

20.12.19 Policing The Jig Hour.wav

SM: Sarah McConnell
AS: Audio Sample
MO: Mike O'Malley
TS: Thomas Stanley
NB: Naima Burrs

[00:00:00]

SM This Irish tune is called Chief O'Neill's Favorite. It's named after Francis O'Neill, also known as the savior of Irish folk music. Back at the turn of the 20th century, O'Neill was a prominent Chicago police chief, and while he was out patrolling the streets, he collected thousands of tunes, mainly from the same community, he was sworn to protect. But his methods weren't always exactly aboveboard.

AS There's one guy who he describes going to his house and he goes to hear his fiddle music. And he goes up these rickety stairs into this very small apartment and he's in his police uniform. And the family don't want him there. They don't like having a captain of police in their house. There's - no good can come of that. And eventually, he says, you know, he gives them some coins and beer is produced and the fiddle player relaxes enough to play some tunes.

SM From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell and today, the savior of Irish folk music. Later in the show, what does it mean to listen deeply?

AS See the - the sound product as it's presented to you as this beautiful smorgasbord of sounds and just feed on it.

SM But first, Frances O'Neill joined the Chicago police force in 1873 and later became police chief from 1981 to 1985. But how did he go from grizzled policemen to the savior of Irish folk music? Mike O'Malley is writing a book about him. Mike is a history professor at George Mason University and says O'Neill's passion for collecting Irish tunes was his way of balancing his identity as both American and Irish. Mike, you're writing a biography on Francis O'Neill, a man who loved Irish music, came from Ireland and became chief of Chicago police at the turn of the century.

MO That's right. He left Ireland when he was 17 and he had a life of adventure. He joined the police and he eventually rose to be chief of police for an unprecedented at that time, three terms.

SM When did he leave Ireland and what brought him to America?

MO He left in 1865. And it seems like from his biography that his family he was the youngest son of a prosperous family. They wanted him to become a priest, which is very common. He was kind of a bookish and scholarly guy and he didn't want to be a priest. And he took to sea leaving Cork in Ireland - he was from near Cork - as an apprentice seaman, as a cabin boy, basically, and he sailed to England. And from there he caught a berth on other ships and eventually circled the globe before he was 20.

SM You've said that he's actually very well read and bookish, like he came from a family that had some means and valued education and music. And at one point he swam from his ship to another ship just to get a new book.

MO He came from a family that were in Ireland, they call them strong farmers, and they were fairly prosperous and he was well-educated by the standards of his time. He loved books. And at one point he's in Yokohama Harbor in Japan and he wants to trade the books that he has for books that other might - sailors might have. So he straps them to his head to keep them dry and swims about 100 yards to the nearest boat to try and make the trade. And the captain finds out that he's done this secretly and rose over to get him and takes O'Neill and makes him swim back ahead of the rowboat back to the boat to punish him for leaving the boat.

SM Why was he so interested in Irish music?

MO It's a really good question. He says when he was young, he loved music and he wrote about remembering the music that he heard, which would have been this rural - dance music of rural people, the rural folk. And I think partly when he's in Chicago, he starts prospering and he starts doing well and he starts becoming American. And I think he was partly thinking, well, what am I? You know, I'm successful as an American, but I'm also born in Ireland. And I think it was a way for him to balance being American and being Irish.

SM What exposure to music had he had specifically in Ireland?

MO In his day, there would be musicians who would set up they called it a patron, a piper or a fiddler would set up typically on a bridge or by a bridge or at the crossing of two roads. And they would have a dance and they would play in the summer all night or late into the night. And they would take up a collection, people would take up a collection that's called - it's a tradition in Ireland, not now, but it was - the Crossroads dance. So he talks a lot about hearing people at the Crossroads dance. And then he also remembers as a kid his parents would have a party in the house and he would hear the music through the stone walls. As he was sent off to bed early, he would lie in his bed and hear the music playing downstairs or next door and that the memory never left him.

SM So he is like some of these folklorists that we hear about, who collected tunes and other genres around America. He was on the lookout for traditional Irish pieces to add to his collection and document?

MO Yes, exactly. He realizes in Chicago that in Ireland he was from Cork and he probably never left County Cork. But in Chicago, within 20 blocks of his house, he's got Irish people from every county in Ireland and they're playing music that he recognizes as Irish, but he doesn't know the tunes. And he starts getting really concerned with trying to collect them and remember them. And he forms a community of people who also play that music. A lot of them are on the cops, not all of them, but a lot of them. He publishes two major books of tunes and the first one has 1850 tunes in it. And it includes slow songs in Irish they call them airs, slow airs. And then he does a second version, which is - it's called "The Dance Music of Ireland". And it has about a thousand and - it has exactly a 1001 in it. And that's the one that has the big influence.

SM Can you play a few of those and help us understand where these pieces come from and why they're significant?

MO Sure. I'll play a very well-known jig called "Banish Misfortune". That's one of the many names under which it's known. And O'Neill learned this from a man named Edward Cronin, who was from County Tyrone in Ireland and worked as a grinder in a harvester factory. You can actually hear Cronin playing this tune on a scratchy old Edison cylinder. But I'm going to play a more modern version of Banish Misfortune that's played by the flute player Shannon Heaton and her husband, Matt Heaton.

["Banish Misfortune" - Shannon and Matt Heaton]

MO That's a jig in Irish music jigs are in 3/4 time, and one way you can tell if it's a jig, you can repeat the phrase, it's an Irish phrase: rashers and sausages. Rashers is Irish bacon. If the tune is playing and you can say rashers and sausages, rashers and sausages against the melody and it fits. It's probably a jig.

SM Da da.

MO Exactly. That's one way people are sometimes taught to get the feel of a jig, right. To repeat that phrase in their head while they're playing it.

SM As opposed to what other kind of Irish dance music?

MO There are a lot of forms of Irish dance music, but the two most common forms are jigs and reels. And a reel is usually faster and they're played in 4/4 time. And the phrase you can use to tell if it's a reel is a double decker, double decker, double decker, double decker. You can say that against it, it's probably a reel.

SM Play me a reel.

MO OK, this is a tune called The Green Mountain, played by a flute player, Conal O'Grada. And you can listen to how hard he hits it rhythmically. He just really bangs on certain notes and that's designed to get your feet moving and get up onto the floor and dancing.

["The Green Mountain" - Conal O'Grada]

MO It's one of the interesting things about O'Neill is that he's very much the boss of this operation. He's a very powerful figure in Chicago. By the time he's collecting music, he's chief of police, he's wealthy and he's done quite well in Chicago, mostly on real estate investments. And he can help you. He can help you get a job. He can help you get gigs if you're a musician. So he has a lot of authority. And one of the interesting things about his life is the way he combines kind of throwing his weight around with his love of this musical community. And it's ironic that he almost in every case ends up kind of destroying the community that he values through the exercise of his authority, collecting music.

SM What do you mean? How how could he destroy the community?

MO When he publishes his first collection, it's called "O'Neills Music of Ireland". It's not called "The Music of Ireland, collected by Francis O'Neill", he's claiming ownership. And the people who help him - he has a large team of people who help him collect music, and a significant number of the more than half of them owe their job to O'Neill. Either he got them their job or he's their direct supervisor. And so they're not going to get promoted unless he helps them. And he says "only the authority of the badge allowed me to

accomplish this collection" and that he often had to use the authority of the badge to persuade people to share their music.

SM Give me an example of that.

MO He complains all the time that people won't share their tunes. This is a common thing. He would hear a tune that was new to him and he'd want to memorize it and he'd want to write it down. And he'd tell the musician, play that again, you know, play it - and that means you play it over and over until I've memorized it and musicians would refuse. Sometimes he bullies people a little, sometimes he bribes them. Sometimes he persuades them with the force of his authority. He goes to see one woman specifically in his captain's uniform or in his uniform as chief of police because it's going to help persuade her to participate in his enterprise.

SM You write that in his first month on the job, he was shot. Was he also violent?

MO He says that when you joined the police, you were on probation for a couple of months. And he says the only way to join the police permanently was, he says, to lick somebody. You had to get in a fight and you had to decisively beat somebody. That was the only way to do it. Then you'd earn the respect of the police. He was initially assigned in a neighborhood called Bridgeport in Chicago, which was a rough district. It was entirely working class. There are a lot of Irish, but not just Irish. And there's brawling all the time. And according to other people, many's the time one of his friends says, that O'Neil came in with his clothes half torn off from brawling with Bridgeport gangs. And he gets shot in the shoulder. He - he's walking his beat and he hears someone yell, "Stop! Thief!" and a shot. And he goes towards the sound and the thief comes around the corner and sees O'Niell and aims his revolver and shoots him. And the bullet takes him in the shoulder. And at that point, the security guard who was chasing him comes up with his gun drawn. And O'Neill says he brought his nightstick down on the thief's hand, he dropped the gun and then O'Niell collapsed on the ground and was taken to the hospital.

SM You know, regarding this music, did he collect a lot of those heirs, also? Did he collect the lyrics?

MO He - he didn't pay attention to the lyrics. There's a long tradition in Irish music of the same melody, having different lyrics. The reason he didn't collect the lyrics, I think is pretty clear. Irish politics could get you killed. In fact, they did get people killed. The central question for Irish people and for Irish immigrants was how to free Ireland from England. Ireland is a colonial possession of England, and there's long been dreams in Ireland of declaring an independent republic. And that finally happens early in the twentieth century. But for O'Neill's time in Ireland, there was no meeting of Irish people where they didn't talk about the dream of an independent Ireland. It was a constant theme. The word terrorism is first used, as far as I know, in the English language, to describe Irish nationalists who are conducting bombing campaigns in England.

SM So all this by way of saying no lyrics, please, let's just stick to the dance pieces.

MO Right. The lyrics are often - either they're very sentimental in a way that for O'Neill is easily commercialized - they can form a kind of the phrase they sometimes use is a shamrockery, a kind of trite Irishness, you know, that's celebrated - like Danny Boy is the most famous verse. And it's a beautiful song, but it's - most Irish musicians roll their eyes because it's very overplayed, it's very sentimental. The other thing is that the lyrics would

often get dangerously political. They would get into factional splits in the Irish American community. And O'Neill wanted to avoid that.

SM Well, this is wonderful. Is there a piece that you could suggest we might go out on?

MO There's a great piece that was done. It's part of a BBC program called the Transatlantic Sessions, and it aimed to get the transatlantic influence of Irish music. So they have Scottish, English, American and Irish musicians working together to play a tune, and the version I'm going to play is - it's the primary lead voice is Mick McGoldrick and Bela Fleck on the banjo. And they're playing a song called Kiss the Maid.

SM This is great, Mike O'Malley, thank you so much for talking with me on With Good Reason.

MO Thank you very much. It was a great pleasure. He's a fascinating man at many levels.

SM Mike O'Malley is a professor of history at George Mason University. His forthcoming book is called "Policing the Jig: Francis O'Neill and the Invention of Irish Music". Coming up next, tag along as we venture on a sound safari.

[00:14:33]

SM Whether it's a song that brings back memories or one of those tunes we can't get out of our head; we all listen to music - almost daily. But Thomas Stanley says very few of us know how to listen deeply. Thomas Stanley is a musician and professor of sound art at George Mason University. He takes us on a journey through sound, describing what it means to him to listen deeply.

TS Well, I make sound, but I'm - I'm mostly a student of listening. And listening is a way of building up you, there is an internal direction, there's something, occult and interior about listening to sound that lodges in the same private places where thinking happens and where our innermost volitions and fears are housed. So I think that when we can listen more deeply, what we are doing really is we are going through a bunch of very elaborate processes of - of internal reconstruction. And I think they lead us in an ethical direction. They lead us in a direction that is capable of embracing higher standards of responsibility.

SM Give me examples of ways we experience sounds that we don't even realize, right. The ways that we're hearing sounds, but not listening.

TS See, I think most music is not necessarily offered to us to listen to. I hover over my 14-year-old's computer and his listening space and kind of eavesdrop on the music that he's into, and it's not like any of the pop music that he digests would be interesting if you strip the vocal away. And what is really going on is a parsing or an engagement with some symbols and not really the whole idea of really listening to sound. I came up through the 70s and artists like Jimi Hendrix and Bootsy Collins and, you know, the idea that what you were listening to had very specific shapes and contours and densities and colors and that that was where it was at, it wasn't the song as a string of ideas that are put in place in an almost syntactical sort of way. But it was this engagement with just the beauty of novel sound and how, you know, the more you listen to a sonic fact, the more you uncover, the more you discover, the more you have to - to roll around in, the more you have to immerse yourself in.

SM So narrate the experience of deep listening to one of the pieces that you're going to share.

TS All right. So I did my master's research in Central America among the Garifuna people, and I was primarily based in Belize. And I got to hear a lot of different artists and hear the traditions of music that this hybrid people who are descended from an amalgam of Arawak Indians and West African people. And we're going to hear a piece of music performed by Lugua Centeno and the Larubeya Drummers, and they're based in Belize. And it's a piece called Lirun Dan (Sad Times) from Bumari, which is Lugua's debut album, 1998.

["Lirun Dan (Sad Times)" - Lugua Centeno and the Larubeya Drummers]

SM I love that. I mean, that's universal, that's thrilling, right?

TS Yeah. The traditional Garifuna culture is a fishing culture. There are hamlets that are scattered along the coast where people eke out these really difficult lives and tragedy, enormous tragedy is a part of what Garifuna people live as a matter of course. And in that song you hear it's got percussion. There's the lead vocalist, which is Lugua. There's the chorus of backup singers and you hear a drum that's called a premero doing these roles that are just kind of like thunder. And you have to deeper drum, segundo that is kind of pounding out the bass of the piece. And it's moving because there's so much there to listen to. See, they have like instruments there that I hadn't heard any place else, and a novel instrumentality creates novel sound. So they take the - the shells of a local turtle and they strapped them together, maybe two or three, and they play the underside of the turtle shell with pieces of wood. And all of their singing and - and music making is full of all of these novel sounds. And it was just a really, for that reason, charismatic music for me. It was very attractive, it really brought me in.

SM But how is that deep listening as opposed to simply "I love that piece", you know what I mean?

TS See, I think what you're doing when you're deep listening, is you're trying to suspend the analytic cognitive reflexes that make you want to decipher what the music is. When I play new music for students, the first thing they want to do is to push it into a genre category. And, you know, once they can say it's, oh yes, low-fi, it's doom metal, it's this, it's that, it's - you know, it's two-step it's - once they do that, then they can start kind of trying to figure out whether or not they really like it or have a positive esthetic engagement with it. And I'd say, just kind of see the - the sound product as it's presented to you as this beautiful smorgasbord of sounds. Sounds organized and sounds overlaid sounds in the context of other sounds and just feed on it and see what you can get out of just pulling that energy into yourself. There's a surrender that's involved. And I'm arguing that in that surrender, you learn a lot of things about yourself.

SM You brought another piece for us to listen to in this different way. Can you introduce it?

TS Yeah, I will, absolutely. This is a band called Dark Sea Dreams, and the track is called "Not Till You Pull That Trigger, Boy". This is heavy music, as it's often called. It's rock and roll. But I think it's really important to know what to do with loud music. The people that are doing it well really aren't trying to hurt you. And there's a great - there's a great deal of compassion and moderation involved. So that's what this is. Play a little bit of it and then we can talk about it.

SM It's so interesting that you said these people are trying to hurt you and there is compassion and how they modulate. Have at it.

TS Well, it's a beautiful piece. You become what you listen to and there's something towering and majestic and, you know, there's - there's an improvised interchange between the guitars. There's something about the way the drums and the bass are anchoring the piece. And for those of us who can listen to this music and get something positive from it. We live in a society, we live in a huge, complex society that reinforces how small we are all the time. And this music feels like size, it feels like the scale of the sky, it feels like soaring, soaring without an engine. And - and the deeper you go into it, those sounds, they're not symbols in the way that notes in a more traditional composition could be played by any instrument and still be that note. They're sculpted, shaped, highly precise spasms of unique ways of shredding electronics sound.

SM You took your class downtown on what you called a sound safari. What is that? What did they experience?

TS We broke up into small groups and everyone had a portable digital recorder, and the idea was to find interesting sound. And then we came back to a central place and we listened and then we walked around and like, "oh, that - oh, that's oh, that's so cool". And there was construction sounds, there were buildings being demolished, there were bells ringing, there was traffic noise, there was a disabled gentleman sitting in front of a CBS that wanted to tell us about his attempt to get VA benefits. And, you know, they were just all of these really large engagements with the sounds that the city was just giving up, because we went looking for them. You know, we went looking for - what is unique within the sound space, what is compelling and evocative within the sound space. And it was a - it was an ear opener for all of us, you know, for the instructor and for the students. Beautiful evening.

SM We just have time for one more piece, what would you pick to share with us?

TS Well, I did bring in a piece from Pauline Oliveros, and it's a love song, and she performs accordion on it. And I think there's even a little bit of voice in there, but it's a beautiful piece and I'd love to hear that.

[Song by Pauline Oliveros plays]

SM Oh, that's wonderful, right?

TS I hear the world - I only have two ears and I hear it all with the same two ears and the piece of music that preceded it, the psychedelic rock, is beautiful to me in a similar way that the Pauline Oliveros is. There's a lot to listen to and there's a lot of movement inward as I listen to it. We talk about social problems, and social problems are problems that lots of people have together. And I think it escapes us that the individual is the component within all of those social systems that have all of these problems, and there needs to be some kind of easily accessible practice that helps rehabilitate and grow better individuals. So for me, this way of listening that is nonjudgmental, it's not based on categories, it's just based on some kind of truth and sound is really, really important.

SM Thomas Stanley, this has been such a pleasure. Thank you for talking with me.

TS Sarah, thank you very, very much. I've had a good time.

SM Thomas Stanley is a professor of sound art at George Mason University. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.

[00:28: 04]

SM Welcome back to With Good Reason at Virginia Humanities. When we think of classical music, we think of Beethoven, Mozart and Bach and we're often less aware of the rich contributions of African-American composers and artists. But my next guest is trying to change that. Naima Burrs, is a professional violinist and professor of music at Virginia State University. She says jazz, blues and spirituals are the very roots of the American musical landscape. Naima, what first attracted you to classical music and how young were you?

NB So I was exposed to classical music since really being in the womb. My mother is a singer and a professor, and so I've had such early exposure to music. I got exposed to the strings and the - the quartet of the Richmond Symphony in the fourth grade when they came to visit our school. And I just remember being just so fascinated, you know, by the violin and the sound of it. And I ran home to my mother and said, "I have to play that instrument". And, you know, the rest is really history. So that exposure through the public school system was really huge for me and a big moment. So around the - I guess that's around the age of nine or so, that I began playing the violin. And before that I studied some piano and didn't enjoy it as much as the violin. But I attended a lot of rehearsals and concerts of my mom and her friends and, you know, CDs and all of those things at home. So from as early as I can remember, I've been listening to music.

SM Which classical pieces are attracting you the most right now?

NB There are so many. But honestly, whenever I have the opportunity, I really like to - to share the music and the accomplishments of, you know, Black composers and artists simply just because, you know, they've made such tremendous contributions to our musical society and really not here - only here in America, but all over the world. And even through these, you know, great meaningful contributions, they're often still overlooked. If we're able to really dissect, you know, the American sound and, you know, look to see what's at the root of that, we're often going to really find that it's heavily influenced by the music of African slaves, the music of Native Americans, Negro spiritual, jazz, blues, all of those things are, you know, heavily influential. And I think that Black people really have contributed so much to this great American musical landscape. Really, for me, it's such a privilege to explore these works and composers. You know, whenever I have the chance to do so.

SM We think of that less in classical music, but really, you're saying there's much more diversity among classical music composers than most of us realize?

NB Absolutely. There's - there's so much there. And often we - we don't really get a chance to - to hear them. We have to go search for them. For whatever reason it's not really included in our - our history courses. Even, you know, at the top levels of education, we're really not necessarily exposed to them unless you take a course that is specifically, you know, related to the music of Black Americans or their contributions or you take some type of world music course. But if you, you know, take a regular Western music history course, oftentimes you can go a whole semester without learning about any of these

composers. And so, of course, that's extremely troubling, but that's what we're trying to change. You know, the narrative of what our - our history is.

SM Was it different for you growing up with a mother who was a classical soprano? Did you know more about the Black composers than most young women?

NB You know, maybe so. Honestly, my one thing that I really have gotten from my mom or what's really inspired me is just her - her curiosity. And she's such a supporter of, you know, living composers. She's always purchasing music. She's the type of musician that, you know, here's a piece for trumpet and piano. And she goes and buys it and she has no business - I mean, she does not play the trumpet, but she's that interested that, you know, she's going to add it to her library. And so I definitely was, you know, exposed to much of this throughout my early life and continue to do so. Some of our best conversations are really just talking about things that we've heard. And have you heard of this composer? Did you see this or did you hear that? And that's the story of a lot of Black kids and Black students, is that they - they often get much of this information from their parents because it's not - if we think of Black history in general, not even music related, it's often that stuff is not really taught us in the school. So much of that does come from our parents and the stories that they tell us, and the things that they want to be sure that we - we know, even if we're not going to get it, you know, in the outside world. So she's certainly influenced me there greatly.

SM So you've recorded two pieces for us on your violin, one by Charles Ingram, another by Jacqueline Hairston. Tell us a little bit about Charles Ingram, if you would, and then play the piece that you recorded.

NB Charles Ingram, he's a native of Mississippi. He taught for, I guess, about 31 years or so - music courses to majors in general music students in L.A. Southwest College. After retiring, he moved back to Georgia where he's basically, you know, devoting his time full-time to just composition. And a lot of his output will include works of choral ensembles, he has art songs as well as chamber music for various instruments. His compositions have been performed all across the U.S. as well as Europe. So the pieces that I've chosen are his three vignettes for violin and piano. And this was composed in 2012. And this first movement is titled "Instigation". And I think I just want to point out that the marking is at the beginning of the score, this first movement is marked "warmly aloof". And I find that - I find that title just really funny. It's filled with syncopations, we'll hear interesting dissonances with these satisfying resolutions. So in my mind, I think the syncopations and, you know, the dissonances might represent the aloof, but then when we arrive at these resolutions, we feel that warmth there.

["Instigation" - Charles Ingram, performed by Naima Burr]

Yes, so that piece, you know, I just really think that the violin and the piano really have such a wonderful interaction. It's really fun to play and the piano will play a section. And, you know, you hear the violin kind of come back in with its response and they're, you know, playing their way throughout with the syncopations, I just really love this composition. And the other two movements are in great contrast to it. And it's just so much fun to play. And hopefully everyone's enjoying that.

SM I understand that this piece in particular has had an impact on your own development as a musician?

NB Sure. I mean, I think that one of the most enjoyable parts of really studying and performing music by living composers is that you often really will have the opportunity to speak with them. Mr. Ingram is a friend of my mother's and she performs some works by him, and when she heard that he had this, she bought this and gave it to me and said, "you need to perform this". And I've had the chance to speak with him, you know, about his history and his development as a composer. And I think that, you know, those experiences are just - are really fantastic. And, you know, we play music by Mozart and Beethoven, but of course, we can't talk to them. So being able to really connect with the composer and hopefully do their work justice is really neat. It's a - it's a neat opportunity.

SM Another piece that you will perform for us is composed by Jacqueline Hairston. Tell me about her work and her life.

NB So Miss Hairston is a native of North Carolina and she wears many hats. She's a pianist. She's a composer, arranger, conductor, a vocal coach, educator. She received her musical training at Juilliard. So her works have been recorded by the London Symphony and the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, as well as has been performed by singers like Kathleen Battle, Denise Graves, Shirley Verret, Grace Bumbry, William Warfield. So many great giants in our field. And honestly, I'd grown up listening to my mother perform Miss Hairston's Spiritual Arrangements, so I was really delighted that I would have the opportunity to see these and that she arranged many of those spirituals for the violin. In this collection of spirituals, there's a wonderful variety. We see "Ain't-A that Good News" and "Guide my Feet", "Wade in the Water" and the one that I really found particularly moving is her setting of "This Little Light of Mine". And spirituals in general are, you know, just to clarify, these are originally really an oral tradition that would be imparting some sort of Christian values while also really describing the hardships and experiences of slavery. Many people will know the words of "This Little Light of Mine", it's been used in many different settings. And if you think back even to, you know, the civil rights movement, as that was growing in the 50s and 60s, singers could use these lyrics or change them around to really reference their particular struggle. And so those new versions were known as freedom songs. And so for me, I think that it's, you know, powerful in its simplicity, I would say. But it remains relevant, you know, as we navigate our way through 2020.

[00:39:47]

["This Little Light of Mine" - Jacqueline Hairston, performed by Naima Burrs]

SM I love how you use your violin to convey the spiritual. It's not a way we think of the violin usually in classical music.

NB Yes, thank you so much, and I really find that Miss Hairston setting is just so moving, this song particularly, I find it particularly beautiful really and it has its calming nature, while the words - we know the words, even though, you know, on the violin, we're not hearing the words, they really offer us strength and optimism to - to make it through difficult times, whatever they may be. And Miss Harrison's arrangement really is just - just beautiful.

SM Have you performed that publicly also?

NB I have done this one, a recital or two, and people really love it. You can feel the silence and the stillness in the room. And I think that people kind of gravitate to that with the, you know, the hustle and bustle in life just moving so fast. And sometimes it's nice to just center ourselves and have something to - to hold on to and relate to. And, you know, here

in 2020, as we continue to witness the injustices related to racism and police brutality or even as we see the COVID cases continuing to rise, I think that this is something that just gives us calm and gives us a little bit of inspiration to - to make it through these tough times.

SM You know, you mentioned as a little girl being so awestruck by the Richmond Symphony and the beautiful coordinated giant sound of the instruments playing together. And yet this summer, you yourself played alongside the Richmond Symphony at the memorial vigil at the sight of Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond.

NB Right. That event was actually - or that vigil was in honor of Elijah McClain. And honestly, all of the lives lost unjustly at the hands of the police. This was a large community orchestra filled with professionals and amateurs and students, and everyone showed up to play without any rehearsal - just there to really offer, you know, music and healing to our community. And I should mention that I think that this was the first event that many of us played or participated in since the shutdowns for COVID-19. So it was extremely emotional on so many different levels. I think that, you know, with everything that had been happening, you know, unexpectedly, kind of, like with COVID and with the killings of unarmed Black people and everyone's been unable to spend time together, really, which usually you would spend time with friends and get together and talk about these things and deal with these things and play music, play concerts, which are so healing. To have just so many things taken away, and you having to kind of deal with this stuff on your own is extremely difficult. And a lot of us, you know, hadn't been to our jobs, we hadn't played music, so many freelance musicians, you know, all of their gigs taken away. And all of that really seemed so small in comparison to people dying of COVID-19 and, you know, people being killed by police unjustly. So there was a lot of mixes of emotions just on so many different levels. And, you know, to hear the beautiful sounds of the strings and to - to be standing in such a controversial space in front of the Lee Monument and to see all the artwork, you know, on that statue and to be surrounded by so many people of the community for the first time when we all have been staying to ourselves was - it was quite a moment. I definitely will never, ever, ever forget that.

SM Did you feel love and strength surrounded by these other musicians playing beautiful music together?

NB So much love and strength, and my family was there and many of my friends were there. And some of the people that we see, you know, at symphony gigs or we see at weddings, you know, multiple times a month or, you know, even sometimes multiple times a week, you're finally rejoining with these people for the first time and taking your instrument out and being able to make music together. And at this event, I actually had the honor of conducting a small ensemble of friends or, you know, friends and professional musicians. And we performed George Walker's lyric for strings. And for those who aren't familiar with Walker, he was a pianist and composer and the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize for music. And this was the piece that Walker composed in response to the death of his grandmother. So I think it was particularly moving to share this music with the community. I remember one of the chords that we sustained, and I looked up in the sky and the clouds were separating and the sun was coming through. And it was it's almost like time stopped. I can't really explain the feeling of being there with everyone, but definitely love and definitely a sense of community and support.

SM You were doing some conducting of your own as part of your current course work. How does that work at a time of shutdown or when we're social distancing?

NB Yeah. So I'm a mayoral candidate in instrumental conducting at the Catholic University of America, and it's quite interesting to be studying something in which you don't have your actual instrument with you. So a conductor's real, you know, instrument is the orchestra. It's the ensemble. And so much of what we learn is by the response to our gestures and the response to the moves that we make. What do the instruments sound like when they watch us give certain gestures? My professors at Catholic have been wonderful in trying to find ways to be innovative and change around the coursework so that we're able to still, you know, grow as musicians and conductors. So we do a lot of work over Zoom, we still continue on with our private lessons, we've been making what are called tile videos. So we use a recording and we conduct to that whatever the excerpt might be, and we have a sound engineer who then takes our conducting video and passes it along to the ensemble and each of the instruments will record their - their part individually. And so we're right now in the process of putting all of those together. So everybody's just looking for ways to be innovative and give, you know, the students the possibility to continue on. And so I'm definitely thankful that we didn't have to pause our degrees and we're able to still learn and continue on the path.

SM What about now? What are you listening to these days that gives you pleasure, either classical or just fun?

NB Oh, man, my playlist - I listen to so many different things, depending on what I'm working on at the time. If I'm heavy into a lot of score study, a lot of times I like to listen to things that are not related. So I listen - you know, I just need a little break from this, but of course I love opera and all of that. So there's some popular artists that I do like to listen to, like Alex Isley. I listen to a lot of Butcher Brown, that's my brother is in a well-known band here, Butcher Brown, they're fantastic. But I also, I still - I love Anne-Sophie Mutter. She's probably my most favorite musician in general. I love Leontyne Price. I listen to all of her albums. Spotify is amazing for that because I can just put it on and just keep searching and searching and searching. So my musical playlist is - it's varied, there are a lot of different things.

SM Can you pick a song that we could play right now that's one of the ones that you've been having fun with recently?

NB Yeah, this is this is Leontyne Price singing "Care Selve". And this is probably - this is a piece that brings me just so much joy, but also just comfort and the beautiful spin of her voice. And I often put this on when I need to be centered.

SM Naima, thank you so much. This is wonderful and thank you for talking with us on With Good Reason.

NB Thank you so much. It's been an absolute pleasure.

SM Naima Burrs is a professional violinist and professor of music at Virginia State University. She's also a doctoral candidate in instrumental conducting at Catholic University of America. Support for With Good Reason is provided by the University of Virginia Health System, uvahealth.com. With Good Reason, is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation, the original people of the land and waters of our home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team as Allison Quantz, Matt Darroch, Lauren Francis, Jamal Millner and Aiden Carroll. For the podcast go to withgoodreasonradio.org. I'm Sarah McConnell, thanks for listening.