

### **{Intro Music}**

This is the Institute for Music Leadership.

**Garrett:** Can y'all hear me OK?

**Dalanie:** Yeah.

**Stephen:** Yes.

**Garrett** OK, I'm going through it, right [now], Dalanie. Next time we collaborate, one of the things we need to talk about is the maintenance of all of the hardware and software required to create this sort of content because I'm going through it right now with my Focusrite.

**Stephen:** Hey everyone. This is Stephen Biegner, and for this episode of Create. Inspire. Lead. I'm actually recording this on my phone – hence the lower quality. I'm dealing with a family thing back home and totally didn't pack my microphone, so here we are.

So...I've been working on this episode for a while: Listening to the tape, reading over the transcript... And, anything I was thinking of doing, I just decided to abandon. This episode is an interview that's hosted by Dalanie Harris. She's the co-host and co-founder of the Classically Black Podcast. We actually have an episode with Dalanie and Katie talking all about their podcast which I highly recommend – and she interviewed Garrett McQueen, who is just incredible. He hosts the podcast, Trilloquy, he's a bassoonist, and a big advocate for Black music and composers, and he does so many other things as well. And, normally, I go through and piece together a story from the interviews we do on this show, and I narrate and interrupt and interject, and the more I listened to this conversation, the more I thought that my usual approach wasn't really helping in any way.

The conversation that Dalanie and Garrett have I think works best when it's unfiltered, and absent of any little interjections I could make. There is a conversation that the three of us have after Dalanie wraps up her interview. And I think that I could use some of that material for a quote/unquote traditional episode for this podcast anyway, but I think the best thing to do for this interview is to just play it and just hear what Dalanie and Garrett have to say. So, without any more from me, here is the uninterrupted interview between Dalanie Harris and Garrett McQueen.

**Dalanie:** \Alright. Hey, ya'll, my name is Dalanie Harris. I'm currently a student at Eastman in my last semester and I'm studying double bass performance. I also do podcasting. I'm the co-host of Classically Black Podcast, where we talk about classical music, Black culture and the intersection of the two of them. So, I'm happy to be guest hosting this episode of the IML podcast. With me, I have a very special guest, Mr. Garrett McQueen. And I will let Garrett tell us a little bit about his himself and his musical journey.

**Garrett:** Yes. Well, first and foremost, thank you so much for having me. It's always a pleasure to collaborate with you. You know, I'll start by just telling a quick story. When I was in, I guess when I was in the seventh grade, there was a senior, a twelfth grader at the school whose name is Thaddeus Crutcher, and he played bassoon and he got into the Eastman School of Music. And, you know, the big deal that they made out of that, you know, really introduced me to the world of the arts in a in an interesting way, because the Eastman School of Music was put up on this pedestal as one of these impossible places to, you know, get into. And while, you know, I've gone to and through the profession of orchestral performance, I still think of the Eastman School of Music as, you know, one of those really important institutions when it comes to everything that's going on in this so-called classical music. So just my way of saying, you know, I'm always honored to work with lots of institutions and being able to collaborate on this podcast is really an honor for me.

So, yes, for folks who don't know who I am, my name is Garrett McQueen. I am a content creator. I'm an arts consultant. I'm a podcaster or I have a show called Trilloquy that comes out every Wednesday, a show that really challenges what it means to have a discussion on classical music or so-called classical music, as I say, and what it looks like when those conversations meet conversations from outside of the concert hall, as we say. So, it's a lot of orchestral stuff, lots of hip-hop and everything in between. So yeah, that's sort of my main gig. And my other projects include hosting different panels and discussions for institutions. I recently did one for the National Philharmonic Orchestra. I've worked with the Kennedy Center, the Gateway's Music Festival, the Sphinx organization and many other institutions. I'm hosting create content for radio stations. One of the things I'm doing right now... I'm in the middle of a series in collaboration with KVNO fm out of Omaha, Nebraska, a show at the intersection of the 13th Amendment and classical music.

So, you know, just little things like that. And when I'm not busy doing all of those other things and answering the e-mails that come with that sort of work, I'm just here playing my bassoon, keeping up my musicianship and really doing everything I can to make sure that this art form that we all fell in love with can survive and can continue to be relevant in this ever-changing world.

**Dalanie:** Yeah, I mean, Garrett is the epitome of booked and busy. I was just like, every time I wake up, it's like Garrett's doing something else. I was like, you know what?

**Garrett:** Yes, and I don't even post everything because I don't try to be bragging like that, see? No, but I'm very, very grateful for the work. You know, anyone who doesn't know me and Googles my name, you know, there won't be too many links that will come before, you know, a big story about my termination from a big organization. So, you know, we often think about how scary it is, especially this year, to be without that 9:00 to 5:00 or that orchestra job or that whatever.

But, you know, these past few months for me have just been a testament to how dynamic classically trained musicians can be, the opportunities that are there and how we can use those

opportunities, use the unique nature of working on your own and really being dedicated to this work, you know how that can have a really heavy impact. So, as much as I'm fiery and always down to challenge the status quo, I'm equally thankful and grateful for everyone and every institution that is really engaged in this conversation and helping me and folks like me continue our careers at this intersection of activism and racial justice and classical music.

**Dalanie:** So I want to first introduce a project that's been going on at Eastman for the past couple of months because I think it's pretty relevant to what's been going on in, I mean, across every field, really. But, you know, in the classical music, you know, quote/unquote field and in the arts field in general.

So, in June, Eastman announced the formation of the Eastman Action Commission for Racial Justice. And it's essentially a commission of 20 people across the Eastman community. There were a few students, myself included, some staff, some faculty, some alumni and some community partners from around Eastman who kind of came together to form this commission that was split into work groups to kind of address different facets of, I guess, the work that needs to be done by Eastman and kind of put together a report that would give, first of all, some background on what has been going on at Eastman, because, obviously, you know, nothing like this had ever been done before, and Eastman is coming up on its centennial next year and then also give some recommendations for how Eastman might move forward.

So, a lot of arts institutions have been coming out with initiatives like this, this year. There these diversity committees, these diversity executive positions, whatever that that may look like. I'm sorry, as someone who's been deeply involved in the work over time, can you tell me a little bit about what your reaction was to this a couple of months ago when it was just sort of this boom of DEI work?

**Garrett:** Yeah, so I began by praising Eastman and now you talk about one hundred years of the institution. So that means 99 of the years, none of this mattered. You know, 99 of the years, as far as y'all were concerned. Black musicians, Black composers, Black history in classical music did not exist. And maybe I shouldn't go that far but, you know, I think just looking at that fact is a testament to the frustration of so many Black folks for this reality that we've lived under, you know, the very specifically challenging reality at the intersection of being Black in classical music. This has always been our experience and to varying degrees and in different ways, depending on the individual's journey. But, you know, those experiences are there.

So, for this to all of a sudden for someone to have to lose their life not far from where I'm sitting right now, actually... For someone to have to lose their life for these conversations, to really take a front seat and for action behind those conversations to begin to happen after all of this time, it's frustrating. So, yeah, I definitely feel that frustration, but more than I feel the frustration, I feel the unique opportunity that we have to really push and to really not be shy in this time. There are many folks who have told me...who are older than me that talk about not seeing this much energy, this much movement since the second civil rights movement back in the 60s. So, you know, we're in a time in history when things are being written down. People are listening.

People are experimenting with what it means to look at things from a new... from a renewed perspective, I should say.

So, yeah, the frustration is there. But more than I feel that frustration, I feel the obligation and the urgency to really do everything I can in this unique moment before the opportunity passes away. You know, back in May of this year, 20/20 of the conversations were really heightened. I think we've all seen it sort of fade away slowly over those past seven or eight months. So, the time is running out. We don't have a lot of time and that really pushes my everyday work, you know, my all-day, everyday work in in this in this field.

**Dalanie:** Yeah. And that's, totally in line with something I was thinking about when this all started happening because people were like, "Wow, this murder had to occur." And it got me thinking about what was different, you know, this time because also it's like this is not the first time and won't be the last time we've watched somebody, you know, die. Well, it be the last time that I will because, you know, I'm not searching that up anymore, right? Frankly. But that we watch somebody die on tape and something that was completely unavoidable. And I feel like this time around, there was this kind of shift in the culture that just did not allow people to remain silent in without, you know, being culpable for what's going on. You know, I just feel like there's been this shift, and I know some people have said maybe it's heightened because of the pandemic, we're all at home and it's very much inescapable.

But, yeah, I know that there's been some varied reactions, you know. And I always have mixed emotions about things like this, when these committees are put together, because like I said, on one hand, in some cases, rather, there are these jobs being put in place, someone that is going to be a permanent part of the institution and that's still going to be probably part of Eastman. But more importantly, these are people with salaries and benefits. And that's something that was lacking in this situation that really had me conflicted about whether or not to participate, you know, to be frank. And I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on that, because, you know, part of the work and part of being equitable is realizing the emotional labor and the effort that goes into combating these issues, especially for Black people and recognizing that and, you know, being equitable in that you are compensating them or you are in some way, I guess, supporting them in their work and in this entire in this huge endeavor that there that they're partaking in that is so clearly more laborious than even for anyone else.

**Garrett:** Yeah. I mean, if I can speak to one of the things you said, how, you know, it was something all of the events of this year were things that folks could not ignore. I remember the first opus of my podcast that I mean, shout out to Scott Blankenship, that me and Scott recorded after the big uprisings here in the Twin Cities. We talked about a piece by Aaron Copeland called *Our Town*. So, when we think about America and the American Dream and all of those sorts of things, you know, there's often the image of this neighborhood with the white picket fences and everything's perfect. Well, as we saw this year, you know, those white picket fence neighborhoods were at the center in many cases at the center of those uprisings and those protests, you know, those pristine places that are off separate, you know, now they don't have a choice but to be involved in the conversation because it's right at your doorstep.

I think that that applies to classical music in a big way because it has inspired many of us to talk about our different experiences. You know, right now I'm thinking about one of the... I guess it was the last... my timeline is so weird on when I listen to my shows and things so I don't remember if it was the last episode of Classically Black or before that talking about hair, black hair. You know, that is a conversation that so many people just would never even think about. You know, what are the implications of me with locks? You know, you wear a natural hair in the concert hall. The experience is there in who has told us to cut our hair, who is said that our hair is distracting or whatever you know, so. And then when you tie in with, and I don't want to go down the list naming, you know, these people who have lost their lives to the police. But when you think about a Elijah McClain, you know, a violinist, you know, that's yet another example of how this conversation has really come to the front doorstep of institutions and populaces that have always considered themselves separate from that sort of thing.

So to say with all of that as the frame, as the foundation, when you have some of these people and some of these institutions who don't have those experiences looking to build something up out of nowhere and inviting us to be involved in that, you know, I think it's our responsibility as Black folks to understand how we can push equity in the way we move with those organizations. So, don't let those organizations just take advantage of your time. Don't let them pimp out the pain. Really ask yourself and ask that in that institution, what's in it for me? You know, and I think the institutions looking to engage folks like us need to understand that, you know, an equitable practice is really paying, you know, for those perspectives, paying for that work in the same way that you would pay an expert in consultation to help you fix your organization in whichever way, you know, as Black classical musicians, especially those of us who have managed to overcome the audition screen tenure, all of those things. You know, we are experts in this very unique experience that we're highlighting and trying to make better for everyone else.

So, I think one of the first steps, if not step one, is making sure that the institutions understand how valuable, the content is that's being created by these individuals, how valuable the perspective is, how valuable that time is and what you're willing to put forward. You know, in receiving those things. How much you really value, whether it's money or whether it's highlighting a person's work or advertising and giving them a platform. You know, I think we were really starting to see what institutions value when it comes to making these changes. And those institutions have to understand that the value doesn't come from anywhere. How is that value going to manifest from you and how is that being done equitably when you think about the folks that you collaborate with and ask to be on your panel or to be on your committee or whatever you're working on?

**Dalanie:** So, this work has been coming to the forefront for a lot of different institutions in the field. I want to transition into talking a little bit more specifically about conservatories or music schools or schools of music, as Eastman likes to call it. I always kind of laugh at that because Eastman prides itself on not necessarily being a conservatory. It's a comprehensive school of music. I'd say if it walks like a conservatory, it talks like a conservatory, it's a conservatory. Just

thinking back, I'm like, there's really not much comprehensive about... I'm sorry I haven't played a Black composer my entire four years except on my recital, which I program so that doesn't count. But, I want to talk a little bit about conservatories. What do you think their role is in this work? Are there aspects of that work that are unique to them? As opposed to orchestras or operas or ballets or other cultural institutions like that?

**Garrett:** Yeah, so I think there are two parts of that conversation. So, on one side... and I got the opportunity to say this to the president of Juilliard some years ago. One side is dispelling the idea that getting into these schools is some sort of prize or some sort of accolade in itself. At the beginning of this conversation, I spoke to how folks acted when Thaddeus Crutcher from Memphis got into Eastman. So as a kid, for me, that was exciting. I've never heard of this school and this is so prestigious. In my adult mind now, I think about, "Well, why don't we put these other institutions up on the same pedestal?" I'm not conservatory trained. I went to the University of Memphis and the University of Southern California, but I still got the music education that I needed to be successful. So, I think one of the things is that conservatories need to understand that they need to get off of the throne, get down from the pedestal and really affirm other institutions that have produced musical talent that's gone into this field. I think that's one thing.

The other side of it, I think, is understanding and realizing the reality that schools like Eastman will always have that stature for some people. There's just no dispelling that. There are going to be a lot of people who will always look up to Eastman in institutions like those as the pinnacle of music education and preparation for the orchestral field. So, understanding that, I think the institutions have to not take for granted what certain things mean or the visibility - how things read both on the positive and the negative. If Eastman is really censoring racial equity when it comes to who it admits, maybe that will inspire other conservatories to think about more equitable audition practices. Maybe making more regional live auditions, a possibility or whatever they need to do. You know, and on the negative, if an institution like Eastman is really just ignoring what's going on in this 2020. I'm not as up on the news as I should be, but I understand there's even some Rochester specific things that have been going on this year when we talk about racial equity and police brutality. So, if an institution like Eastman is ignoring that, being up on that pedestal, that's something that we all see as well. So, yeah, that's why I described it as two sides of the coin.

On one end it's get off your high horse. You can set an example by affirming the other institutions as equally viable and equally important. But then, on the other hand, understanding how some people will always see you up on that pedestal. Be that example and understand with that visibility, people see your institution as what's right and wrong. What's normal practice and what's left field. So, institutions like Eastman can really help make that shift and turn certain things that are fringe right now, radical right now into just foundational normal parts of going to a conservatory and getting a music education, that sort of music education.

**Dalanie:** Yeah, and that part about setting an example - It's crazy how when one institution does it, the others really do follow suit, because I remember when Manhattan School of Music

was, I think, the first ones to come out with anything sort of even in this realm of DEI earlier, at least in this... a new set of uprisings this year, because when they came out with the announcement that they would be programming at least one work by an African-American composer on every concert that they would do for the next year or something. That's kind of when it started to act like a domino effect. Because Katie and I were like, I feel like everybody is calling their emergency meetings. The weekend after that happened, and after that, you just saw people were just rolling out, "OK this is what we're doing, this is what we're doing." And it's crazy to think that if one institution had not done that, I feel like a lot of these initiatives might not have existed.

**Garrett:** And again, the big institutions, because...and I think about this more when it comes to the orchestras: big orchestras versus small orchestras, but I'm sure it can apply to schools as well. The smaller institutions have really been exploring this for a while. You know, back in - Oh, my goodness, maybe 2015 or 2016 back when I was with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, we were playing Florence Price then and not just on Black History Month. You know, she was on regular subscription programs and we even put her *Dances in the Canebreaks* on the Fourth of July Pops. That you do that when we talk about [American...] And I'm sure there are many other institutions that we just don't know about that don't have that visibility that have been doing similar things.

So, when a school like the Manhattan School of Music, a very famous music school, when they do something like that, like you said, the other institutions that are trying to compete, that are trying to be seen as equitable or attractive to students or whatever, you know, funders, even, they're going to do the same thing. But even there, I would look very carefully, because if the Manhattan School of Music affirmed that every concert is going to have at least one piece of music by an African-American composer, I'm going to do two things. I'm going to look at in what capacity? Is it a symphony? Is it one of the larger pieces or is it the little, Gospel-y sort of encore or introduction? Is it that? And then even beyond that, you know, you said African-American. So that means I better not see any Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges. Or I better not see any Samuel Coleridge-Taylor or even any Errollyn Wallen. So under, doing those things, there's still opportunities to understand the implications of certain phrases, certain words. How we are so afraid to say Black instead of, you know, African-American and nothing to give us that phrase African-American.

But I think when we affirm Blackness, you know, we really affirm it as something global, even in classical music. That's where we pull in the Samuel Coleridge Taylor's and Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges and those folks. So, on top of being that example and really pushing the needle and stepping out first, you have to be open to the criticism of standing out first and the critique of standing out first, because that's the only way we're going to change. People want this to be a comfortable sort of process, something that feels good, something that even feels natural.

OK, and not to get on my soapbox here, I didn't come to preach to anybody, but if you go all the way back to the plantation, what's foundational to the United States. So how can racism not be

natural and how can anti-racism feel natural, feel normal? That sort of work can't feel regular in this sort of environment and in this sort of country, certainly in classical music, one of the most predominantly white institutions here in the United States. So, when we when we move forward, we have to really understand that there are going to be some growing pains. There are going to be some disagreements. There are going to be some times when folks feel embarrassed or like they really tried and missed the mark or how some people might not be grateful for the little that we are doing.

So, you really have to be open to all of those things. I think about... I said stepping out first. I think about when you're playing a quiet section of a piece of music, an orchestral piece of music, and there's an entrance, no one wants to be first. Okay. Especially y'all in the strings. I'll say nobody wants to be first, but the institutions need to have that courage to be brave enough to be first, step out first and understand if there's critique or discomfort along the way. That means you're doing it right.

**Dalanie:** Yeah, I really like that you brought up that point about language and the language that you use around these initiatives because African-American and Black, they don't always overlap.

**Garrett:** Right. Right.

**Dalanie:** And, you know, I feel like...

**Garrett:** Let's talk about all the Afro-Caribbeans that live in New York and across the country. You know, here in the Twin Cities, folks from East Africa are very much a population and have a presence here. So, understanding the nuances of that. One of the equitable practices that I think a lot of the institutions are missing is understanding how diverse Black people are, how diverse our music is. We can talk about how that's integrated into music education, music history and all that sort of thing. But, yeah, there's something to learn and something to do at every little turn.

**Dalanie:** Yeah, and even within us over a Classically Black, Katie's family immigrated here from Jamaica.

**Garrett:** Yeah.

**Dalanie:** And, even though she grew up here, there's some things of, I don't know where my family is from beyond what my living grandparents can recount. But there are some things that come over from, you know, the southern United States that she's like, "I didn't know, that about that group of Black people and things that I've learned about Caribbean Black people. And so I think that's a that's a huge blind spot. And just language in general, because we also come into this conversation about Black vs. BIPOC or POC or something like that because... That goes into, like you said, how you incorporate these initiatives, like what are the specifics of the: We're

playing the piece by a black composer or in their case, an African-American composer on every program. What is that looking like?

Because what that brought to mind was, there is an organization actually that is, I won't say it's affiliated with these men that it comes from, someone who went to Eastman. So, they are thinking about this this idea of incorporating, I guess, composers that are not traditionally in the canon. But when I looked into it, I was like, "See, this is why we need to really go into that next step of thinking critically about how we're doing this," because it's basically like a course where you learn about all these different types of like opera and things. And you have your week of Mozart your week of Italian opera, your week of Verdi, your week of German opera, a French opera. And then you have BIPOC composer's week. And that immediately stuck out to me, like, "Are you kidding?" Like, you have a week. That is just for Mozart. Just him.

**Garrett:** Yeah.

**Dalanie:** Then it's like everybody who is Black...

**Garrett:** And all of us are in one little thing. And that's one of the spicy conversations that these institutions don't like to get into. But, shout out to all of the non-Black people of color and Black people have specific rights and needs that have to be addressed. I think that all of these diversity initiatives do a really great job of talking about how a body of students or whatever can be more colorful, but we don't really talk about serving Black people specifically. So, I think that's really one of the things that we need to begin to understand as we get into, step 1.5 not even step 2 is understanding, like you said, when you put a week aside for all BIPOC composers, how are you really serving Blackness? How are you serving the community of people that you allege to serve based on reactions from the horrors of this year. So, that's what we really need to get more into.

I took a look, probably about three weeks ago, I was going through some papers, and I found the excerpt list that was sitting on the stand when I won my job with the Knoxville Symphony with the specific excerpts circled. And just looking down that list and seeing all white male composers... Think about the orchestral excerpts that that we learn. When is that going to look weird to someone? When is it going to look weird for an American orchestra to not affirm the people and the musical aesthetics that built everything that is American music. And maybe I've gone off the trail a little bit, but when we talk about really specifically serving and addressing racial equity from that Black perspective, what we're doing is affirming what America is. So, it's nothing against any other community of people. But, as I say all the time, with the exception of Indigenous population, everything, classical and otherwise, that is purely American, is Black, is rooted to Blackness and Black people certainly on the musical front. So, if an American orchestra, if an American conservatory alleges to celebrate what America has contributed to the field in which it's sending its students, we have to have a shift in the way we look at diversity, which, as I'm speaking to right now, concerns specifically celebrating Black music and not just as an aside or a special thing, but something foundational to the structure because, you know, it's foundational to America.

I can get into how evolutions of the Negro spiritual were siphoned into certain areas because of racism. That's why we don't typically consider jazz a form of classical music. A lot of people know the story of Dvorak's appreciation for what he called Negro melodies when he was here in the late 19th century. We can get into all of that, but at the end of the day, we have to foundationally change the way we're looking at what it means to be an American institution and to do that, you have to foreground Black music and the Black story before all else because it's foundational to what all of this is.

**Dalanie:** And that kind of speaks to the growing pains that you were talking about, like how people want all of this to feel comfortable and it's just like you are really going to have to move past that. And that's just...

**Garrett:** Right, and that's why we say systems change, because I can hear it now. Well, a student has to learn the Mozart concerto.

**Dalanie:** Exactly.

**Garrett:**... because you need the Mozart concerto to get this job or whatever. Well, we're trying to. I am certainly trying to create a world where you don't need to know the Mozart concerto to get this job over knowing something else or some other sonata by Black composer or this other concerto by a woman composer whose works have been overshadowed.

So, yeah, those growing pains. Institutions understanding their role in the bigger issue, Eastman's role in perpetuating white supremacy in concert halls across America. Eastman's role in the normalization of excerpt lists, looking the way they do or concert programs looking the way they do. Those growing pains have to be experience to understand the gravity of racism in America and how it has impacted so-called classical music. But you also need that to have, again, as I said earlier, that sense of urgency and understanding how this time is unique and how we can change that. What the concert hall looks like 50 years from now, in many ways, I think, is dependent upon right now. Is this the time when we are going to drill in the orchestral music of William Grant Still, and Florence Price and William Levi Dawson and Margaret Bonds and all these people? Is this going to be the time where we drill that in so that decades later it's just normal to hear that? Or are we just going to sprinkle it across so that those sprinkles can gradually disappear over the decades, as we've already seen happen in American classical music? I don't know if that answers your question. I don't even remember what the question was.

**Dalanie:** I mean, yeah, it was just talking about how this sort of discomfort was breaking away from the canon and breaking away from what we have known is something that is just going to be necessary because to say, "Oh, well, we can't sacrifice one of the weeks that we're doing the Mozart string quartet because they must know the thing that the Mozart string quartets teach you. It's one thing that of all of these works of Black composers, not one of them can teach you what Mozart can teach you, or it can't teach you it as well. And then also saying that these

different techniques, these different musical styles and in things that you need to develop in order to play these musical styles are not as important or not as pertinent to you being a musician who is considered qualified, who is considered capable, like you are devaluing all of these other musical styles by doing so. I think that's a part of it that a lot of people don't think about, is that this whole system that we have of like these schools of thought, these techniques, this system of music theory, even that we have, really, is actively trying to devalue the musical styles of Black people.

Because, one thing that I think Classical Music Twitter gets up in arms about are at least actually the woke side of Classical Music Twitter gets up in arms about is these TwoSetViolin videos that will be making fun of rap music, for example. And one of the things that they will poke fun at is that it's not as melodically complex. They'll be like, "Oh, this is such a simple melody compared to this Beethoven Symphony and whatever." And I'm like, "I just feel like classical music has been trying to compensate, I think, by putting itself on this pedestal saying this is what musicality is..."

**Garrett:** This is what is what complexity is.

**Dalanie:** Complexity was exactly what I was going to say. Yeah, complexity is... When in reality, complexity, I feel like is being able to understand and interpret different musical styles, because what never occurs to people is that melodic complexity and variation is not the only musical concept that you can embody. I mean, a lot of times in rap music, the most complex part of it is not the melody.

**Garrett:** Right.

**Dalanie:** There are rhythms in rap music that ya'll will spend months on the metronome trying to get right, and still not advance, you know?

**Garrett:** And you talk about diminishing other styles. That conversation is even bigger than race, I think. And that's why I use the phrase so-called classical music so much, because even in using that phrase: classical music, there are a world of aesthetics that are classic to those cultures and those experiences that are being left out. So, when you say I'm going to hear a classical music concert we don't bring to mind an African drum ensemble or even someone playing of vina from South India or a shamisen from Japan or, whatever, a mariachi ensemble from Mexico. We aren't thinking about those things because we have been conditioned to really have that aesthetic of Western European orchestral music as the measure of what classical music is. So, just to make clear to folks, that's why that phrase classical music, itself, has to be at the center of certain conversations.

But look, we talk about complexity. Music history teachers, maybe even the music theory teachers will spend a whole class talking about 4' 33" of silence-of no music. OK, and yet we're going to diminish... I'm trying to watch my mouth here because I know ya'll are students, but where we're trying to diminish things like hip hop or in a broader sense, not affirm what we

aesthetically define as jazz as equally a part of that tradition, of that instrumental to tradition. You're talking about rhythms that folks will spend weeks with on the metronome, and yet we have music that is this complex and that colorful, that's being created in the moment when it comes to improvisation that we stick to another side of the building, another side of the conversation.

So, yeah, just expanding what we understand about our norms is just required all the way down to that phrase, classical music. The episode, the opus of my podcast, they came out today, the guest is a woman named Donna Walker-Kuhne. She wrote a book on arts advocacy, arts equity called Invitation to the Party. And one of the things she talks about in that book and that she talked about in my interview is how all of this is a forever change. It is a lasting thing. When we talk about engaging new audiences or diversifying a student body at a conservatory, those folks have to understand that you now have to forever nurture this new body of people, this new reality. These new communities that you're serving. That's why there's so much doubt getting back to an earlier point you are making. That's why there's so much doubt about these institutions are doing, because the forever-ness that the change requires isn't even there when it talks about how we foreground the conversation. We aren't even willing to have the conversation as intensely as we were seven or eight months ago, you know. So how can the upholding of that new reality be upheld with that same lack of energy?

James Baldwin once said, he doesn't know that a certain institution is racist, but he knows what the institution looks like and he knows what the institution has been upholding. What does the Eastman School of Music as an institution look like? What has it looked like for this past 100 years? And what does someone like me or folks like me, folks like us, what do we think of that institution understanding those things seeing the current reality, seeing the past? And is that going to make us attractive to you? You know, if not, there are forever changes that need to be made to get you to that reality.

**Dalanie:** Yeah, I mean, 4'33", when you said that I was just like, "Wow, he really finessed ya'll."

**Garrett:** Really. I mean, really think about that. And I can get into my nerd bag and talk about that piece of music, as improvisatory and how the actual music is what happens in that four and a half... I can do all of that right at the same time. I can affirm that there are whole Black women that wrote symphonies that y'all don't even know. And we're sitting here talking about four and a half minutes of silence. That's where that anger in that fire comes from. That's where that frustration comes from, and that's what I have to, sit to the side again when we talk about taking this unique opportunity.

So, you know, with that frustration, that Black folks have in the system, we are still able to engage these conversations and really try to work toward a positive push despite respectability, despite how folks might feel about it. So, if we are able to do all that with all of the ancestral baggage we have and the receipts from today's classical music feel, if we can do all that, the institutions with all of their resources can certainly serve as that example, as what we need to do to fully change. It's going to look different. I have to press that again, is going to look

different, it's going to feel weird. It might even feel unfair to some people. But in the spirit of equity, we have to understand that there's a lot of catch-up to do before we can even begin to talk about or even consider equality, because equitable practices haven't even gotten us to that stage yet. We're beginning to talk about equitable practices. We have a long way to go.

**Dalanie:** And it's great that you bring up that it will look different because what the first thing that a lot of people who feel like they're onboard with this work tried to do is they tried to incorporate additive curriculum. They want to add stuff and it's just like, "No, you need to transform this." You need to take things away and replace them with other things because, just to say, "OK, well, yeah, we're down with what you guys want to do but we cannot lose any of what we already have..." It's like you want to keep that in place because it makes you feel comfortable, because you still hold onto that belief that this is something that we cannot do without. While this entire time we've been doing without the music of Black people. You thought of that as something that we can do without.

**Garrett:** Right.

**Dalanie:** So it's like, I can do without Mozart.

**Garrett:** Right.

**Dalanie:** You know?

**Garrett:** Period. You know, you're hitting the nail on the head right there. Again, when we talk about diminishing other styles, diminishing other bits of history, when you really sit down and take a look at what we have not even included. Much less, what we have not centered for so long and what we have, to me, it's plain to see the changes that need to be made. In preparation for this interview, one of the first things that I wrote down is to not take for granted that some people still don't understand why we're having these conversations. They still don't understand why it's a problem for you to have almost gone through a whole degree without having performed an orchestral piece of music by a Black person. People don't understand why that's a problem. So, these conversations help inspire that thought in people.

You know, my goal in the work that I do is to inspire enough thought to get that critical mass of people to eventually nudge the folks in positions of power either out of those positions or nudge them toward making the more equitable decisions for this change. It's a forever change. And I think we have seen what institutions are willing to do it, and what institutions are not willing to do it. And then, when you when you speak to the music schools and whatever, whoever else is talking about what you need, what has to be included, what has to be a part of it. We can't take this away. You know, I think about these riots from this past summer in Minneapolis there are some people who thought that third precinct needed to be there and there's some people who had a different idea. So, what I say to the classical music institutions, are we going to do this the nice way or are we going to do this our way? Because I'm down for either one. I'm down for every music school in the country to be closed if none of them are going to actually do this work.

And that's one of the bigger points as we get to the end of the hour here, one of the bigger points that I try to make to these institutions when I collaborate with them, it isn't just of, even though I believe we should be centered, it's not just about us. It's also about your survival. And in 30 years, in a hundred years is your institution going to be relevant if communities of color, more diverse communities are seeing the concert hall are seeing orchestral music as something that has nothing to do with them. Who will be the students that you serve to send into those spaces? So, this isn't just about us or just about doing the right thing for the sake of doing the right thing. It's about all of us coming together to make sure that this art form that we have fallen in love with survives.

I can sit here and trash Beethoven and Mozart all day, but the fact is, there are times when I love listening or even performing the music of Beethoven. You know, playing Mozart opera was one of the favorite parts of the profession of playing for a living. So, it's not that we're diminishing that music as much as we're saying that we have to have more relevant programming, more equitable programming so that people can see what it has to do with them. You know what Mozart and Beethoven have to do with me is my training, my understanding of theory, my understanding of how to play the bassoon, you know? But that isn't something that applies to the person on the street. What a living composer or what the music of a Black composer can mean for the person on the street might be more genuine. That connection might be there, not only there enough to get them into the concert hall, but there enough to get them to really value what they experience.

And so we have to we have to think about all of those things and really understand that while this is about doing the right thing and doing our part in fixing America's original sin, it's also about making sure that these institutions survive. I'm thinking about the MET right now in New York City. Think about the diversity that is New York City. Think about all of the different types of food, all of the restaurants, the weirdos you see on the train platform. Think about just how colorful it is and think about how an institution that has as much money as the MET, who they have served in that diverse landscape. You know how uncolorful that looks. They spent so long serving only a few people that when you have something like COVID come along, they're unable to serve anybody. They're closed right now are they. More institutions have that future in front of them, including conservatories. If we don't take a serious look at how we can be more relevant and more impactful and more engaging to more people. That's going to look different. It's going to mean that Mozart and Beethoven have to get out of the way sometimes. But it's all in the name of survival and it's all in the name of equity and it's all in the name of, again, this art form that we have all fallen in love with.

**Dalanie:** I mean, that -

**Garrett:** ...despite its problems, the you know...

**Dalanie:** The part about relevancy is just so true because they always teach you about like different types of history. They're always compartmentalized. You have U.S. history, I took state

history in fifth grade and so my music history and my U.S. history have been totally separate. So, like, even though you know these dates, you don't put them together like these were happening at the same time. And so, my professors already know, if I have the chance to do my own prompt own project, my own curriculum, it's is going to Black. I don't care what type of mental gymnastics I have to do to fit in the time period, it's going to be Black. So, if when sitting in music history and realize, I'm sitting here learning what Mozart had for breakfast on his 17th birthday, and there was this whole slave trade happening at the same time. It just it immediately became the most irrelevant thing to me. You know, I just didn't care anymore.

**Garrett:** And this is Mozart's 17th birthday. So that would have been the 1770s. That's when you have the Revolutionary War going on. That's when you have Black musicians who have participated in that and wrote music that we don't know about or that we are learning about. Hell, the first person shot in the Revolutionary War was a Black man, and half of us don't even learn that much, you know? So, think about the depth of everything else that is not there and how and how that can serve everybody living here, really diving into... I'm glad you brought that up because really diving into what it means to understand not only the music that played a role in the Revolutionary War and American so-called independence, that doesn't just serve Black folks, that serves all Americans, and that gives us all a clearer picture of what the history of all of this is. So, when we really understand, again, the Black history of America and really understand how it's been intentionally pushed to the side, how could we keep things the same when we talk about our conservatories. How could we?

I'm thinking about Blind Tom Wiggins right now. A musician and composer who was a slave. We talk about him on the latest opus of Trilloquy. But, I'm thinking about folks like him and all of those fiddlers and pianists and folks who we will never learn about in music school because, as you say, we have to learn what Mozart had for breakfast when he was 17. So, that's what we're talking about when we say push certain things to the side. It's not that there is not value in Mozart, there is just a history here that pertains directly to us that has not been explored. What I'm thinking about, again, complete system change, things looking different.

Let's say the COVID vaccine comes out and everybody's local orchestra is back. They come back with Beethoven 5. I'm sure that will sell out because a lot of people know it and X, Y and Z. What if they came back with the premiere of, the Beyonce symphony? First of all, you won't be able to keep folks away from the building, much less... So, you will have a different type of problem with selling out the tickets. You'll have a different type of audience, and you'll have an audience of people who sees what that institution can do for them as a person. So, that's the lofty sort of hyperbolic example featuring Beyonce, say, or the music of Beyonce. OK, so now let's say, in a more realistic way, we have really taken the time in music school, in our music history classes, in our American history classes to talk about the Black folks who made this country, including the Black musicians, the Black composers, all those folks.

We're working toward a reality when that the music by those folks will fill the concert hall because it's familiar A and B, it actually has something to do with us. And I know that there are going to be a lot of symphonies when they come back playing the music of Florence Price,

because that's the name that everyone is saying. What, if her name were as normal as Bernstein and Copeland. What if little Black girls growing up really had that mental example of a Black woman being a composer, when you think about a composer. And when you spread that culture out, what could it mean for institutions programming her music? What could it mean for the schools and the conservatories really foregrounding that sort of music? When we talk about music theory and music history and the excerpts we learn and the sonatas we bring to juries or whatever. What could it mean? It could mean a different world, a landscape that matters to more people and a classical music field that looks different than that it ever has been.

But it's going to take a lot of bravery and a lot of courage along the way. Right now, the conversations of it are uncomfortable for so many people. So, the actions behind it are even further behind, but I think we can get there. I think we can get there if we persevere and we keep on keeping on. But we just have to be unapologetic and really frank about the traditions and the norms that have been upheld by classical music, as I mentioned before, even in the way that we use the phrase classical music.

**Dalanie:** And in recognizing when those things have been normalized, because I remember in the discussion, we were talking in music history about why we still adhere to the canon. Someone was like, because it helps us remember our history. And I said, not my history!

**Garrett:** Yeah, who's history? And really not your history either, is what I would tell the white people. Not yours either. Because as again, as I just got done talking about: Your history as an American is consuming and being enriched by musical traditions rooted in Blackness. So, even beyond, and let me just make this clear, just in case folks don't know or won't get it. So, when we talk about orchestral music in America, we're talking about an import. We're talking about something that was not born here. Something that came across the ocean from Europe and sort of set root here.

When I say that American music is Black music, with the exception of what the Indigenous people codified. What I'm saying is that when you have those Negro spirituals from the plantations and the other Black things that that grew from that, you have something that is uniquely American. You have something that you cannot attribute to any other country, to any other culture, in the same way that we can attribute orchestral music to Europe. So with that being the foundation of American music, you have to tie rock and roll, bluegrass, obviously jazz and hip hop, and you have to tie those things into it. But you also have to tie into it the classical tradition, because the American composers that were born from that tradition have hints, have glimpses of that experience in their music just because they were born here. You can't talk about Austria for very long without talking about Mozart, because in their musical traditions, in a more contemporary way, that is foundational. You can't go to Italy and talk about opera without talking about Verdi. That is just what it is. The reality is that you should not be able to be in the United States and not talk about Black music, but that is what classical institutions have upheld for these generations.

So, I just wanted to make that point, make sure that's clear for people. We're trying to equitably repaint the picture and help folks understand that what is foundational to all of this is Black. And if we turn the page and shift the car a little bit to really see that, we'll see all of the many things we have to change within the systems, you know, from the conservatories to the professional orchestras all the way down to those beginning band rooms. When you opened up that instrument case for the first time. What is the first tune you learn to play? Was it something that was culturally relevant or even historically relevant to the United States, or was it some European folk song or something that has nothing to do with your experience as a person?

I'm sure my mom was very excited the first time I could go home and play *Go Tell Aunt Rhoda* on my bassoon. How more excited would she have been if I could play *Wade in the Water* or goodness forbid, *Sir Duke* by Stevie Wonder. So it's everywhere. The changes we need to make are everywhere. What every individual, what every institution needs to understand is, certainly in classical music, is that you have a role. You have had a role in maintaining these systems and you have a very specific role in changing them. It can't happen without you. And if it has to happen without you, everything else is going to happen without you as well, including survival.

**Dalanie:** Well, thank you so much, Garrett, for joining me. Can you let the people know where they can find you?

**Garrett:** Yes. So, I'm all over the Internet for good or for bad. Just Garrett McQueen [GarrettMcQuain.com](http://GarrettMcQuain.com) is my Website. You can learn more about my podcast, [Trilloquy.org](http://Trilloquy.org). And for all of my other work and collaborations, including those with the Gateway's Music Festival, shout out to them, a very important Rochester and Eastman-adjacent institution, so the work I do with them, with Sphynx, with various radio stations, you can just learn more about that on the website again. [Garrett McQueen.com](http://GarrettMcQueen.com).

### {Outro Music}

**Stephen:** Special thanks to Dalanie Harris and Garrett McQueen for donating their time and talents to this episode. I will try to put together an episode of some of the conversation that the three of us had after the interview ended, and release that at a future date, so stay tuned for that. We've included links to Garrett's website and podcast in the show notes. Do check those out, and we'll also once again include a link to the Classically Black Podcast so you can hear more of Dalanie.

The episode was mixed by Frances Inzenhofer, intro music was by me, and the outro was composed by Alexa Silverman. Please be sure to follow us on SoundCloud or on the IML Facebook page to find out about new episodes. If you have any questions, comments, or ideas for future episodes, please send me an email. You can find that in the show notes as well.

Go out. Make art. Do good work. From the IML, I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.