

APOLLO EDUCATION

RESOURCE GUIDE

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THE GATHERING

A COLLECTIVE SONIC RING SHOUT



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his guide for *The Gathering: A Collective Sonic Ring Shout* at the Apollo has been developed for middle and high school students and educators. In the wake of a global pandemic and years of heightened racial injustices, an essential question that “The Gathering” asks is: How do communities reckon with trauma and loss through music, movement, and song?

The Gathering: A Collective Sonic Ring Shout, a new work co-presented by the American Composers Orchestra and the Apollo Theater and co-curated with National Black Theatre, brings the ancestral tradition of the Ring Shout into a contemporary context, taking audiences on a sonic quest rooted in the ritual tradition with a diverse array of multidisciplinary artists.

This guide aims to provide historical and cultural context for teachers and students around various African-American rituals and performative acts of collective memory, grief, celebration, and protest that will be experienced at this event. The articles herein provide pre- and post-performance study materials on topics such as, “The Collective Power of Art in Times of Historical Reckoning”, “A Brief History of the Ring Shout”, and “The Enduring Influence of Black Artists on Western Classical Music”. These articles and other resources will ground and support students through multiple lines of inquiry that can lead to important self- and community-reflection on our times and our futures.

Apollo Education is committed to providing engaging school programs that highlight the rich history of The Apollo and its ongoing significance to Harlem and African American culture. It is our hope that a combination of this guide, our professional learning programs, and our on-demand learning library will support educators in their efforts to foster in their students a comprehension of the importance of cultural diversity, universal practices, and human rights. ■



Ring Shout Gullah Islands,
Synthia SAINT JAMES

THE COLLECTIVE POWER OF ART IN TIMES OF HISTORICAL RECKONING



Black Lives Matter, photo By August Schwerdfeger from Minneapolis, United States.

“I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence. Like failure, chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge—even wisdom. Like art.”

—Toni Morrison, “No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear”, *The Nation*, 2015

Across the globe, it is common practice for people to gather together for shared experiences. Whether they come together in celebration, in mourning, in protest, or in commemoration, there is power in the collective energy of a gathering of souls united in purpose and participation. Since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, we have witnessed a dynamic range of national events that have called on us to gather together and harness the power of numbers in response to social challenges such

as voter turnout, feeding the hungry, supporting essential workers, and calling for justice in cases of police violence and domestic terror. We have rallied around the world and painted murals in the streets. We have written legislation and songs of rage and remembrance. We have voted and watched the tides of retrenchment and resentment rise in response. While American communities take pride in their ability to rally together in a crisis, when traumatic events build over a period of years, it takes intentional and creative energies

The Collective Power of Art, continued from page 4

to channel and sustain our collective energies into acts of healing. So, what's next?

This spring, The Apollo presents a series of public performances under the title, *The Gathering: A Collective Sonic Ring Shout*, with the aim to bring artists and community members together to bear witness to our shared struggles and to cultivate a renewed energy of hope and healing. Rooted in traditional and contemporary artistic practices to promote belonging and wellness, these programs will convene the community for a range of liberatory experiences through the arts. In March, *Healing, Joy, and Liberation: Mental Health and the Arts* draws upon the healing power of the arts to inspire community advocacy and joy. In April, *New Black Fest* explores how artists of the Harlem Renaissance responded to the historic events that shaped their time, and how contemporary creatives and playwrights are dealing with the issues of the present

choir, this event features new musical works, including New York premieres by Courtney Bryan and Joel Thompson paired with commissions from Toshi Reagon, Jason Michael Webb, and Nona Hendryx, created to honor our present need for a collective space of remembrance.

In 2022, as we grapple with the persistent inequities in our health care, political, educational, labor and justice systems, we can draw connections to the struggles of previous generations pushing against and through the limits of myriad challenges including forced migration, Jim Crow segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Today, the recurring tensions and traumas of racism have delivered us, once again, to a place of historical reckoning. Black American artists and performers have a long tradition of using their art to capture the social and political zeitgeist of the times in which they live. Weaving together joy and pain, visual and performing artists have produced transcendent



Children from Mulemba Primary School in Maganga da Costa participating in a traditional circle dance.

moment. *Resistance and Healing: Engaging the Ring Shout* examines the African diasporan history of the Ring Shout as a community practice. The series culminates in May with, *The Gathering: A Collective Sonic Ring Shout*, that takes audiences on a sonic quest rooted in the ritual tradition of the Ring Shout with a diverse array of contemporary multidisciplinary artists. Anchored by an 80-member orchestra and a 50-voice

odes to the complexity of being human throughout the ages and in a full range of forms from folk songs to jazz, from hip hop to rock, from the blues to funk, and from classical to R&B. Whenever there is communal struggle, we ask ourselves, *How do we get through it?* The answer is TOGETHER. When we ask ourselves, *What should we do?* The answer is WE GATHER. ■

NEW YORK PREMIERES | PRODUCTION NOTES

SANCTUM

BY COURTNEY BRYAN

Courtney Bryan is “a pianist and composer of panoramic interests” (New York Times). Her music is in conversation with various musical genres,



including jazz and other types of experimental music, as well as traditional gospel, spirituals, and hymns.

Sanctum explores the sound of improvisation in Holiness-preaching traditions. I draw inspiration from recorded sermons, *The Praying Slave Lady* by Pastor Shirley Caesar and *The Eagle Stirs Her Nest* by Reverend C. L. Franklin, and Reverend Charles Albert Tindley's hymn, *Stand By Me*. Included are the voices of Marlene Pinnock and of activists in Ferguson, Missouri from 2014. By employing techniques of layered repetition, rhythmic intensity, sounds of moaning and whooping, *Sanctum* invokes solace found in the midst of persecution and tribulation.

[Interview with Courtney Bryan](#)
[and Sanctum video](#)

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF

THE UNARMED

BY JOEL THOMPSON

Joel Thompson is an Atlanta-based composer, conductor, and educator, best known for the choral work, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, which was premiered November 2015 by the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club and Dr. Eugene Rogers and won the 2018 American Prize for Choral Composition. His music has been performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra,



Chicago Sinfonietta, Atlanta Master Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, EXIGENCE, and the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. Currently a doctoral student at the Yale School of Music, Thompson has written a new opera, *The Snowy Day*, based on the book by Ezra Jack Keats, will premiere

December 2021 at the Houston Grand Opera.

In November of 2014, a Staten Island grand jury chose not to indict the officer whose actions led to the death of Eric Garner.

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed wasn't written to be heard. It was essentially a sonic diary entry expressing my fear, anger, and grief in the wake of this tragedy. I was serving as director of choral studies and assistant professor of music at Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia and my musical life mostly consisted of conducting and piano, but I occasionally composed pieces and hid them away. Finishing this work in early January 2015 was a much-needed catharsis; I felt exorcized of the emotions that had drained my spirit. However, Freddie Gray's death the following April urged me to try to bring Seven Last Words of the Unarmed to life. A Facebook post asking musician friends to sight read the work, a phone call by a friend to Dr. Eugene Rogers of the University of Michigan, a commission from Andre Dowell to fully orchestrate the work for the 20th anniversary of the Sphinx Organization, and the piece is alive five years later and I am very grateful.

Liturgical settings of the Seven Last Words of Christ are not attempting to demonize the Roman soldiers that orchestrated the crucifixion, but they are designed to stir within the listener an empathy towards the suffering of Jesus. Similarly, this piece is not an anti-police protest work; it is really a meditation on the lives of these black

Continued on next page

men and an effort to focus on their humanity, which is often eradicated in the media to justify their deaths.

Listening to Seven Last Words of the Unarmed can be uncomfortable. As you listen, I ask that you try to remain open. It can be easy to let a spirit of defensiveness pollute the experience of the piece. I ask that you revisit the last moments of these men with fresh hearts. Joel Thompson's [Letter to the listener](#)

CHELSEA TIPTON, II CONDUCTOR



Lauded by The New York Times for “leading sweeping and vibrant performances of “Rhapsody” and “An American in Paris” as a last minute replacement for Robert Spano to conduct an all-Gershwin season finale with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, American conductor [Chelsea Tipton, II](#) has won over audiences and critics alike with his vibrant musicality, accessibility, versatility and extraordinary commitment to Arts education. ■

PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE

Key Ideas and Essential Questions for “The Gathering” Performance

REQUIEM

What is a Requiem? How do we remember the dead (the fallen, lost loved ones)? How do we honor our loved ones who have passed? How does a community honor the lives of its citizens or members? What role do memorials, monuments, ‘day of remembrance’ rituals play in our local and national communities?

RITUALS

What are they? What rituals do we/our families participate in and why? How do rituals define private and public spaces? How can we recognize and respect the diversity of rituals that different communities practice?

SOCIAL ACTIVISM

How do artists address contemporary social, political, and cultural issues in their art? How do artists wrangle with justice and injustice in various forms?

COLLECTIVISM, COMMUNITY ACTION, AND CIVICS

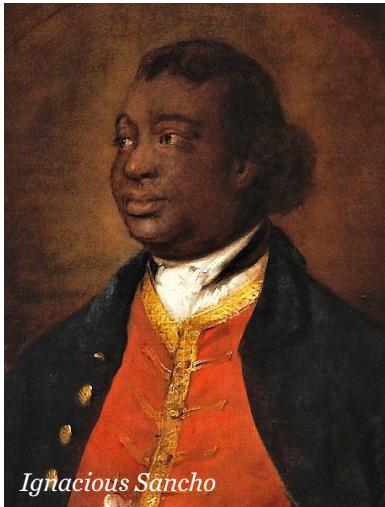
What is the role of the citizens in local, national, and global communities? How do communities define and protect ideas of ‘commonwealth’ and ‘common good’?

HISTORICAL RECKONING

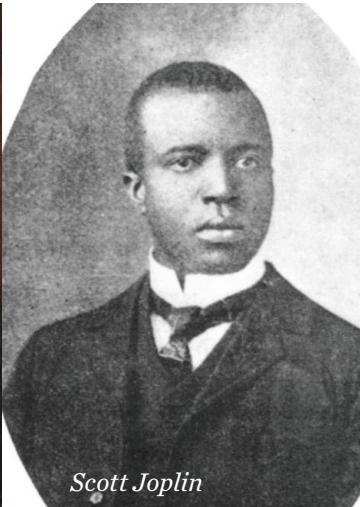
How are Americans working to come to terms with its past? What is the difference between social progress and social retrenchment? What are “culture wars”? What are the different ways we see political differences debated in society (e.g. in our government, communities, schools, and families)? What visions or hopes for peace and reconciliation do each of us hold?

THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF BLACK ARTISTS ON WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC

BY KEVIN JAMES, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION,
AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA



Ignacious Sancho



Scott Joplin



Joseph Bologne



Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Throughout the history of Western classical music, Black artists have been an influential force on the highest level. Many of their contributions are only traceable by their racialized monikers that overshadow their actual names. In the 1700's in France composer Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, a prolific composer and among the finest violinists of his day, was known as the "Black Mozart". Around the same time, born into slavery, Ignacious Sancho would become a leading composer, writer and abolitionist in England. Beethoven wrote one of his most famous concertos for the Black composer and violinist, George Bridgetower. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who lived at the turn of the 20th Century, was known as the "African Mahler".

What do we mean when we say "classical music"? For many people, the term evokes images of a large orchestra with copious numbers of string players seated on a stage in a grand hall, wearing tuxedos and gowns performing

the music of wig-wearing white men for an audience of ostentatiously wealthy patrons. While this image can still play out, it can be limiting and does not explain the many forms in which we find "classical music" living in the modern world. Organizations such as The Apollo and the American Composers Orchestra are working through programs such as "The Gathering" to change the way that classical music is practiced and perceived in the 21st century.

A great way to explore an expanded and historically inclusive definition of classical music is through the music of Scott Joplin, a Black American composer known as the "King of Ragtime". (Listen to his super famous composition ["The Entertainer"](#) from 1902). There is a bridge from Joplin's work to the contemporary Black composers Courtney Bryan, and Joel Thompson, whose works will be performed by the American Composers Orchestra as part of "The Gathering: A Collective Sonic Ring Shout". Most of the time, "classical" music is distinguished by the concept of *development*. Scott

Continued on next page

Joplin is best known for composing “Rags” - short, fun, repetitive tunes that fall within an easily recognizable and consistent style called Ragtime. Mr. Joplin also wrote an opera titled “Treemonisha”, that explored a wide diversity of styles, including Black spirituals, and a musical call and response meant to capture the fervor of a Black preacher and his congregation.

The opera used the same sorts of thematic materials found in his rags, but *developed* those themes, stretched them, combined them with other styles, and sometimes transformed them completely in order to convey the widest range of human emotion and experience. It also captured Joplin’s feelings on the nature of Black existence in his time.

Courtney Bryan, like Joplin, is a virtuosic jazz pianist. Also like Joplin, Ms. Bryan takes elements from “non-classical” traditions such as jazz, gospel, and even street chants and *develops* those sounds into something utterly personal. This is where we touch on the deep influence of Black composers on current musical trends. Ms. Bryan’s work is titled “Sanctum” and it uses recorded samples of sermons, hymns, and protesters to invoke solace in the midst of persecution. Classical composers of earlier centuries titled their works things like “Sonata in Eb minor” or “Allegretto” (a reference to the tempo of the piece). Morals and messages were generally the domain of opera, where words and acting could assure the clarity of intent. Over about the past 100 years, though, this has dramatically changed, in large part, at least in America, due to the infusion of Black culture and Black musical traditions into the world of orchestral music.

Joel Thompson’s work, on the other hand, titled “Seven Last Words of the Unarmed”, forgoes musical language that’s unique to the Black experience. Like Joplin, though, it borrows formal techniques from earlier eras, in this case referencing “The Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross”, by Joseph Haydn, and combines them with more contemporary approaches to painfully and empathetically illuminate the words in a way that again defines the nature of the Black existence in our time.

Each of the works on the programs this spring does exactly what we expect of art, representing the very personal experiences of the composers, connecting those experiences to our own, placing them into a context of history and cultural meaning, and making us a deeper community for having experienced them. ■



RECOMMENDED COMPOSERS TO EXPLORE

William Grant Still

Margaret Bonds

Florence Price

Terence Blanchard

Adolphus Hailstork

Undine Smith Moore

Zenobia Powell Perry

George Walker

Wynton Marsalis

Tania Leon

Brian Nabors

Ollie Wilson

George Lewis

Pamela Z

Jessie Montgomery

Jeffrey Mumford

Michael Abels

Ysaye Barnwell

Valerie Coleman

Carlos Carillo

Anthony Davis

Jonathan Bailey Holland

Nathalie Joachim

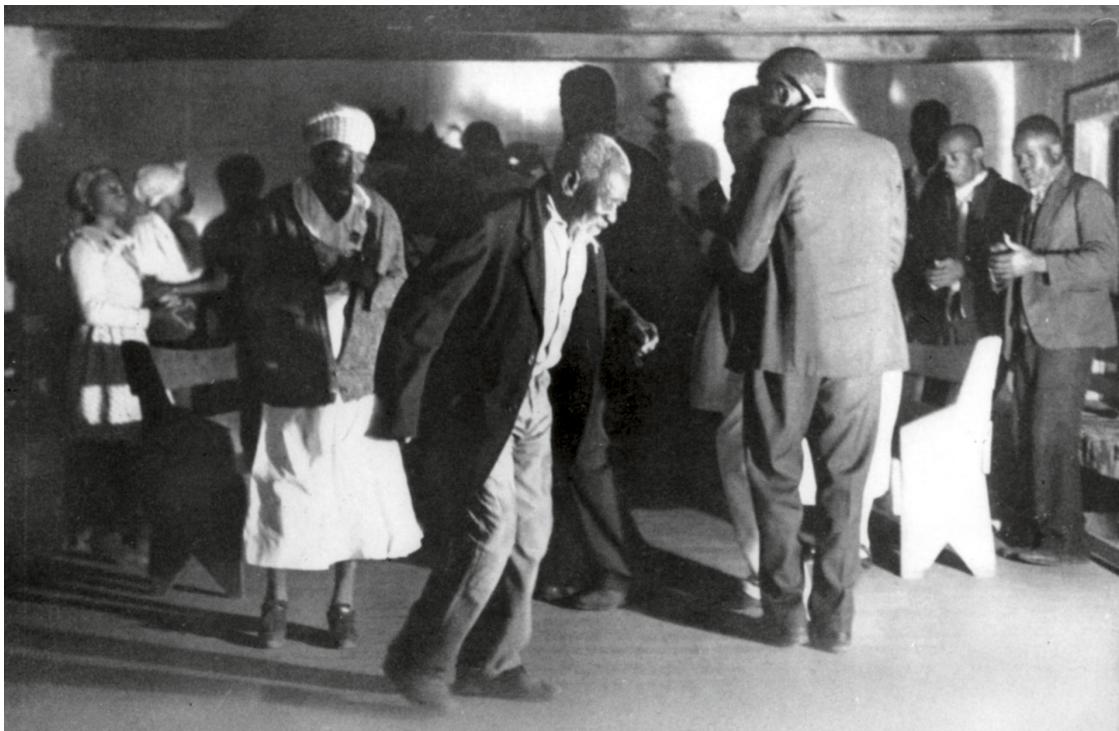
Hannibal Lokumbe

Alvin Singleton

Shelly Washington

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RING SHOUT

BY DEIRDRE HOLLMAN



Doing the Ring Shout in Georgia, ca. 1930s Members of the Gullah community express their spirituality through the “ring shout” during a service at a local “praise house.” Image courtesy of Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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The Ring Shout, one of the oldest African American musical traditions, is a combination of music, dance, and song. Invoked at birth, marriage, planting, seasonal change, or death, the Ring Shout can be both celebratory and solemn.

Men, women, and children first gather in a circle, small or large. The gathering can be formal or impromptu (improvised) as people begin to move slowly in a counter-clockwise circle to a beat or cadence started by a drum or another musical instrument, or themselves. Hand clapping, foot stomping, or vocal calls, can be enough to start the shout. The shout itself is then simply following the rhythm and path of the ring leader. Vocally, participants may follow the call and response of the leader, or each other, or create musical rhythms by mouth, hands, and feet. They may also move silently, making sound only with their hands or feet, in a way dictated by the spirit of the occasion.

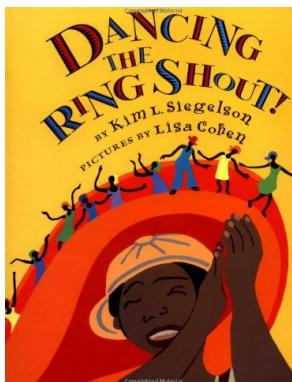
With origins in Africa as a form of traditional circle dance, the Ring Shout was performed in a variety of cultural ways throughout North America, South America, and the Caribbean. The Ring Shout contained all of the musical elements that later evolved into other musical styles, including gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues.

The Ring Shout survives today in communities of the American South that honor the traditional form as a cultural practice. We can also trace the legacy of the Ring Shout in hip hop cultures’ practice of rap and dance cyphers where body percussion, call and response rap vocals, and dance are combined in sessions of collective creativity.

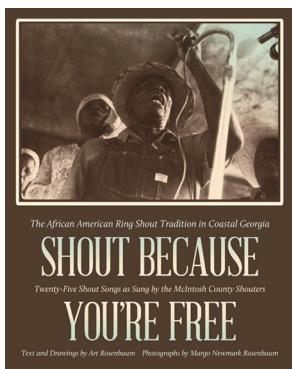
This article, in part, is excerpted with permission from a 2005 educational brochure written by historian Christopher Moore and educator Deirdre Hollman on the occasion of the Youth Ring Shout Ceremony at the 2005 New York African Burial Ground Ancestral Heritage Event. ■

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED LEARNING ABOUT THE RING SHOUT

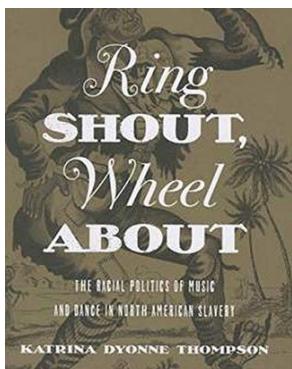
BOOKS



Dancing the Ring Shout!
By Kim Siegelson, pictures by
Lisa Cohen



**Shout Because You're Free:
The African American Ring
Shout Tradition in Coastal
Georgia** By Art Rosenbaum,
photographs by Margo
Rosenbaum



**Ring Shout, Wheel About:
The Racial Politics of
Music and Dance in North
American Slavery** By Katrina
Dyonne Thompson

ARTICLES AND WEBSITES



[In Anacostia, 'Ring Shouters' Break World Record | WAMU](#)

[The Rabbit and the Wolf Blues: some notes on the echoes of the "ring shout" - No Depression](#)

[Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters event | Unwind | indexjournal.com](#)

VIDEOS AND PERFORMANCES



[McIntosh County Shouters: Gullah-Geechee Ring Shout from Georgia | Library of Congress](#)

[Episode of Down Yonder with the McIntosh County Shouters - Digital Library of Georgia](#)

["Run Old Jeremiah": Echoes of the Ring Shout](#)

ART SPOTLIGHT



Table & Activity Book for Young Artists) and *Selena's Colourful Island*.

SAINT JAMES is most noted for designing the first Kwanzaa Stamp for the U.S. Postal Service in 1997, the cover art of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* and Iyanla Vanzant's *Acts of Faith*. She is a popular keynote speaker, educator and public art designer who has garnered numerous awards during her artistic career spanning over 50 years. The prestigious Trumpet Award, a Coretta Scott King Award, a HistoryMaker Award, and an Honorary Doctorate Degree from Saint Augustine's University are a mere sampling.

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE APOLLO THEATER

The legendary Apollo Theater—the soul of American culture—plays a vital role in cultivating emerging artists and launching legends. Since its founding, the Apollo has served as a center of innovation and a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the world. With music at its core, the Apollo's programming extends to dance, theater, spoken word, and more.

Since introducing the first Amateur Night contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater has served as a testing ground for new artists working across a variety of art forms and has ushered in the emergence of many new musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Among the countless legendary performers who launched their careers at the Apollo are D'Angelo, Lauryn Hill, H.E.R., Machine Gun Kelly, Miri Ben Ari, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, James Brown, Gladys Knight, Luther Vandross, and Stevie Wonder; and the Apollo's forward-looking artistic vision continues to build on this legacy.

ABOUT APOLLO EDUCATION

Apollo Theater Education extends the Apollo's commitment to enhancing the life of our community. Apollo Education focuses on four distinct areas of learning and engagement: residencies, workshops and tours for schools; curriculum materials aligned to state and national learning standards and study guides derived from the Apollo's history; career development for teens and adults through the Apollo Theater Academy; and discussions and lectures for the public that highlight the history of the Apollo and its impact on American art, culture and entertainment.

PHOTO/IMAGES/ VIDEO CREDITS:

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P5, *Children in circle*, © UNICEF/
UNI46342/Pirozzi

P6, *Courtney Bryan*, photo by Arielle Pentes, Courtesy of Courtney Bryan

Joel Thompson, photo courtesy of Joel Thompson

P8, *Scott Joplin*, unknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges D'après Mather Brown (1761–1831) & William Ward (1766–1826), public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, by unknown author, restored by Adam Cuerden - Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5107726>

P11, *Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters*, P9
Paul Meacham/Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters

McIntosh County Shouters
Margo Newmark Rosenbaum

Shout Because You're Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia by Art Rosenbaum, Photographs by Margo Newmar Rosenbaum. University of Georgia Press, 1998, 2013

Ring Shout, Wheel About: The Racial Politics of Music and Dance in North American Slavery by Katrina Dyonne Thompson, Courtesy University of Illinois Press

Interview with Courtney Bryan and Sanctum video

Oberlin Conservatory Sinfonietta Sanctum (2020) by Courtney Bryan Timothy Weiss, conductor Date of broadcast: March 6, 2021

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed by Joel Thompson

Performed by the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club

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Co-Curated with National Black Theatre

In Partnership with Gateways Music Festival and Harlem Chamber Players

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