come work for me at Salama. I'm your teacher now. I'm changing your life.' I said, 'okay'. The first thing that he did in our lesson: he moves me over. He has me come in. He's playing C, he says 'sing C'. And I sing it, but I sing it as a tenor. He said, 'No, no, no, head voice'. Okay. All right, let's go. 'Tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu-tu' [mimes piano playing while singing vocal warm-ups]. And I'm just going, and he just makes me go and does not stop. He said, 'okay, yeah, you're a

³⁴ Dr Nathan Carter (1936-2004), an internationally recognized teacher of vocal music, directed the Morgan State University Choir for 34 years. Under Carter, the choir garnered international acclaim with tours in Europe, Asia, and Africa, as well as performances at the White House and at a Mass Celebrated by Pope John Paul II.

³⁵ Salama Urban Ministries is an urban youth development programme based in Nashville, Tennessee. It provides after-school care and extracurricular opportunities based around 'academics, performing arts, and Christ-centered spiritual development'. See <http://www.salamaserves.org/>.

³⁶ *The Gospel at Colonus* is an African-American musical version of Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus at Colonus*. It was created in 1983 by experimental theatre director Lee Breuer and composer Bob Telson.

³⁷ William Crimm is an African-American bass baritone currently serving as adjunct professor in voice at Tennessee State University. He serves as Associate Director of Salama Urban Ministries.

countertenor'. I said, 'what?'. He said, 'you're a countertenor'. And now I'm trying to resist, even though I actually know that ... you know, we're kids, right? I know that this is right. I think 'no, not a countertenor'. 'You're a countertenor'. So in that, he gives me things that are aligned with what I would be. He gave me 'Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Zion', from *Messiah*. He gave me 'An die Musik', he gave me 'Vergin, tutto amor', and he gave me [Harry T.] Burleigh's 'Deep River'. All of these were very important pieces, but particularly the Burleigh, because that was what I used pretty much in most competition. So in NFAA Arts,³⁸ in ACT-SO,³⁹ in ... in the Grady-Rayam Prize for Sacred Music,⁴⁰ those were all ... that was a piece that was always kind of a signature for me at that time. And then I go on, and even when I was in ACT-SO, that's also important: there were so many points that kind of led me to Morgan. I didn't realise that Kishna Davis, who's a Morgan alumna, a fabulous soprano, she had come to my high school, and just spoke and talks to us and gave a mini masterclass. Then my two years in ACT-SO, each year, there was a judge, who was a Morganite. One of them, actually the first year, was April Curtis Haines who's, you know, currently at the Met now.⁴¹ So he makes sure I go to Morgan and he puts me there. And the reason why I went to a place like a Morgan State was because they had been a tradition of grooming and building Black countertenors. Also, I wasn't ... in his words, I was a little all over the place. And I wanted to sing opera, gospel, jazz, musical theatre, everything. And he said, 'yeah, you're not going to ... you're not going to do that. So we're going to, like, we're going to line the voice up.' And he did that for me, putting me as a ... having me go to Morgan, be a countertenor from there. And then from there, went to Boston University. And, you know ... but before that I was the first countertenor ... first countertenor in the Young Artist Programme at Opera Saratoga. And the first one to be invited to Opera New Jersey, as well. So there were some moments that kind of started me there. And, but, you know, the Black church *Messiahs* and the Black church competitions and the Black church ... singing in HBCUs has led me down the path of all of that.

Naomi Andre: Thank you so much. I'm realising that we ... and this is the scholar side of me: I want oral histories with all of you, and that's ... we're giving just sort of little mini versions. Thank you for sharing your stories and getting ... sort of the, the texture of what this is. And I like how the *Messiah* keeps sort of being important across, you know, here in the US and in South Africa. I'm going to try to keep us moving since time is happening quickly and I am interested ... if you could keep your comments ... if we could keep them a little more short, because I want to hear from all four of you about this next topic, about identifying and facing the barriers. We know that systemic racism signals that oppression and

³⁸ The National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA, now known as YoungArts National Arts Competition) is an application-based award for emerging artists aged 15-18.

³⁹ The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) is a year-long achievement programme designed to support and recognize talent among African-American high school students.

⁴⁰ The Grady-Rayam Prize for Sacred Music is named for Bishop Thomas J. Grady and opera singer Curtis Rayam. Winners of the \$3,000 prize become year-long ambassadors who promote the African-American spiritual by performing under the auspices of the 'Negro Spiritual' Scholarship Foundation.

⁴¹ April Curtis Haines graduated from Morgan State University. She joined the Metropolitan Opera Chorus in 1995.

exclusion of Black lives from the mainstream economy and culture is more than anecdotal. More than the occasional encounter with ignorance and prejudice. These things happen. I'm interested in your experience, what are the ways in which systems of opera as an industry affect Black performers, singers, composers, administrators. And this, I know, could go on for a huge thing, but I'm interested in hearing ... sort of, comparing your experiences in the US, in South Africa, in Europe. Is that sort of a commonplace? All of you have overlapped. Is there something ... and by systems, I'm talking about the roles you would get as a singer. The ... or the lack of roles that you've been cast in. Or a production company not knowing how to properly light Black people on stage, having realistic wigs, or just being in the space near the opera house where they're just not ... uhm ... it might not be so open to people of colour. Or have you ... and again, feel free to use other ... if you want to choose one or two experiences outside of being a singer, or as a singer: something that you knew that you were fit to do that you were prepared for, but this larger industry just wasn't ready for it. I'm wondering if we can start this time with July and move, sort of zigzag around, but July start and then the others, just feel free to sort of pop in.

July Zuma: Yeah. Where do you start. [laughs] Well, I'll just try to try to be short, as you said, and try to be on point. Well, in my experience, I, I have kind of two Julys in the head: the administrative July, and July the singer. So I think on the administrative side, I have ... I have experienced some kind of ... this ... this ceiling, that as a person of colour, you should not be reaching. You're just allowed to go this way and then you cannot break through a certain ... there's a standard that you, or a level that you're 'expected', quote unquote, to ... that's just you, and you cannot rise above it. So I felt, there ... like numerous times where I felt as somebody administrative that there are some doors, and they're just not open. And you can feel that you could do better at something and ... it's just not open for you. As a singer as well you ... oh yeah, it's a, it's a lot of that on the other side. I think ... I just think it's just people ... some people are just not ready for the change or ... and to accept that this wave is really happening. These people of colour are in this space, let's just try to see how can we change our own preconceived ideas about who people are in general. So I think that happens a lot. I am very dark, as you can see, so there would be some kind of roles that I would not be assigned to, I think. [laughs] I remember at some point ... because as a singer, we do auditions now and then until you get maybe to a level where you don't need to go auditions, you have a status, you are Coca Cola, you are really a brand, and then you, you are spared from this terrorising audition process. [laughs] So, you know, as you walk in, as a man of colour, a friend of mine once said, 'immediately we walk in, it's minus on your points, before you even start to sing', you know, and there are some times where roles ... I've been approached to do Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte*, without even auditioning for it, just because of the character and whatever the Mozart *Zauberflöte* is all about ... I'm sure people know the story.⁴² And so, yes, this, this ... up to today, it does really exist, and I think ... I don't know the solution, but I think it's ... it's just a question of accepting and not resisting. We are

⁴² Monostatos, a villainous character in Mozart's final opera, *Die Zauberflöte*, is described as a 'Moor'. He is depicted as an amalgam of racist stereotypes, including being dirty, untrustworthy, evil, and unable to control his sexual urges.

not here to take anything from anybody, we also just want to be accepted and do the art form. And that gives us joy. We want to express ourselves in that way because it has found us, you know. And we would like the space and given opportunities that are equal to everybody. Of course, it has to do also, do you deserve the role—there are all kinds of things that are into ... they come into play. You know, is it your *fach*, and all kinds of ... but there is that element before we even get to ‘do you ... can you sing the role?’, there is just that [gestures an obstacle like a wall], that just stands in front of you. That drawer that is like, you cannot open it. That's just not for you. That's frozen, you know. So thank you.

Naomi Andre: Thank you so much for bringing up this element of colourism. Louise, I see you're about to jump in.

Louise Toppin: Well, I want to follow the thread that he did, because of course in the United States, it's very similar. I mean, it is the same issues, that opera and classical music on the large scale is still an area that has remained ... the doors have remained close for African Americans, large scale. And as I will take his, too, in terms of administration, we are ... we don't exist en masse at the administrative level, which means that we're, that we're not there to help make these decisions. If we're not the directors; if we're not the ones who are funding the projects, the operas; we're not in the room for picking any of the operas; we're not going to have an opportunity to make any changes. And the same system ... systemic racism exists and is perpetuated because there is a lack of faces and voices in the room that need to be present. Black people in the United States are hired and have been for *Porgy and Bess* by major opera companies. At a time that there were financial crises, the companies mounted *Porgy and Bess*, because they knew it was going to be a success. But those same singers—and I've been in those casts, in which that same singer, that same Porgy should have been hired for Tosca or something like that—would not get that second contract. So until we can change that system and that thought of ‘we're not just hired for the Black operas, but we need to be hired because we're the voice for any opera’, we're not going to make some of those changes. I'm also an advocate for Black composers. When have we mounted an opera that tells these wonderful stories. I know, *Blue* has just come up.⁴³ And there ... Terence Blanchard's *Champion*.⁴⁴ There are some operas that are just starting—*Central Park Five*, Anthony Davis—they're starting to peek through.⁴⁵ But without these operas you're not telling the story of Americans fully. You're telling a partial story. And we do a lot of world premieres in this country. But how many of them tell the story of Black people in a positive light, besides the characters you get in *Porgy and Bess*, that are not positive characters.

⁴³ *Blue*, an opera by composer Jeanine Tesori and librettist Tazewell Thompson, premiered at Glimmerglass Festival in 2019. The opera deals with police brutality towards African-American men and boys.

⁴⁴ Terence Blanchard's 2013 opera, *Champion* (libretto by Michael Cristofer), is based on the life of African-American boxer Emile Griffith. The work was co-commissioned by Opera Theatre of St Louis and Jazz St Louis.

⁴⁵ *The Central Park Five* by composer Anthony Davis and librettist Richard Wesley, received the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Music. The opera premiered in 2019 at Long Beach Opera, and narrates the true events surrounding the unjust imprisonment and eventual exoneration of five African-American and Latino teenagers wrongfully convicted of rape.

People play them with dignity—I have been cast in *Porgy and Bess* many times: you play it with dignity, but there's ... it's already fraught with problems because of who the characters are, and who the community that you're telling. So you're not giving us an opportunity. I am a light-skinned African-American woman. And so I have, I am treated differently, and I know that, than some of my dear sisters who are not. And so that is an issue, speaking for them, that they have faced so much in terms of makeup, in terms of not being able to ... some of the questions you said, in terms of wigs and doing the hair. I mean, they have quite often done my own hair. But there are there are issues fraught with that. Some of the best voices on the planet have been these African-American, dark-skinned African-American women. And one or two will burst through, but we don't get a large scale number. Or we don't feel like they fit. We're not acting like they fit the character when in fact they do. So I will stop there and let others begin...

Naomi Andre: Njabulo ... oh, would you like to ... Either, go ahead.

Patrick Dailey: Well, I'll just say this, that um ... you know, going off of that too, I remember it was fairly recent ... um ... and I just kind of have a few different anecdotes, but like one of them is ... one of them is that, like, recently doing some world premieres and things, and sometimes with a lot of new music that's coming up ... and it's not always intentional, but, you know ... because I do a fair amount of crossover things. There was a piece ... there was a piece that I did, that I got very ... um ... that I got great reviews for, but the music that had been composed for me was very dis-, was not like anything else that anyone else sang. It was, it was more jazzy and showy and things of that nature, in my main piece. And so they ... and this was knowing that I was a Black singer who did these other things, kind of interpolating and bringing those things in. And also some of the text, you know, was somewhat problematic. And what was interesting is, it was my white colleagues—because I was the only Black person in the cast—it was my white colleagues who said, 'hey Pat, did you notice that?'. And I didn't think anything of it. Because in many ways we're just kind of used to doing the job ... getting the opportunity, just grateful to be in the room. And I had some advocates who were there to say, 'hey, let's think about it differently', which really helped the process overall. Also, you know, I also sing a lot of early music. And so there are spaces in which, you know there are discrimination, and not understanding about the sound, and the frequencies, and what we do, and how we emote, and how we produce, right, and so there are all those things. Then there are moments, sometimes in the rehearsal room. And you know what it means to be in the rehearsal space, and you know ... and how you interact with colleagues, what you can and cannot wear, right, how you have to present in this respectable manner. And I think that if we deal with the respectability piece, as well as, you know, of course, these administrative things ... but we also have to ensure, um, that we're ... that the avenues to administration ... you know, there are networks that happened for other people that don't necessarily happen for us. And then as July said, there's only but so far, because they may want to just put you in EDI,⁴⁶ they just want to put you in education, they maybe

⁴⁶ Shorthand for Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity.

just want to put you in outreach, as opposed to the artistic thinking about it and artistic formula. And so those are just some of the things that I've observed and even experienced.

Naomi Andre: Thank you so much. I ... oh man, I so appreciate the texture of what we're getting here. Njabulo, please feel free to jump in.

Njabulo Madlala: Yes, sure. I mean, one of, one of the things I'm thinking in my head is: if we diagnose what the real problem is, then I think we can begin to talk. Because we have been talking about our experiences. I mean, I'm not surprised when I hear another Black singer tell one of these stories. So we have to make a decision. If we do accept that opera is racist, and begin from there. But if we are going to go around the issue and say, 'you know, they can have a bit more here, a bit more there', they'll do what they're doing now: suddenly they are able, during this period, wherever you look, you see a picture of a Black singer, you see a concert of a Black singer, you see something with a Black person. And you think, 'oh, suddenly we are all able to do this'. But in other days this seems to be such a big problem. And in other days you are told that what matters in opera is how talented you are. Suddenly you have managed to find all this talent during this period since George Floyd was killed, and since there's been this dialogue. So we've got to just accept what the root of the problem is. And also maybe go further to say, well, sometimes it might not be that people are racist, but there may be issues of white privilege, you know, where people just, you know ... how ... because sometimes I think we can begin with our, with our colleagues. Our colleagues who are, some of them are our friends. How are you comfortable, year in, year out, to turn up to rehearsals and have a room be filled with a chorus of 60 people who are all white; you as soloists singing roles are all white; the orchestra turns up to be all white; and you are all comfortable with this? And when we begin to have a conversation about racism in opera, you are the first ones to say 'really, you know, is there racism in opera?'. Because that's where it begins: before you even get to the top, you're asked by your colleagues, 'do you really think that there is racism in opera'? You know. So this is, this is the difficulty. And then ... and then, you also have a situation now in Europe, where ... I've certainly turned up to sing some operas, knowing that I'm the only Black singer, but somewhere along the lines, I've turned up to the rehearsal room and there are like five or six other Black guys in the room. They are not singers; they are not in the chorus. They are not ... they are actors that are now brought in by opera companies ... especially around here where I am ... to just be on stage, move things around, act, you know. This is happening a lot now as well.

But the main thing that I come back to is this statement which I find ... I've found, always. Because I've studied in London and for ten years—for seven years as a student and three years after that as I was beginning my career—I had a scholarship that allowed me to go to ... to see opera. They paid for my tickets. And I went to the Royal Opera House (or maybe I shouldn't mention names, because this is ... names, because this is gonna be all over the internet ... but who cares). I went to Royal Opera House for ten years, and I saw opera, and I never saw a Black singer on stage. And there I was aspiring to become this thing. And I know people say, 'oh, but you know, is it always important to see people who look like you?'. It is important, because that is how we feel we belong to something too. If I'm going to turn up and not see people, first of all in the audience, that look like me, I immediately don't belong

there. And on stage, you know, for ten years I go to see an opera in these venues, and I don't see people who look like me. But then you think, surely they know that. Surely they see that. So what is the issue? And I mean I've heard a story, like ... One of the most offensive things that run in opera today, or as a defence, is to say: 'We don't care what race you are, as long as you are talented enough to do this'. So this takes it a step further, because it says the reason there are no Black opera singers in opera is because they're not talented enough. So now we are actually told that we are not talented enough. But not only that, we are, we are more than talented. You have some of the best opera singers, who when they turn up to sing, they are the best person on stage. You know? So this is not even the discussion. That is so offensive and that is so racist. I wish that opera companies can stop doing that.

And then secondly, they take it further to say, 'well, if we hold an audition, everyone must turn up. And if you come, if you come in and you do a great job, we will of course accept you'. They are talking to Black singers who have not sung on opera stages since 20-something ... I don't know ... 2017 some of them. But when you, when you, when you turn up to auditions, you are expected to be so prepared and so on ... you know, on the same level as your colleagues who are singing, day in, day out, who are receiving coaching everywhere. You are turning up cold. So if they were really serious about addressing diversity, they would do more. They would stop saying, 'we cannot find them', because they are there, and within an instant we can show you that ... how many opera singers ... how many Black opera singers exist in the world. Two: I wish that they would stop, you know, saying this thing about being talented enough and just accept that, in their ways, they are very racist. I mean, I'm very happy to say this now because there is no other way of looking at it. Suddenly, you know, why is *Porgy and Bess* not part of the, of the repertory of opera companies, if any opera company that does *Porgy and Bess* sells out? And you are able to be told that, 'if we don't sell any other shows during this season, we are fine because of *Porgy and Bess*. However, *Porgy and Bess* cannot be part of, of our repertoire because ... what are we going to do with our white chorus over here and our friends who we usually employ to sing? What are we going to ...?' We just have to ... now, I think we have to accept the situation for what it is, and then we need policy, because we cannot change anything in opera. We can have these dialogues as much as we want. But unlike in South Africa, where there's legislature that companies cannot run without having a certain percentage of people in their employment—51% percent of the company must be black in South Africa—you will never be able to change it.⁴⁷ You will never be able to change with opera. How are you expecting people who are racist to ... to accept that within themselves and then to change it within themselves? Where is the accountability? We are going to need to sit on those tables. We are going to have to make sure that young Black singers, when they go to audition, they walk in and they see someone like me, someone like July, in the panel. We are going to have to make sure that administrators are in these opera companies. Not just the posters with a Black singer for this period, and then we forget and then everyone goes back to their thing. We are just going to

⁴⁷ Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) is a legislative framework instituted by the South African government to promote black economic integration and redress in the wake of apartheid. It requires South African companies to maintain a certain percentage of black ownership, board management, and skills development in order to qualify for government contracts and industry rights.

have to be very ... this activism has got to go ... has got to intensify. And we've got to hold opera accountable, because they're getting away with murder at the moment.

Naomi Andre: I so appreciate us getting deep into this and I want to ... I know time is happening, but I want to give you all an opportunity to jump in and continue this conversation, as well as to ... I know you're doing community engagement, and organising competitions, and finding ways to insert your voices to get a broader Black population. Feel free to continue this conversation and to add what your ... how things are working for you—things before Covid and the pandemic, and afterwards. I'm going to start with Louise, because I think she's got to duck out at some point soon. But please, it's so awful—I don't want to moderate too much. I just want us all to be in the same room.

Louise Toppin: Absolutely. I want to dovetail ... what he just said was fabulous. We need to be in the room. We have, as I said, we have to be the administrators, though, in the room, and that just talking about it is not going to get there. When do we get when we're in those positions of power? And if we can't get into the positions of power, we need to create our own opportunities, which I think so many of us have done, creating our own competitions. I think July and I are both the ones that have created a competition, is that correct? Njabulo, I'm sorry, Njabulo, excuse me, you're the one with the competition that ... You know, we had a reason for creating these competitions to help propel the next generation in terms of the repertoire that, that ... and then seeing other African-American or Black singers. I am concerned that both Covid and Black Lives Matter, um ... I don't know that it's going to push companies in the way that they should ... that they're going to try to do quick-term fixes, and instead I'm interested in policies that are going to help us: long-term fundraising, that is specific for long term ... seeing people of colour becoming a part of administrations. Instead of appeasing us for the moment and saying we need to do this now, I want to see what do we do ten years down the road. How do we bring young people in? And as we were saying, if you don't have people of colour in positions—where they can see us on the stage, where they see us backstage, where we're creating programs in the community—then we're not going to encourage young people. Classical music already has problems encouraging young people. But they don't have problems encouraging young people when they can see you. When we're visible they, they, they gravitate to it. Young people do not have preconceptions about classical music and opera and anything else, until you tell them, 'Ah, it's not interesting; ah, it's not this'. But you let them see us: I used to do a lot of programs as a coloratura—I would go and sing the doll song, from *Tales of Hoffmann*. I would have young people, you know, winding me up, and I had so many kids that came and said, 'you're Black woman! I never thought that I would see ...' And I was at elementary schools, while I was doing operas or concerts, or whatever I was doing, where I was the only Black person in the cast, but have ... going to all-Black schools and showing them that there is something else there; there is something else to this music. And so I founded the George Shirley Competition with George Shirley, as a way of getting students to know the repertoire of African Americans and the African diaspora. We've extended it to the world—anybody that's a Black composer is now repertoire that we want to encourage. And so when the students come, they are of all ethnicities, but they're seeing Black professionals who are opera singers, that are judging

them. They are seeing other Black, they are seeing Black singers en masse, that are contestants. And so it's a ... it's, it's my ... one of my many ways of trying to get young people to take an interest in what we're doing. And I'll be quiet. [laughs]

Patrick Dailey: If I could jump in there. Um, you know, I had a colleague—and I've told this story a lot—I had a colleague, a while back, and she's an HBCU graduate. But she said, 'well, you know, Black people don't support the arts'. And I was like, 'hold up, sis, Black people support the arts; Black people sup-' ... but however, in anybody ... and I'm just ... Black people are not a monolith ... but, people will support arts that are relevant. If we look in our own communities, particularly like in the US, we have all of these ... you know, people are supporting the marching band at all of our HBCUs. People are supporting the gospel choirs. That's art. Right, so we're supporting art that's relevant. However, the issue that comes up is that opera is not made to be relevant. Opera is guys in this very Eurocentric colonialist white thing of like, 'well, that's not for us'. And the thing is, a part of what I work to do in encouraging audiences, as well as encouraging singers, is showing the relevance. Also, in bringing back agency: when we learn the mu-, the history of music ... when we look at a music history book, or a music appreciation book—I've taught that course, many times—we open it up and it says, 'we'll be starting in, in, in antiquity and music: we start in Greece. We ... the first opera is somewhere in Europe.' Right? And I'm like, nah. Let's go back. The first opera—if we're if we're talking about music making, if we're talking about real antiquity—it comes from Africa. It comes from the roots. Right? So the instruments that are even being played all have these roots that are indigenous to ... to African people, and then it goes out and is dispersed around the world. Right. But nobody wants to say that. We want to say it's Greece, it's Europe and, like, cut *that* out. So that's the first thing: is ensuring that there's agency and that there's ownership in being a part of it. And also showing that ... showing a relevancy, right? So I have a lot of students who will come in, particularly in the HBCU, and they'll say, 'well, I'm ... I want to sing RnB, I want to sing gospel, I want to do other things'. And I ... and we work to show them—myself, my colleagues, so many of us are working to show: this is why the technique is important. This is why you work across the board. And I will show you, you know, because what often ends up happening and what's sometimes being told, even at times by Black professors and, and, and directors of colour and such, will say 'well, you know that gospel stuff ... leave that alone. Don't, don't use that.' And when you tell somebody that what they've come from, who they are, what they've been doing their entire lives, does not belong in a place, they will definitely ... you know, reject it. And so what we have to do, is also say, 'no. What you have ... let's contextualise it in terms of technique. Let's contextualise it in terms of performance. Let's also contextualise it in terms of your place in the world. And then from there we can also incite you to build ...' Yes, and to go off of what Dr Toppin said: if they're not going to let you in the room, it's cool. We got rooms too that we can build. That's what we can do. So we can build our own rooms, we can build our own spaces, and we can ... you know, support there. And then from there, if we want to get into their rooms, we have the agency to do so.

Naomi Andre: Thank you.

Louise Toppin: I have to sign off and say goodbye. Thank you so much it's been a pleasure with ... meeting all of you and keep up this good work!

Njabulo, Patrick and July: Nice to meet you! Goodbye!

Naomi Andre: As I said, I wish this was much longer, let's move over to ... and you so much. We should have thanked Louise more, but I will in person. July and Njabulo ... and thank you so much, Patrick, for giving sort of these ... what *you're* doing. Experiences in South Africa: I'm so interested in these, sort of, cross-cultural, cross-Atlantic situations.

July Zuma: Njabulo, do you want to go?

Njabulo Madlala: Yes, I, I, I can. I mean, as we said at the beginning, we started off singing in choirs, but one of the most amazing things is how out of that we have all these incredible opera singers. So, as you can probably tell, I'm very offended by this thing, even more so now, because I think—even part of my education, when I look back now—that I did hear this a lot, to say ‘we, we, you know, it doesn't matter what colour of your skin ... the colour of your skin is, as long as you are good enough’. So in many ways what that makes the few Black opera singers that exist in there, is, it tells them that, you know, they are the ones that are good enough. So in many ways we also keep on ... not in ... not realising that we are sometimes used as tokens, you know. We are the few that are there, but ... and ... but we are told that, you know, we are helping something. We are helping to change how people know. We know that we are talented, yes, but we also know that there's too many other singers that are extremely talented, which is really one of the reasons that I've always done this competition.⁴⁸ Because even when I was in London studying, I always used to remember how many singers I've left at home, who are extremely talented. And ... and I'm no longer prepared to now be one of the few that are supposedly there because they are gold. Because that is not true. I'm just one of the few that is there, because there has to be a few. You know, there has to be a few for box-ticking reasons, and we cannot have that anymore.

And I mean, even the online competition: I usually do the competition in July in South Africa. But this year I decided we'll do it online. So singers, every week, send a one-minute video, and then on Sunday we have a live competition, and we've done it per voice type. But there are many things that are ... there is a reason for that. One of them is that I was ... I was too angry when that thing happened in the States.⁴⁹ I thought I need to do something

⁴⁸ The Voices of South Africa International Singing Competition is open to singers of all nationalities living in South Africa. The competition, which forms part of the Voices of South Africa charitable trust, seeks to empower South African singers from all walks of life and all levels of training by providing participants with masterclasses, mentoring, support, and skills development. In 2020, the competition met the challenge posed by the Covid-19 pandemic by trialing an innovative online format over several Sunday nights. For more information, visit <https://www.voicesofsouthafrica.org/events>, or see the competition's Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/voicesofsa/?ref=page_internal.

⁴⁹ The murder of African-American George Floyd by members of the police force in Minneapolis sparked a resurgence of worldwide civil campaigns against racism and police brutality against Black and minority ethnic persons.

to ... I need to do something to channel this anger, one. And two, as I've said many times, I'm very offended by this line that says, 'where are they?', you know, 'are there, are there good Black opera singers?'. So I wanted to, you know, play a part in showing the world that, 'really, I don't know what you're talking about', you know. So that's part of the competition. But really, to quickly finish off, is to say: we need to find a way to hold opera accountable, and we need ... *that* needs to be our conversation now. And we need to almost start a movement like #BlackLivesMatter, that really holds opera ... Because we can no longer ... I mean, they can't start talking about diversity of the audience: how are you going to diversify the audience if you can't even diversify the cast? How are you going to do that? I mean, if you can't diversify the cast ... if you, if you can't bother to actually say, 'we've got this opera over here, we need 10 Black singers to be part of it. And we are not going to hold our little audition over here and say, "well, if you turn up your turn up; if you don't, you don't"; we're actually going to go into these communities and we're going to find this talent, we are going to do something extra.' I mean ... you know Guildhall, when I told the story that I turned up one day at Guildhall, and I sang for somebody. It was not during their audition period. They could have said, 'we're not hearing people at the moment'. But they did something extra, and that is why I exist in opera. All opera is going to need to do that. You are dealing with people who have come out of *years* of being oppressed. I mean, I came out of South Africa, out of apartheid, thinking 'well, now I'm in the UK; now I'm outside of this.' There's more racism, because ... and especially, because you don't know who to talk to. You know, I keep saying, in South Africa, you ... in many ways, you knew who to talk to, because somebody called you a k---- in your face.⁵⁰ You know, a k----, you know, like n-----, you know. So you knew who to fight; you knew who to resist. Here in Europe, you're told—by people, by the way, who have gone over there and auditioned people—without any accountability, that they didn't find one that is good enough. And you are told after those auditions, that 'sadly, you are not what we were looking for'. What were you looking for, and why can't you come out honestly, and say, 'this is what we're looking for'. So that a Black singer doesn't travel from the States to Europe to sing, when a director knows that the picture of the cast doesn't include a Black singer or an Asian woman. And you make them travel from Africa, from America, and then you tell them afterwards, 'you were a little bit sharp', or 'you were a little bit flat'.

Naomi André: Hmm-mmm ... July ...

July Zuma: Thank you, thank you, Njabulo. To add to that, and more ... I will focus more on the South African side of things. I think it's ... it's, it's, it's ... what we are facing with now, I think of course ... people always say, 'oh, you cannot blame things on the past and the system' and like that. But when ... that, unfortunately, will always be a point of departure. You know, we have to look at: these are the results of what happened in the, in the past. Of course, now we have to find a way: how do we move on and forward about it. But I think the problem that we are facing, even if ... It's also 'fronting', to put a Black face in, in a

⁵⁰ The word Njabulo references here is a derogatory term for Black people in South Africa. Under current South African law, use of the word constitutes hate speech. However, its use continues, especially among conservative white Afrikaans communities.

managerial position, but you know very well that it's just to make the picture look good. That person has no voice, no ... that person has no ... can't decide on anything, you know. It's ... you even see these things when companies have these photo shoots. You know, everybody is displayed so it looks like a very nice rainbow nation, 'we are together'. But when you look at the structures of the companies, how the companies are structured, you know—at the bottom of the list, you know, you find said people of colour, who are mostly going out there to sing and bring in the money, so that the people at the top can have nice good salaries. You know, it's, um, this idea that as a person of colour you don't deserve to be sitting in a certain position that gives you power to ... to take some decisions. And also ... most of it also was based on financial ... you know, you cannot put somebody in a good financial space. For ... for people to ... their salaries, you know, this used to happen, it happens a lot in South Africa: you know, as a singer, as a black singer, your fee is determined by where do you live. If I'm living in a township, therefore, my fee is less. So therefore, you're not appreciating the value and the talent that you're getting, you know. So this, this ... until we also change that mentality, especially in my country, you know, and look at people according to their merit, you know. For me, there will be no CEO of the company sitting there, earning such a big salary, if there is no singer who is going out there to bring in the money. [01:20:56] You know, so for me it always disturbs me greatly when people say, 'we don't have the budget, we don't have the money to pay people', but if I'm looking at your salary, you know, it's ... it says a different story. You know, I think the mentality has to change, that the singers, in general, they are the lowest in this food chain. I think that's where the most of the problem is. And then on top of that to be a man, I mean a person of colour, it even lowers you even, even more, you know. So and ... this unfortunately still exists. And it's very, very sad that we are still talking about it in 2020, after a long time of freedom in the world.

But even that itself, it's just disguised. We are not controlling anything; we're not in charge of anything, because we're not allowed to get into these spaces and have a voice. As Njabulo was saying: if I'm walking ... if a singer walks into the panel, there's got to be somebody who looks like me. So then, you know, you are ... you know, sometimes it's also a language thing as well. You know, we understand each other, you know, according to our background and everything. I can tell, 'oh okay, maybe that singer is just not that they're not talented, you know, that maybe they're having a bad day today'. You know, the singers ... the lifestyle and the way black people live in South Africa is just ... um ... it's just not the same, you know. And I think ... all these problems are really rooted into the system that is operating over there and it spills to these places, and it just spreads like cancer, and then it just goes and destroys everything. I think the core is the inequality in there still plays a huge role. And then it makes everything really shrink. The circle really becomes very, very, very small for people to move around. We're not here in Europe because we love being here; we're looking for better opportunities, unfortunately. Nobody wants to leave their country and spend years and years in another country dealing with bureaucracy, where visas are issued in a different way than other people would get the visa. You know, it's just ... I remember this incident I had: I needed to go and sing in the UK. I live here [in Berlin], I have been living here, I have a Schengen. But I cannot go to the UK with my Schengen visa and the South African passport. But the people from the other side can waltz into South Africa, without any visa, without anything. You know, this always being scrutinized ... You know, I remember a

friend of mine, he was going somewhere and then they had to ... he had to ... to show a video of YouTube that he is actually a singer, he's in this country to sing. You know [laughs]. It's just very, very sad. But I think in my country, specifically ... the problems that everybody is facing—especially black people—is the inequality. And that inequality is fuelled by racism that still exists, but it's really nice to dress up because now we have black people in positions. But they're not, they're just ... you're being put in there and somebody else behind you, runs the show.

Naomi Andre: I have the really awful position, but also a good position of having brought us together, but also having to think about moving, sort of wrapping things up. There are two points I want to bring up from the questions and answers, which I think all of you, hopefully, have had a chance to see.⁵¹ And if we have time, we can sort of quickly jump in on them. Also, I think this is something for the BORN network that we can continue these conversations. This is meant just to be a beginning.

The first question is, 'how should a black singer and his colleagues approach performing a role, such as John the Baptist in Ricard Strauss's *Salomé*, in which the text and the supertitles speak relentlessly of the whiteness of his skin. I ask ... I ask this from an actual experience directing the opera, under these circumstances. It seems to me that I could be starting ... it could be a starting point for a larger discussion today.'

I think this question needs more conversations, because we need to think very carefully about opera and the politics and sensitivity of who's representing whom. We are used to seeing non-black singers perform the roles of Aida, Otello; we're used to seeing non-Asian singers, [non-] Japanese singers performing Butterfly; we're used to seeing non-Chinese singers performing Turandot.⁵² And so these issues of blackface, yellowface, true-to-colour casting, and who gets to represent whom, are so complicated. My own view is that opera needs to have some sort of discussion and contextualisation. Because when there's a voice that can sing Otello, I want to hear it, regardless of the colour. I think we need to open up the pipeline for people of colour to sing these roles. But it's frightening to think of ... in my opinion, that we couldn't have an excellent tenor seeing Otello—who's white—or an excellent black singer sing Susanna or the Countess or Figaro, because the colour of the role and the colour of the singer do not match up.⁵³ I know it's complicated. I know there are bigger things. I think with opera being as real as it feels to us, and real emotions ... it is still on stage, and a leap of the imagination is still okay. And it's still okay to have a John the Baptist or a Narraboth or ... yeah, to go to that specific question: if you've got a great voice of any race, background, person, I want to hear that great voice as an opera lover.⁵⁴ I want to hear that great voice and I'm able to make a leap of faith, and especially if I've got some sort of programme notes or lobby display, or something that can contextualise it.

⁵¹ The Zoom panel ran a concurrent text-based dialogue box, where audience members could address questions to the panelists.

⁵² The roles mentioned here are some of the most famous non-white characters in European canonical operas by Verdi and Puccini.

⁵³ Susanna, the Countess, and Figaro are characters in Mozart's opera, *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786).

⁵⁴ John the Baptist and Narraboth are characters in Richard Strauss's opera, *Salome* (1905).

Let me say one more question ... oh! and we are going to have to close in a second. 'The survival of high school music programs is critical to introducing young black people to the world of classical music'. There's a thank you to us for having this programme. 'Following up on July's comment on the glass ceiling for Black opera administrators: is this not where college programs could step in, offering students a graduate programme in the arts management, that includes placements, such as opera companies and symphonies?' These are wonderful things that we need to have happen.

And here's a great question: 'Where can we learn more about South African folk and classical repertory to learn and teach to our students?' This is one of the main concerns of the Black Opera Research Network. Now ... these are not standard things; it's hard to find. And you *can* look for it, and please do. We are trying to be a website that will have resources. We're thinking of adding an 'education' tab to our site that can be resources, and since black opera in South Africa is *so* near and dear to the founders' hearts, and we're interested in opera on these topics and other parts of the world, please stay tuned. We are putting up a link that talks about indigenous Canadian opera in Canada. So we're really trying to use this as a framework to look broadly ... uhm ... about opera.

Okay. I'm just looking through ... 'Many believe the diversification of orchestras and opera companies lies in music education, in early and high school education'. Yes. And absolutely, we've heard from our panellists, that when you have a visible role model, when you see someone at any age—particularly the younger the age—that will make a difference. When you think of the systemic oppression that these folks on the panel, and so many others, but particularly on our panel—because they have achieved so much—that they had to live through, yet they made it. It shows how exceptionally wonderful these people are. And as we've heard, they've talked about having friends, or a person, or ... I love, Njabulo, when you talked about Guildhall saying, 'okay, let's give you a chance; here, please try this'. There's ... we have a lot of allies out there. And we really appreciate the people out there who are working. But we're working under a system that doesn't allow the allies to have the best final word. We're working under a system where that is not the norm. And there are drastic, emergency issues happening in the opera industry today, that ... I don't want to minimise that. This is not necessarily a feel-good situation, because all of our experiences ... and we've seen this, and I so appreciate your being willing to show that vulnerability in such a big zoom event. This is very painful and tough and I ... these are bold conversations that need to happen. I um ... I hate to say that we are now at an hour and a ... 90 ... we're at 92 minutes, an hour and a half plus two minutes. So unfortunately, we're going to need to stop. I am willing to extend this just for like another three minutes. Are there any final closing remarks? Louise had to leave, but I do want to make this more of a panel having the last word, than me. Can we start with July, move to Patrick, and then Njabulo.

July Zuma: Yes, thank you, and time flies! I didn't even realise. And as you said we really need more time and have such discussions. Because this is also the way to start. We need to open up, we need to talk about things. But also on the other hand, I feel that we as people of colour, we are the ones who are always trying to make these talks. And then ... I even have friends during the ... Floyd thing that happened, and then there was such a discussion; people who are ... of another school skin colour, white people, other people, can start within

themselves in the, even in the space of opera. You have black colleagues like me, and then I had some people interested, ‘oh, so, how ... how ...’ coming forward. But that is so easily ... can just be disturbed by, ‘no, sorry, we have to reschedule because I'm going for dinner with a friend’. And then you never hear from them again. So it's this ... this also, this false sense of, ‘yeah, we want to help, but only when things heat up.’ when things are slowly like ... [gestures flames] ... not hot any more, you don't hear. So I think it's also very important, our colleagues, that they really have to mean what they say. And really try to foll-, make a follow-up. You know, it starts—as Njabulo said earlier on—it starts with colleagues, you know, those guys that should also be with us in this, you know, question themselves: ‘Why is it like ten of us here, just one Njabulo sitting over there?’ You know, so we need to have such conversations and openness. And also, I think during this time of Covid, I think it's a fantastic chance for opera to emerge into something; to let go of the old and start to see, how can we develop the new. The people who are sitting in this position, the intendants and everybody, they are old ideas; maybe they need to be revisited. We need also young people with other kinds of ideas as to where the opera is ... is ta-, is heading on. I am grateful for what they are doing, it's beautiful, but we need another kind of intervention. Thank you.

Naomi André: Thank you so much. Patrick.

Patrick Dailey: That was ... I mean, exactly; I can't say anything else. But I will say this. I think part of what ... and I've said it earlier ... part of what has to also happen, is that we have to work to decolonise the way that we teach and the way that we educate in music, in the arts, across the board. Because ... and then also ... because I think a lot of it is also about, like, kind of centralising the Eurocentric aesthetic. It always is that place—it's like that's ... that's the, that's the central point. And we have to really say, ‘you know what, there are other people who also gave to this. There are other people who have a foundational part of this. And they might look like you, they may come from you.’ And I also say too, you know, people also talk about ... um ... what's the term ... um ... representation matters. Representation does matter, yes. But representation without intention, without accountability, without ... with- ... without movement, without elasticity, without agency, *won't* matter. So all you will see is a talking head. It kind of goes to a lot of what July was saying. We have people who may be in position, but they may only get to do so much. Or they are also working to ensure that nobody else gets there except for themselves. Right. I mean, that's the thing, too. And I think that what we have also seen in this conversation is how ... how very similar and how very ... um ... unite- ... united and unique the black experience in music and arts and singing is across the diaspora. And that's something that we should really take into account, right, that it is not just us over here in the US. It is also our brothers and sisters on the continent; it is also our brothers and sisters in Europe and in other parts of the world, who are having some of these same conversations. The more that we really dig into the ‘world view’—and, you know, and I think this is a little bit more Garvey-esque, so that's a little bit, you know, Marcus Garvey's a little bit out ... is a little bit activist, and that's a little bit of me—but the more that we go into that worldview, and looking at how we can shape it—because it is ... the system is not just in one country; the system permeates from, from the top

all the way out around the globe.⁵⁵ So we really have to ensure that happen. Decolonising the canon. I think another thing that happens too—when somebody talked about those roles and such: you know, you may need to reconstruct some of those shows. I had a colleague, you know, she said, ‘well, then ... that's ... the text talks about my skin being white’. And I said, ‘well, what about it being bright? What about it being shiny? What about it being clear?’ And she said, ‘oh yeah, that works in the translation!’. She had to change the translation, so that it wouldn't be this offensive thing, right. So that's some deep diving work. I guarantee you Verdi, and Otello, and Puccini, and all of these people are not going to come from the grave and get you if you change their stuff. They're dead. Okay, so like ...

Naomi André: Thank you! Yes!

Patrick Dailey: ... like move on! And also, what ... see ... what happens in theatre is: we do respect—in the theatre world, they do respect Rodgers and Hammerstein; they do respect the old shows—but Jason Robert Brown is writing new shows; they are writing new shows all the time; black folks are writing new shows all the time.⁵⁶ We don't have to only do—in our companies, and in this space—only do the ‘old guard works’. People do want to see exciting new things.

Naomi Andre: Thank you so much. Njabulo. Again, I'm sorry, we're running near out of time.

Njabulo Madlala: No, no, that's fine. You know, one thing that I know for sure is that there's not many black singers who are sitting there concerned about singing something that's gonna say the skin is white. We are concerned about having work in the first place. You know, we are not even at that stage where we can be worried about whether the words ... I mean, sometimes I might have sung something like that, but to be honest with you, I really do not care. I'm just grateful to be there, to be singing. Because there are too many operas that don't have such words that we are not singing already. So it seems to me that we are already jumping the conversation to talk about ... But this is also the explanation of why we are not involved in opera. There's always something that's got to be explained very quickly: ‘but what about this, what about ... ?’ No, there are too many— I mean, Figaro ... there's ... I don't know how many operas I could quote, that black people are not singing, but there wouldn't be any problem with them singing them. I mean, composers didn't even specify that this role should be sung; why are we not singing that, you know? So that, that one thing is ...

⁵⁵ Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a Jamaican-born activist for Black empowerment and Black unity. In 1914, he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which promoted Pan-African solidarity, Black academic and cultural self-help, Christianity, and a delinking from white economic structures across the Americas and Africa. He was a crucial figure in the ‘back to Africa’ campaign, which advocated the return of some Black Americans to Africa, to help forge a strong centre of Black power and to protect the continent from white colonial exploitation.

⁵⁶ Jason Robert Brown (b.1950) is an American composer of musicals including *Parade* (1999) and *The Bridges of Madison County* (2014). See <http://jasonrobertbrown.com/>.

I think we can discuss that once we have actually managed to get more opera singers—black opera singers—to sing opera. We will come to that discussion.

The other thing I wanted to say, was: the world has a lot to learn from South Africa. You know, I think the world can really take a look at South Africa. Yes, we are a majority in South Africa. So naturally anytime you walk in a theatre, the majority of people on stage are black people. It's not the same in the audience, but there are too many other factors with that, because people can't afford. But it's not ... usually, it's not the problem that people don't 'get' opera, or they don't like opera, because, actually, sometimes people come to hear us because they are there to support us. You know, and it is made possible, that, in South Africa, because they are going to arrive at the theatre and see *us* perform. So ... and also ... yes, in South Africa we have problems with money. We need to find money for opera and all that, but even the people that are doing stuff there—I mean, you see some white chorus master in a township doing workshops. You see some ... you know, you see ... Last year I took the competition, and we were in a township—probably one of the most dangerous townships—with, with Kamal Khan and ... you know, you know ... and I was thinking ... suddenly I thought to myself, 'wow, look at this! I mean ...'⁵⁷ But to be honest with you, the opera world—now outside of that—will tell you, 'we are employing these ten people to do outreach programs; we are employing this one ...' I mean, some of them even employ people to do ... to address the issue of diversity. All these people employing each other and creating job opportunities for themselves. But really, really, really, it's not really that difficult: if people ... if you can have today, more black opera singers in Europe be from—, people who come from townships in South Africa, why is it not possible to have black singers in a privileged country like Europe, who are black British? Why do you need to ... to know about Pretty Yende,⁵⁸ but hardly know about another one that is a British singer or, you know ...? Why do you need township singers to come and be the 'black opera singers' in the opera world? Because they [decision makers] are not serious. So they ... we need to ... I'm sorry to say this again: we really need to talk about how we can look at this situation really seriously. Because we don't want to say that some of these people are racist, but maybe we need to educate them about what is racist. Because certainly what they're doing is racist.

Naomi Andre: Thank you so much, Njabulo Madlala, Patrick Dailey, July Zuma, and Louise Toppin. I cannot let you know, just the ... the joy. We're seeing this in the comments, saying thank you. Thank you to everybody who has been here, as we've moved a bit longer. And we certainly could go longer. We will leave ... put a transcript that we're getting, and we will put this up online when we figure all this out—sometime in September. Again, thank you. Thank you. It is such a pleasure to share the Black Opera Research Network, and particularly highlighting you, our panellists. Thank you, goodbye.

⁵⁷ American-born conductor and vocal coach Kamal Khan is head of the University of Cape Town Opera School. See <http://www.kamalkhan.com/>.

⁵⁸ Pretty Yende (b.1985) is a Black South African opera singer from the rural town of Piet Retief. She first discovered opera at the age of sixteen when she heard the British Airways advertisement featuring the 'Flower Duet' from Délibes's *Lakmé*. Since her La Scala debut in 2010, she has built a major international career. See <https://prettyyende.com/>.

Transcribed and annotated by Juliana M. Pistorius and Allison R. Smith.