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Voices of Two Little Girls Blue: Janis Joplin, Nina Simone, and the Blues

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There is a fire inside of every one of us.
—Janis Joplin, "Kozmic Blues"
Because I have loved so vainly, and sung with such faltering breath, ...
—Nina Simone, "Compensation"

Janis Joplin and Nina Simone, two of the most popular and influential singers of the mid-twentieth century, had divergent musical styles, differing racial backgrounds, and dissimilar career trajectories; however, the two singers had much in common, including singing the blues and suffering much loneliness and emotional turmoil in their personal lives. As performers, both struggled with the gap between their public singer personas and their authentic selves. This paper analyzes Joplin and Simone's music and their efforts to reconcile their internal conflicts through their songs. Although the article discusses multiple elements of their oeuvres, it focuses particularly on their distinct renditions of the song, "Little Girl Blue," which profoundly and intimately embody who the women were personally. Joplin's version of the song is an emotional piece, the second half of which is almost a moaning cry of pain, while Simone's is a quiet and delicate song of wavering resignation and hope. Joplin, who died from a drug overdose, suffered from alienation throughout her singing career, longed to connect with the collective voice of a community, and sang about her despair in her own individual voice. Simone layered the collective voice on her individual voice in her music, seeking to intertwine her singer-persona's voice with her personal thoughts and feelings to create her own unique voice of a suffering human being who survives and sings for joy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

American music legends Janis Joplin and Nina Simone were two of the most beloved and influential popular singers of the mid-twentieth century, and their music remains vital today. Despite their divergent musical styles, differing racial backgrounds, and dissimilar career trajectories, the two singers had much in common, including singing the blues and suffering much emotional turmoil in their personal lives. As performers, they also both struggled with the gap between their public singer personas and their authentic selves. Their life stories have garnered much attention, but their actual music and their efforts to reconcile their internal conflicts through their songs have received insufficient scholarly attention.

This paper endeavors to help fill that deficit. After first giving a brief overview of pertinent aspects of the history of American blues music, this article will analyze key elements of Joplin and Simone's music generally and discuss how they manifest in each of their renditions of a particular song, "Little Girl Blue," which they both recorded in their own distinct voice. This analysis will delve into the two singers' songwriting and lyric adaptations to explore the unique voices they cultivated through their music. Examining the similarities and especially the differences between the two singers deepens our understanding of the essence of their remarkable talents and voices.

2. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PERTINENT ASPECTS OF AMERICAN BLUES MUSIC

2.1 The Persona of a Blues Singer

Performing before an audience enables a singer to channel their inner emotions outward and embody a distinct persona. This phenomenon is particularly evident in blues music, in which singers immerse themselves in imaginary scenarios to convey somber feelings sometimes in very raw ways. This depicted sadness is an artistic portrayal, yet audiences may believe that the singers are expressing their own actual thoughts and emotions.

Blues music has its origins in African American culture in the Deep South during the 1860s. The mass commercialization of African American secular music in the 1930s introduced blues protagonists, often portrayed as underdogs, appealing to an audience that embraced their musical recordings known then as "race records" and welcomed the protagonists' "otherness."

In fact, the names of some 1930s blues singers, like Blind Willie Johnson, Blind Lemon, and Blind Willie McTell, emphasized that they suffered from double marginalization as both Black and visually impaired persons. By the 1940s and 50s, mainstream audiences embraced otherness in blues lyrics more broadly by perceiving Black artists in general as leading unfortunate lives.[1]

We do not know how early blues singers, who were all Black, felt about being consumed as representatives of the "other." The late 1920s and 30s commercial recordings categorized Black songs into "voices of sorrow" and "devil music," delineating Black spirituals and the blues respectively. Musicians were divided into these categories as well, fragmenting the identity of Black music. The blues framework, particularly in songs catering to popular music markets, imposed expectations for singers to personify traits like depression, outcast status, and sexual inhibition. This new persona that Black entertainers had to assume, added to existing degrading stereotypes that minstrel shows had created.[2]

2.2 The Blues as a Voice of Collective Memory

In traditional blues, a singer may refer to themselves as "a poor boy" or "a poor girl," but when they do, they are speaking not only as the individual persona they're inhabiting for the song, but of anyone who has suffered from marginalization. Traditionally, blues lyrics are an accumulation of lyrical formulas encapsulating communal emotions that reflect the collective memory of the Black community and resonate over the passage of time. For example, the lyrics of the 1927 song "Back Water Blues" by the iconic Black blues singer Bessie Smith (1894–1937) begin as follows:

> When it rained five days and the sky turned dark as night (×2)
> Then trouble's takin' place in the lowlands at night
>
> I woke up this mornin', can't even get out of my door (×2)
> There's enough trouble to make a poor girl wonder where she wanna go[3]

Smith's singer-persona is a victim in this song, but the flood, not a hostile person, drove her to despair. Two stanzas later, the singer reveals that "there's thousands of people, ain't got no place to go," and thus all of them are also suffering the same misery as the singer-protagonist.[4] These folktale-like lyrics tell a story of a community facing tragic adversity, and

not just the experience of the individual singer-protagonist.

The stylistic essence of traditional blues inherently preserves its historical backdrop and memories of the past, with the blues artist singing in a collective voice reflected in the lyrics. The phrase "I woke up this mornin'" that Smith uses here is a common component of many blues songs. The lyric triggers immediate recognition in the listener, binding singer and listener in a shared recollection of the phrase's appearance in many songs and forging connections with many other performers and audiences. The repetition of lines of lyrics in blues songs represents a call and response between one person and many others in the same situation, all embodied in one singer's voice. The blues singer is thus connected to others who have suffered or are suffering the same hardships. In the Black blues tradition, being a victim is the normal state of existence, and the singer neither appeals nor insists for help or change in the lyrics. They just describe and reflect on their circumstances, comfort themselves, and try to keep on living.

2.3 The Changing Personas of Black Female Blues Singers

The formulaic persona of Black female singers evolved from the 1920s and 1930s, when it was exemplified by singers like Bessie Smith, to the 1940s and 1950s, when it was represented by singers like Billie Holiday (1915–1959). Smith's singing exhibited a playful musical style reflecting vaudeville, and her singer-persona did not represent her personal life. However, a shift took place by the 1940s and 1950s when Holiday was prominent. Audiences began associating the hardships depicted in lyrics that the performers sang with the singers' actual real life experience. As the singers' success grew, so did their image of having a tragic upbringing and doomed existence. In 1962, music critic Ralph J. Gleason wrote of Billie Holiday:

> The story of her life, in all the grisly, tawdry Sunday supplement detail from illegitimate birth, through prostitution, jailhouse, junk, jailhouse again, and the final deathbed scene—under arrest in the hospital room for narcotics, gasping out her final breaths, $750 in $50 bills strapped to her shrunken leg—has been told over and over and over. Please God, let her rest in peace at last; she was tortured enough in life in her all-too-public hell.[5]

Fig. 1. Album cover of Janis Joplin, *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* (1969). 1993, 1999 Sony Entertainment Inc.

Fig. 2. Album cover of Nina Simone, *Little Girl Blue* (1959). The Official Home of Nina Simone. https://www.ninasimone.com/discography/.

By the 1960s, audiences had come to accept the lyrics sung by women blues singers as an expression of their personal feelings and thoughts. Audiences enjoyed conflating the image of the singer-persona with that of the actual singer. A large market emerged that consumed both singers' voices and episodes from their personal lives. It is with this background this paper explores the music of two prominent singers of the 1960s: Janis Joplin and Nina Simone and their renditions of the song "Little Girl Blue."

3. The Music of Janis Joplin and Nina Simone, and Their Renditions of "Little Girl Blue"

Music icons Janis Joplin (1943–1970) and Nina Simone (1933–2003) were both labeled as "blues singers," although Joplin's music also encompassed psychedelic rock and Simone integrated an eclectic mix of jazz, gospel, and classical music into her songs. They recorded numerous albums and gave many live performances, including their recordings and live performances of their own very distinctive blues renditions of the song "Little Girl Blue" from the 1935 Broadway musical *Jumbo.* The song was written by Broadway legends Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, who composed over 500 songs together.[6]

"Little Girl Blue" has been recorded countless times by both female and male singers in different musical genres, including major stars like Frank

Sinatra, Judy Garland, and Louis Armstrong, with the balance of expression of the song's conflicting emotions depending on the singer. The renowned jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald's 1956 rendition creates a dreamlike ambiance, revealing distinct nuances with her voice evoking the stereotypical image of a heartbroken young woman seen through a man's protective gaze. The popular singer and actress Doris Day's version of the song in the 1962 movie *Billy Rose's Jumbo*, a remake of the original musical, resembles the original version of the song in many ways.[7]

Joplin and Simone's very personal renditions of the song differ radically from the original and represent far more than their casual interpretations of an old musical standard that numerous artists have recorded. They reflect more broadly the two singers' own life experiences, distinctive singer-personas, and musical styles, as well as the disparate racial and cultural contexts for their music. Joplin and Simone's renditions of the song so profoundly and intimately embody who both women were personally that Simone herself named her first album *Little Girl Blue* in 1959 and Amy Berg named her 2015 documentary about Joplin *Little Girl Blue*. Simone's portrait on the cover of her album clearly fits the title, too.[8]

But Joplin and Simone's renditions not only differ from the original, they differ significantly from each other. Joplin's is an emotional piece, the second half almost a moaning cry of pain, while Simone's is a quiet and delicate song of wavering resignation and hope. What factors shaped their two very distinctive versions of the song and why are there such great differences? How can I describe their voices and the influences that shaped the two iconic singers more generally and the differences between them? Simone identified herself as "Little Girl Blue" in her debut album; how would Joplin have felt about being identified as such by a documentarian? What elements of the two singers' personalities and voices made the meanings of the three words representative of their images? The next two sections of this paper attempt to shed light on these questions by describing separately each singer's overall musical craft and how in turn it is reflected in her rendition of "Little Girl Blue."

4. Janis Joplin

4.1 Joplin's Voice and Her Association with the Blues

The prominent music impresario and concert promoter Bill Graham heralded Janis Joplin as "the first white singer of that era who sounded

like she had to come from the world of Black blues."[9] However, this classification of her singing style as blues has not been without critique;[10] in fact, Joplin's voice and image are intertwined with blues and Black music but diverge in important ways from those of the traditional blues singer in African American folk music. Joplin's singing style evokes elements of the "ring shout," a communal African American religious practice involving rhythmic vocalization and prayer, but it differs from the ring shout in significant ways as well.[11] Like the ring shout that builds gradually and grows in intensity, Joplin's songs often start softly and then crescendo and intensify as they progress. Yet Joplin's expression is that of an often isolated individual crying out in pain and not one of spiritual unity and communal religious fervor inherent in the ring shout.

Joplin's voice also offers little of the redeeming quality and inviting sensibility that one finds in Bessie Smith's voice, for example. Traditional Black songs contain an inherently communal aspect, no matter how painful their theme may be. The singing style exudes a sense of spiritual togetherness, like connecting to someone distant or conversing with someone unspecified. Smith's singing in the 1930s, before the blues had enjoyed decades of broad popularity, carried an air of spontaneous vitality, the expressive power to laugh off misfortune as if life itself was no more than a casually encountered experience in which many things were beyond a person or community's control. By contrast, Joplin's singing expresses a painful, mighty struggle amidst difficulties life presents, emerging as sharp, isolated, and stark, baring a self-inflicted vulnerability.

"Kozmic Blues" (*I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!*, 1969), that Joplin both wrote and recorded begins with a description of her singer-persona's solitary journey:

> Time keeps moving on
> Friends they turn away
> I keep moving on
> But I never found out why[12]

As Ulrich Adelt points out, Joplin portrayed herself in numerous interviews as a victim of marginalization and mistreatment.[13] Joplin experienced intense unease in her hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, and was already in treatment for alcohol and drug addiction in her late teens.[14] Her struggle seems to have stemmed from dissonance between two contradictory aspects of her identity: one in which she lived in solitude as a victim who

also valued her independence, and the other in which she desperately and naively sought a devoted romantic partner as the solution to her problems.

4.2 Joplin's First Self-Identity: Her Voice of Isolation and Independence

In the first version of herself, Joplin, being consuming by an inner fire, chooses to destroy the comfort of living with others and instead seeks stimulation and safety in the solitude that arises. Importantly, Joplin believes she needs to leave other people not because she has decided to turn away from them, but because they have turned their backs on her. As she sings in "Kozmic Blues," "Friends they turn away / I keep moving on."[15] And in another of the same album's songs "One Good Man" (1969), Joplin underscores her loneliness and how people have let her down, explaining that she "love[s] to go to parties and … like[s] to have a good time," but that it can "get[s] too pale after a while."[16]

In an interview, Joplin compared and contrasted herself with Zelda Fitzgerald (1900–1948), the novelist and socialite wife of the renowned author F. Scott Fitzgerald. According to Joplin, both women were considered dangerous for their unprecedented personalities and talents in the social atmosphere of the American South that demanded subservient femininity. Both of their upbringings led to their mental instability. But Joplin contended that they differed because Zelda was married, while Joplin did not have a life partner.[17] Joplin's identification with Zelda, the iconic flapper, might reflect her fondness for romanticizing her past as an alluring outsider, but both women sought recognition in the arts and put great value on life in the present.

Nevertheless, Zelda and Joplin had obvious differences. The former Zelda Sayre came from a privileged Southern family, and benefitting from her looks and social standing, she attracted the attention of men from a young age. She married Fitzgerald, who eagerly sought after her, and began her writing career under her husband's influence. At the same time, she could not dispel her husband's shadow on her reputation. Zelda's misfortune was that she had difficulty being recognized as an independent writer under the social gaze. While being treated for mental illness at Highland Hospital in North Carolina, she tragically died in a hospital fire.[18]

On the other hand, Joplin unlike Zelda did not grow up in affluence. In her book *Love, Janis*, Janis' sister Laura Joplin recounts numerous instances in which Janis resisted following societal norms by breaking school rules and community expectations. Her rebellious adolescent behavior led to a

tarnished reputation in her hometown and distanced her from her family.[19]

And as Joplin herself noted, she never married and was never protected or overshadowed by a male figure. This absence of a male guardian subjected her to hostility, disdain, and isolation in her hometown. Combined with her being a White blues singer, Joplin's being single posed substantial challenges in her professional career, but provided special opportunities as well. As her sister put it: "The novelty of being a white, female blues singer made Janis fabulously successful. It also held her in a prison …."[20] Contemporary social norms dictated that a White female should have a male protector, while the archetype of a blues singer implied a solitary and outcast existence. This conflicting identity as "a white female blues singer" suggested a life of dual isolation. Despite this, Joplin deliberately adopted this persona and let it lead her life, resulting in enormous creative and professional success while ultimately entrapping her personally in a figurative "prison."

Joplin framed herself as "a white, female blues singer" to promote her image and popularity as a star before the designation would associate her with a particular musical genre. Joplin's untimely death in 1970 at the age of 27 from a heroin overdose was so tragic that Joplin's sister associated it with those of Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday. Laura Joplin asserts that "Janis absorbed the details of the life of a blues singer by reading Billie Holiday's 1956 autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*," and writes, "I wonder if Janis was able to glorify Bessie and Billie only by copying them down to their weaknesses."[21]

The persona of a glorified female blues singer may have had significant control over Joplin's later life. But it is important to note that there is a crucial difference between what Joplin faced as a White person and what Smith and Holiday faced as Black. Joplin's addictions, which eventually ended her life, were deeply related to the problems of the White community in which she grew up and are distinct from the experiences of Smith and Holiday as Black women who lived during the Jim Crow era. America has often used Black music culture to avert its eyes from severe problems of White society.

Associating the experiences that led to Joplin's untimely death with those of Black blues musicians without engaging in critical analysis misappropriates the history of the blues. When African American blues became incorporated into the dominant White music industry in the 1930s, negative stereotypes of Blacks came with it. Although the majority of singers were Black men, Black women also sang the blues and faced

the same negative racial stereotypes their male counterparts did. And as women, they were represented as leading wild existences without "proper" guardians.

Thirty years later in the 1960s, Janis Joplin became the first White woman thrown into this multidimensional discrimination. Joplin herself was genuinely attracted to the blues; after all, blues is healing music for the wounded. Ironically though, Black music in the 1960s national marketplace was in peril as White beatnik musicians entered the arena, and as enduring negative racial stereotypes remained part of Black blues singers' image and appeal to a wider White audience. The concomitant emergence of large-scale outdoor concerts as part of the new business model meant that Black blues singers, not suited for these large venues, found it difficult to find suitable career directions. Moreover, Joplin was a brave, independent woman who did not flatter with her beauty or figure and had no male protector. How did she navigate this cultural and commercial maelstrom? Was she able to make the blues her own?

4.3 Joplin's Second Self-Identity: Her Voice That Expresses Intense Emotional Need and Seeks a Romantic Partner as a Panacea

The key distinction that differentiates Janis Joplin from blues singers in the Black tradition is that Joplin wrote and sang in a personal voice in which she as the singer-persona related her own personal thoughts and feelings that she experienced. The moment her voice utters a lyric, it intensely demands empathy. Although listeners may identify closely with what Joplin is expressing as she sings, she is a sole victim in her songs, purporting to speak for no one but herself. Indeed, Joplin repeatedly asserts her victimhood in her songs and performances and craves for affection.

By contrast, as set forth earlier in this paper, singers in the Black blues tradition express their experiences in terms of collective memory and they neither insist nor appeal to listeners to have sympathy for them as an individual. Instead, they lament about the misery of their conditions as a normal, perhaps inevitable aspect of their lives, particularly as marginalized African Americans in White society. Traditional Black blues singers reflect on their circumstances, comfort themselves, and endeavor to keep on living through it all.

In contrast to Joplin's self-identification as a victim who was isolated yet independent, an opposing part of Joplin desperately wanted a romantic partner as a panacea for all her problems. In this second version of herself,

she at core is Janis, an insecure girl who yearns for everlasting love and a fairy tale-like resolution. Many of Joplin's songs are powerful and personal messages about a resolute quest for a devoted partner. But they represent imaginary narratives that do not require sustained emotional effort to last. And such an idyllic partner never appears in reality, leaving Janis always lonely and continually searching.

For instance, in "One Good Man" (1969), discussed above from the album *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!*, Joplin singer persona describes how when she is no longer having fun at a party and feels isolated, she seeks a single faithful male lover who will never leave her:

> Honey, and I start looking to find, one good man
> Hmm, don't you know I've been searching
> Oh yes, I have.

And in the immediately following lines, Joplin's persona underscores how that male lover is the answer to all her woes:

> One good man
> Oh, it isn't much, honey it isn't much
> It's only everything.[22]

In "I Need a Man to Love" (*Cheap Thrills*, 1968), she repeats the stirring phrase "I need a man." Joplin's posthumously released album *Pearl* (1971) contains her striking song "Move Over," which portrays a woman frustrated by a man who rejects the singer-persona verbally yet will not leave her side. Although she tells the man to "move over," she does not speak of ending their relationship. Instead, she feels on the edge, as if their relationship is "hanging from the end of a string," as she continues to face the man. She says he expects her to "fight like a goddamned mule."

> You say that it's over baby. You say that it's over now,
> But still you hang around me, come on. Won't you move over?
> You know that I need a man. You know that I need a man,
> But when I ask you to, you just tell me that maybe you can.[23]

In an interview on *The Dick Cavett Show* that aired on June 25, 1970, just a few months before her death, Joplin says that she wrote the lyrics to "Move Over" based on the image of a mule with a carrot dangling from the

end of its nose and chasing it forever without getting it.[24] While singing of the frustrating love relationship, Joplin, the singer-persona, demands and screams and captures the listener's heart. Joplin's powerful voice vacuums the listeners into her world.

Once again, this loud and unabashed expression of her needs distinguishes Joplin from traditional Black blues singers. In Bessie Smith's "Reckless Blues" (1925), Smith's singer-persona describes how as a young person she had much pull with men with her mother calling her "reckless" and her father calling her "wild." Because these characteristics are stereotypes of Black women, most listeners accept the parents' accusations as amusing fiction, and the tradition protects the singer for better or worse. At the end of the song, Smith's persona finally expresses her own feelings, but even then, she hides behind the appellations of "my daddy" and "my mama," deceiving and confusing her listeners for fun. She calls her love interest "Daddy" or "Papa" and herself "Mama"—a framework that appears to reference the closeness of her parents even as she hints at her own sexual/romantic desires. She sings: "Daddy, mama wants some lovin'," and "Darn it, pretty papa, mama wants some lovin' right now." As is characteristic of Black blues tradition, Smith's lyrics hint at sexual desires, flirting, and teasing the other party.[25]

This approach stands in stark contrast to Joplin's singer-persona's direct, passionate, and even desperate appeal for love. Both Smith and Joplin's singer-personas seek love, but Smith's voice retains a playfulness that diminishes the tension in the male-female relationship. The indulgent language with which she calls the man she loves "Daddy" or "Papa" communicates hope and the coming joy of their sexual liaison.

Herein lies another crucial difference between Joplin's singer-persona and Smith's: Smith's singer-protagonist in "Reckless Blues" loves herself, while Joplin's personas in her songs do not. Smith declares: "I ain't good lookin', but I'm somebody's angel child." Smith slowly, playfully, and repeatedly asks for what she wants, all the while celebrating herself and accepting the negative reality of "not being pretty." Smith's use of a story-time setting, playfulness in the face of unsatisfactory situations, and her art of accepting and loving herself despite her marginalized circumstances render her voice part of the Black blues tradition. It's a place of safety, in which the blues voice relaxes the listener and invites participation. But in striking contrast, Joplin's agonized singer-persona is left out there on her own to fend for herself.

4.4 Joplin's Rendition of "Little Girl Blue": A Voice of Solitude Unconnected to the Past

As mentioned above, "Little Girl Blue" is originally a song from the 1935 Broadway musical *Jumbo*, an entertainment extravaganza that has the perhaps dubious distinction of being the only musical to feature an entire circus with over 500 live animals. *Jumbo's* plot revolves around two feuding circus owners whose children fall in love. Eventually, "the lovers succeed in bringing the rival fathers together," but not before they fear that their fathers' feud will cause them to be forever separated. The daughter Mickey sings "Little Girl Blue" as the first-act finale in which she voices her despair that she and her lover might never be together. The adult Mickey sings to herself as a child as she dreams that she is a child again being entertained by the circus performers.[26]

Mickey's calling herself "little girl blue" is a play off the famous nursery rhyme "Little Boy Blue", about a little boy who sleeps under a haystack instead of watching the sheep. A 1912 version of the renowned rhyme adds verses connecting the rhyme to sadness, saying: "Will you wake him? No, not I; For if I do, he'll be sure to cry."[27] While the original lyrics of "Little Girl Blue" contain a brief interlude in which the signer dreams that she is a child again being entertained by the circus performers, the main section of the song's original lyrics are:

> Sit there and count your fingers / What can you do?
> Old girl, you're through
> Sit there and count your little fingers / Unlucky little girl blue.
> Sit there and count the raindrops / Falling on you
> It's time you knew
> All you can count on is the raindrops
> That fall on little girl blue.
>
> No use old girl
> You may as well surrender
> Your hope is getting slender
> Why won't somebody send a tender blue boy
> To cheer up little girl blue?[28]

In the 1962 movie *Billy Rose's Jumbo*, adapted from the stage musical but with a reworked plot, the movie's heroine Kitty mistakenly thinks she has

been cheated and abandoned by her lover, and she sings "Little Girl Blue" as an expression of a small innocent girl's disillusion, though with a hint of hope.[29]

Janis Joplin's rendition of "Little Girl Blue" is featured on *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!*.[30] Joplin's significant adaptations and additions to the lyrics and her raw and intimate performance of the song transform "Little Girl Blue" into a profoundly different song and experience for the listener from any of the versions that came before hers. The romantic longing of which Doris Day sang in her perfectly coifed hairdo in *Billy Rose's Jumbo* just seven years before is replaced by the wild and frizzy haired Joplin's unflinching expression of her solitude and loneliness. Joplin's unmeditated communication of her thoughts and emotions in her music was emblematic of the profound social change that took place in America during the 1960s, of which Joplin was one of its most visible symbols.

Examining Joplin's lyrical adaptations, Joplin declares that "little girl blue" is "unhappy" four times in the song, while word "unhappy" does not even appear in the original song lyrics from the *Jumbo* musical or the 1962 movie. The original lyrics contain only a single description of the girl as "unlucky," a description that Joplin retains once as well. Gone too in Joplin's lyrics are memories of earlier childhood joy, such as that which the singer found at the circus described in the original version.

In Joplin's version, her singer-persona is not interested in why or how the girl is unhappy, and instead focuses on the acute hopeless experience of "unhappiness" itself that emanates. Significantly too, Joplin omits the original lyrics plaintive question—"Why won't somebody send a tender blue boy to cheer up little girl blue?"—thereby not offering a romantic solution to the little girl's sadness. This omission places the song firmly as an expression of the first aspect of Joplin's self-identity set forth above, that of isolated and independent solitude. It distinguishes the song from the second aspect of Joplin's self-identity epitomized by Joplin's singer-persona in "One Good Man," featured on the same album as "Little Girl Blue," who fervently believes that finding a faithful male lover, "one good man," will solve her problems.

In "Little Girl Blue," Joplin expresses strong understanding and sympathy for the isolated, grieving girl, who can do nothing more than count her fingers, and the singer says to her, "I know how you feel," "I know you're unhappy," and even "I know you got no reason to go on." In the final line, she expresses deep compassion, saying "Ooh-ooh, honey, I

know, baby, I know just how your feel." Joplin's complete lyrics are:

> Sit there, hmm, count your fingers. / What else, what else is there to do?
> Oh, and I know how you feel, / I know you feel that you're through.
> Oh, wah wah ahh sit there, hmm, count, / Ah, count your little fingers,
> My unhappy oh little girl, little girl blue, yeah.
> …
> And I know you feel that you must be through.
> Oh honey, go on and sit right back down,
> I want you to count, oh count your fingers,
> Ah my unhappy, my unlucky / And my little, oh, girl blue.
> I know you're unhappy, / Ooh ah, honey I know,
> Baby I know just how you feel.[31]

In Joplin's version of the song, the singer and the girl are both Janis Joplin. It is she who is looking and speaking, and it is also she who is being looked at and talked to. Indeed, personal loneliness underpins nearly all of Joplin's songs. Her life, marked by alcohol and drug use, brought transient connections, rendering each successive moment quickly a relic of the past. This disconnection from the past perpetuated her isolation. Unlike traditional Black songs steeped in a history of survival, which evoke reconciliation and resilience, Joplin's compositions delve into her intimate experiences, resisting communal engagement.

Joplin's songs encapsulate an introspective realm, steering clear of the conventional blues role of embracing collective struggle. No matter how much traditional blues singers mourn, "a poor girl" represents the collective, not the individual personality. On the contrary, Joplin's songs express her personal inner life. Even when put to blues music, she still does not invite others to communicate with her. And unlike the traditional Black blues persona, she never lets herself act as somebody bound by her social circumstances to be a loser at life. She holds on to a belief in her individual agency, and the strength of Joplin's voice is the secret of her long-lived music. Her solitary voice is brave. Though she is pushed to the edge, her voice reconciles with no one, not even with the past, as heard in her composition, "Turtle Blues" (1968):

> 'Whoa, call me mean, or call me evil.
> I've been called much worser things, all things around.
> Yeah but, I'm gonna take good care of Janis, yeah!
> Honey, ain't no one gonna dog me down, yeaaah yeaaahhh.[32]

5. Nina Simone

5.1 The Connection of Her Musical Voices and Self Concept to the Past

Nina Simone was an exceptionally talented artist who possessed a multifaceted musical gift. She diligently took piano lessons throughout her formative years and mastered European classical music. While grounded in both traditional Black songs and classical music, she was infused with the assertive spirit of the 1960s and exhibited a unique and unrestrained self-expression.

Simone's vocal prowess encapsulates dual identities: one that engages with contemporary existence and another that channels voices of the past. The former is often full of anger and passion and tends to reject others, while the latter embodies a contemplative spirit that gently invites others to join its melody. These two voices can be classified into four categories: 1) the voice of drama; 2) the voice of storytelling; 3) the voice of an activist appealing for change; and 4) the voice of looking back and overcoming. Sometimes one voice is louder in Simone's music, and at other times another comes to the fore. Below, we will look at each of the four voices in turn.

5.2 The Voice of Drama That Conveys Other People's Lives

Simone's "voice of drama" was present from the beginning of her career. Many of her early and much-loved hit songs were covers of songs from Broadway musicals. Simone's first album, *Little Girl Blue* (1959), contains five songs from musicals: "Little Girl Blue" (*Jumbo*, 1935), "I Loves You, Porgy" (*Porgy and Bess*, 1935), "My Baby Just Cares for Me" (*Whoopee!*, film version 1930), "Love Me or Leave Me" (*Whoopee!*, 1928), and "You'll Never Walk Alone" (*Carousel*, 1945).[33] The first four of these became Simone's signature songs.

Along with "Summertime," "I Loves You, Porgy" is one of the most recognized songs from the Gershwin opera *Porgy and Bess*. The character Bess, caught between her lover Crown and her suitor Porgy, communicates her emotional turmoil to Porgy through this song. Simone's rendition of the song highlights the complexity of Bess's experience as a Black woman within a society that dictates her position:

> Someday, I know he's coming to call me
> He's going to handle me and hold me so.

It's going to be like dying, Porgy
When he calls me.
But when he comes, I know I'll have to go

Simone's cover version underscores Bess' passion for a free and respectable life. The voice of Bess, the singing-protagonist who is not free to choose her place nor is respected in society, represents the voice of Black people during the Jim Crow era. Simone sings quietly as if Bess, the persona Simone is embodying in the song, is talking to herself, but she raises her volume to make a strong appeal when she sings "I love you Porgy" and implores "Don't let him handle me."[34]

In 1987, Simone's rendition of "My Baby Just Cares for Me" (*Little Girl Blue*, 1959) was used in a Chanel No. 5 perfume commercial in the United Kingdom, and the song itself then suddenly catapulted into a top 10 hit in the U.K. It marked Simone's return to the music market, from which she had distanced herself since the 1970s. The original song appeared in the film version of the musical comedy *Whoopee!*, in which Eddie Cantor (1892–1964) sings the song in blackface in high spirits, just like in minstrel shows.

My baby don't care for shows, / My baby don't care for clothes
My baby just cares for me!
My baby don't care for furs and laces, / My baby don't care for high-toned places
My baby don't care for rings, / Or other expensive things
She's sensible as can be.
....
Bud Rogers is not her style, / And even Chevalier's smile
Is something that she can't see[35]

Simone's autobiography reveals that "My Baby Just Cares for Me" was chosen as an upbeat finale for side one of her first album.[36] Simone removed the ridiculous stereotype of the blackface performance and brilliantly inverted the perspective of the singer-persona in the lyrics from male to female. Her singing completely transforms the protagonist of the first-person narrative into a proud woman.

My baby don't care for shows, / My baby don't care for clothes
My baby just cares for me

> My baby don't care for *cars* and *races*, / My baby don't care for high-tone places
> *Liz Taylor* is not his style, / And even *Lana Turner's* smile
> Is somethin' he can't see.[37]
>
> (Italics added to show Simone's lyric alterations.)

The singer-protagonist-persona in Simone's "My Baby Just Cares for Me" has a confident, teasing tone to assert control over the man's infatuation. Simone's piano accompaniment is clear, rhythmic, and playful, reflecting the infatuated man's simple emotions and the woman's reserved manner. Simone's voice embodies a woman in control of her love life. In the Chanel commercial, a confident woman in a stylish red suit encounters and dismisses high-status men one after another in the setting of the austere Western desert where she fearlessly exercises her independence in choosing her romantic partners on her own terms.[38]

In another song "See-Line Woman" (*Broadway Blues Ballads*, 1964) Simone also embodies a liberated woman in love. The song is an adaptation of the traditional African American children's play song "Sea Lion Woman." The eminent poet and social activist Langston Hughes, whose secretary George Bass wrote the adaptation, told Simone, "I think 'See-Line Woman' is particularly suited for you."[39] Because there are likely many variations of the "Sea Lion Woman" folk song, we cannot be sure exactly what version Bass adapted into the song "See-Line Woman," that Simone sang, but it would have closely resembled the version from the Kodály Center's American Folk Song Collection:

> Sea lion woman, See lah. She drink coffee, See lah.
> She drink tea, See lah, And the gander lie, See lah.[40]

This version of the folksong describes a large-bodied woman who is said to resemble a sea lion. The song pokes fun at an exchange that she and a man have in the open. The folk song contains added verses that make it a love song as well as a child-play song to match the rhythmic quality of the song. The lyrics of the folk song are full of fun and childlike joy, with additions such as "sun," "a sugar plum," and "old rabbit hip, hop, bit, top." Bass's lyrics as sung by Simone, on the other hand, transform the song into a depiction of a "see-line woman," who attracts the gazes of men. They emphasize the charm and freedom of the leading lady: "See-line woman, dressed in green, wears silk stockings."[41]

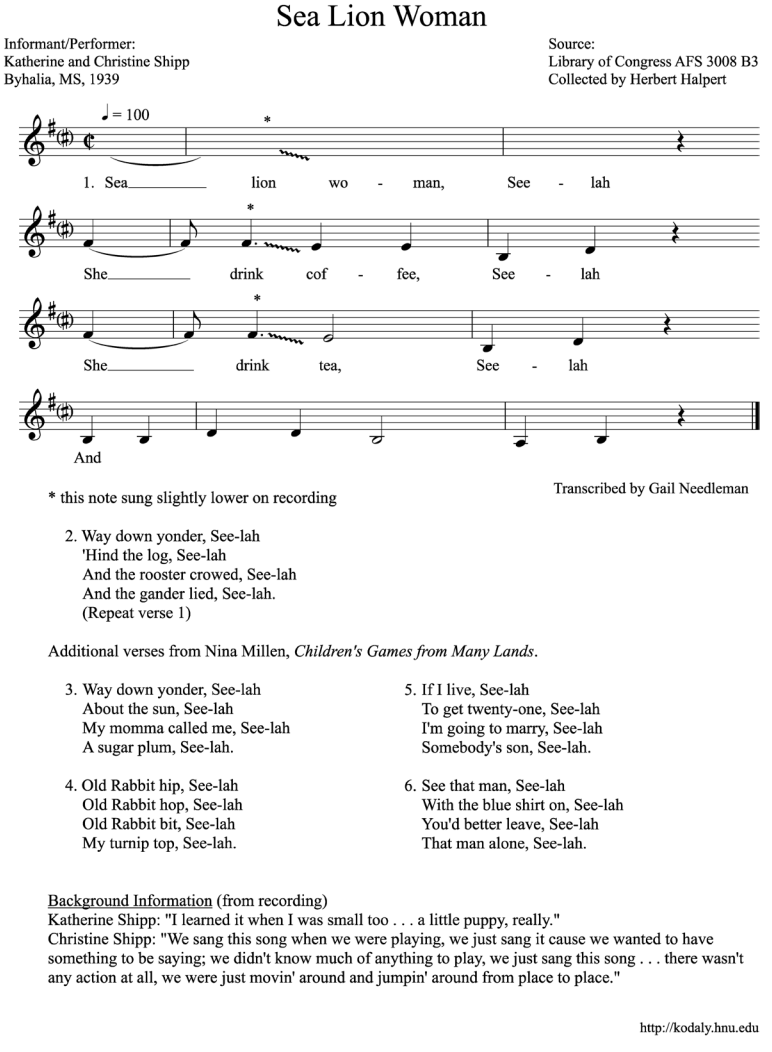

Fig. 3. "Sea Lion Woman" sheet music. Kodály Center at the University of Redlands, The American Folksong Collection. https://kodaly.hnu.edu/song.cfm?id=645.

In traditional African American songs, women know their attractiveness and find the joy of love to enrich their lives and behave naturally as the "sea lion woman" in the folksong. Simone mastered the spirit of Black folk music and knew the grace of the free women portrayed in it. Tragically, however, the mainstream audience marginalized the woman persona

in Black songs as a portrait of a sexually uninhibited woman. And that negative persona of Black women was forced on the individual singer. Thus, Black female blues singers suffered from an unrespectable public image imposed upon them that did not reflect the reality of their private selves. Simone consciously tried to avoid the trap. She struggled throughout her life to reject the stereotypical image imposed by the music market. She emphasized that she had been formally educated in classical music and was an accomplished musician in every way—which was very true. She maintained her pride and dignity and refused to allow the mask of an unrespectable Black woman singer to be forced upon her in secular music. The 1987 revival hit "My Baby Just Cares for Me" showed that the music market finally recognized Simone's proud singer-persona as attractive.

5.3 The Voice of Storytelling to Embody a Fictional Persona

Simone's vocal diversity encompasses elements of storytelling, exemplified by her covers of Bob Dylan ballads as well as some of her original songs. In her rendition of "Just Like a Woman" (*Here Comes the Sun*, 1971), she takes Dylan's lyrics that consist exclusively of a male voice observing a young female love interest coming of age and makes them her own. Dylan's singer-persona begins the final stanza of the song by declaring that the woman "fake[s] just like a woman," revealing he is heartbroken at a change in their relationship.[42] Simone transforms the song, putting it all in the female voice. Like Dylan's singer-persona, her narrative voice starts by observing a young woman. But in the final stanza she merges her persona with that of the young girl subject of the song. Simone does not "fake just like a woman"; she boldly proclaims: "I take just like a woman":

> I take, just like a woman. Yes, I do.
> And I make love just like a woman.
> And I ache just like a woman
> But I break, just like a little girl.[43]

In "The Ballad of Hollis Brown" (*Let It All Out*, 1966), Simone retains Dylan's lyrics that narrate the tragic tale of a poverty-stricken farmer who, in despair, kills his five children, his wife, and then himself. Dylan sets his lyrics to the tune of the traditional murder ballad, "Pretty Polly." In Simone's rendition, she narrates and describes the life of Hollis Brown in a compelling storytelling voice. [44]

Simone's original song "Four Women" (*Wild is the Wind*, 1966) briefly narrates the lives of four black women, and the singer-persona speaks in each of their four voices. The four women are stereotypically depicted, following the style of traditional Black folksong lyrics. Folksong narratives usually present stories of targeted persons in formulaic characterizations from a third-person point of view without emotion. In "Four Women," each woman in the song introduces herself in the first person, expressing her love, pride, and resentment of the negative impact that racial discrimination has had on her life. Each woman's anger is not so directly expressed with words but by the strong tone of Simone's singing voice. One woman's story is:

> My life has been rough, / I'm awfully bitter these days
> Because my parents were slaves.
> What do they call me? / My name is Peaches.[45]

The sweetness of her given name Peaches contrasts with the bitterness in her heart. Here, the character Simone embodies sings not just of her suffering from discrimination but of the pain she experiences because her ostensible persona of being sweet like fruit does not match with her "bitter" inner self.

5.4 The Voice of an Activist Appealing for Change

The role of a folksinger is to connect with people from the past in song, speak for them, or carry on their voices through new interpretations. Traditional folksingers, embodying the "collective voice," assume a collective identity, obscuring the "individual voice" of personal feelings. During the 1960s American folk revival, artists like Pete Seeger adopted subdued tones to contrast with the loudness of rock music. Yet they infused their own perspectives into ostensibly collective sentiments. Bob Dylan mastered this subterfuge, employing allegorical lyrics and monotone vocals, exemplified by "Blowin' in the Wind" (*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1962). By contrast, Janis Joplin's intensely personal introspection in her songs did not partake of this approach. Nina Simone was able, in a single song, to do both. Her singer-persona could split between a public and personal perspective, coexisting within a song. In songs like "Little Girl Blue," "Porgy," and "Four Women," just to name a few, she began with the collective and personal voices separate but joined them at the end.

This bifurcation of public and private perspectives marked one of

Simone's many strengths, but it also signaled internal conflicts. Initially unenthusiastic about the Civil Rights Movement, Simone's outlook transformed after the 1963 Birmingham church bombing. Her composition "Mississippi Goddam" (*Nina Simone in Concert*, 1964), a departure from her norm, boldly denounced violence against Blacks. "All my life I've wanted to shout out my feeling of being imprisoned," she realized.[46] Although she explained that her husband had encouraged her only to sing songs instead of employing herself in revolutionary actions,[47] radical songs were inevitable as long as she stood on stage as a musician.

Thus, it was natural for Simone, now a recognized singer, to bring her voice directly to her audience in the heat of the Civil Rights Movement. In "Mississippi Goddam," she expressed her outspoken nature, but it is her only song that succeeded in appealing for social justice in an aggressive, piercing, and angry voice. Nadine Cohodas observes, "Nina never liked protest songs because she found most too simple and unimaginative. They ended up stripping the dignity away from the individuals they celebrate."[48] In order to preserve the dignity of individuals, celebrate their lives, and sing imaginatively, Simone often blended appealing storytelling and dramatic voices in more nuanced appeals for social change. In "Blackbird" (*Nina Simone With Strings*, 1966), Simone employs irony by giving her singer-persona a racist voice which she of course detests. Melanie E. Bratcher interprets the voice in "Blackbird" as follows: "The Blackbird seems to be a metaphor for Black people. The voice in the song could be interpreted as an external voice of a racist person or as an internal voice, which most likely resulted from internalization of racist affliction."[49]

In "Backlash Blues" (*Nina Simone Sings the Blues*, 1967), Simone addresses a fictional persona "Mr. Backlash."[50] In "Sinnerman" (*Pastel Blues*, 1965), Simone channels the collective voice through a dialogue between her singer-persona and a sinner, whose voice echoes the fears and frustrations of those inspired by injustice.[51] "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" (*Black Gold*, 1970) encourages racial pride. Simone first declares that "to be young, gifted and black" is a "a lovely precious dream," and then she reflects on her past. Her voices in the song both contemplate the past and makes an appeal to young people.

> How to be young, gifted and black / Oh, how I've longed to know the truth
> There are times when I look back / And I am haunted by my youth[52]

Simone was diagnosed as suffering from mental illness, including multiple personality and bipolar disorders;[53] however, the numerous voices she gives life to in her songs are the not the product of such challenges, but rather the gifts she offers the world as a singer.

5.5 The Voice That Brings the Past to the Present and Overcomes through Spiritually Rooted Faith

By the end of the 1960s, Simone suffered from profound loneliness. Her mental health deteriorated, and she sought treatment from many doctors, all to no avail.[54] Her marital relationship with Andy Stroud, strained since about 1964, broke down in the fall of 1969 due to increasing tensions.[55] While the Civil Rights Movement elevated Simone's profile, her forthright and sometimes blunt behavior and her direct and outspoken lyrics alienated some people.

Simone's album *Nina Simone and Piano* (1969) is a collection of sound poems that capture and express her solitude at that time in a deeply intimate manner. For the first time, Simone sings all the songs on an album accompanied only by her piano. The songs are dialogues between voice and instrument, and Simone's singing style evokes that of early blues singers who lamented alongside their guitars. Simone does not try to entertain her listeners, but rather along with her piano she seeks to convey to her audience the reality of her painful inner life.

In that expression of her isolation, there is a faith that love sustains her, which seems more religious than romantic. Her lyrics repeatedly reveal the tremendous weight of her profound loneliness and disillusionment; but her piano accompaniment finishes each song with a sure touch as if to rescue from the edge the deep emotional turmoil emanating from her lyrics. In this album, two aspects of who Simone is work together: her personal self, who has been deeply hurt and is about to break, and her artist self, who creates beauty in music that lives on even after her death.

What is even more remarkable about *Nina Simone and Piano* is how the album, while giving intimate voice to her deeply troubled inner life, also takes up the collective voice of Black people. The 1960s were marked by traumatic events such as many senseless killings of Black Americans at the hands of Southern White racists and the assassination of leading Black civil rights leaders including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., and a lack of sufficient progress in civil rights activism. In response to this tremendous adversity, Simone turned to introspective songs from traditional Black blues

for this album. Those songs included Blind Willie Johnson's gospel blues song "Nobody's Fault but Mine"(1927) and her blues adaptation of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "Compensation" (1905). This period of artistic exploration for Simone enriched her music, as she connected with historical works to forge her identity as a spiritually-rooted Black person, much as Blind Willie Johnson (1987–1945) expressed his religious vision of the blues in "It's Nobody's Fault but Mine."

Even though Johnson actually evangelized in his songs, they exemplify how the categorization of blues into separate and antagonist categories of religious and secular music is a false distinction when applied to the vast majority of Black folksongs. This erroneous distinction that occurred when the broader White American music industry and market gave recognition to Black songs was the result of disrespect and misunderstanding of the nature of Black religious feelings and music. Further, a tragic consequence of this process was not just falsely categorizing Black songs as either sacred or secular, but dividing Black musicians as to which type of person they were.

Nina Simone, raised by a Methodist minister mother (Kate Irvin Waymon, 1901–2001), was a victim of this division. Simone's mother had supported her daughter when she aspired to be a classical pianist, but she disapproved of her daughter playing or singing "sinful music" for a living. As a singer of popular music, Simone felt torn between two artificially constructed worlds and was deeply hurt that her mother disapproved of her profession.[56] Greatly concerned for and fearful of her mother, Simone did not use her birth name Eunice Waymon in her career, concealing herself under the stage name Nina Simone.[57]

The trauma Simone was experiencing is evident in her cover version of "Nobody's Fault but Mine." Johnson's lyrics say that "father," "mother," and "sister" taught the singer how to read so that he could read the Bible and that it would be his fault and no one else's if he did not read the Bible and consequently lost his soul:

> Mmm, father, he taught me how to read / Father, he taught me how to read
> If I don't read, and my soul be lost / Nobody's fault but mine
> Now, Lord
> Nobody's fault but mine / If I don't read, and my soul be lost[58]

In Simone's rendition, she speaks in a nuanced way of the inner conflict she experiences as a singer whose mother disapproves of her music that has been categorized as solely secular. And she announces her personal

self-definition, distinct from her mother. Simone's version of the song substitutes the words "pray" and "sing" for "read," and her singer-persona refers only to her mother. Unlike Johnson, Simone does not explicitly give a reason why her soul would be lost if she dies. However, Simone's singer-persona's describing that her mother could pray and sing seems clearly to refer to Simone's own mother's attitude toward her music. Accordingly, Simone appears to be suggesting that her own soul could be lost because she sang songs categorized as secular, and that it would be her own fault:

> I say, "I had a mother who could pray (×2)
> If I die and my soul be lost
> Nobody's fault but mine, yeah / All right, all right. Hey now.
> …
> Hey now
> I had a mother who could sing (×2)
> If I die and my soul be lost / It's nobody's fault but mine
> Nobody's fault but mine[59]

By declaring that it would be "nobody's fault but mine," Simone asserts her independence from her mother while still expressing the pain of loneliness. It is hard to fathom the depth of spiritual burden Simone must have experienced making her living in popular music as a nationally recognized singer by the late 60s. After experiencing both the power of her songs in the civil rights movement and the setbacks in the movement that followed, Simone was finally ready to define her own identity for herself. "Nobody's Fault but Mine" represents that declaration of independence from her mother.

Simone expressed the same theme by her musical adaptation of the poem "Compensation" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). Simone's lyrics employ the words of Dunbar's poem verbatim:

> Because I had loved so deeply / Because I had loved so long,
> God in His great compassion / Gave me the gift of song.
>
> Because I have loved so vainly / And sung with such faltering breath,
> The Master in infinite mercy / Offers the boon of Death.[60]

However, Dunbar's literary poem and Simone's musical rendition of it convey polar opposite messages. Dunbar's poem is a quiet self-reflection of

an artist who humbly offers listeners a sense of redemption beyond death. The theme of Dunbar's poem is God's compassion, i.e., even if you are vain and faltering, God will scoop you up in His deep mercy.

Simone uses the same words to communicate a very different message. She attests to her determination to sing until her death, even if she cannot be saved spiritually. Simone's singing of Dunbar's poem begins softly as she seems to confess that she has loved vainly and sung and lived imperfectly. Her voice rises in volume and intensity with the line "Because I have loved so vainly," reaching a peak with the song's final word, "Death," where her voice resonates powerfully for a long time. Simone appears to be conveying the message that loving is in vain and that death is the only release that provides lasting rest.

Simone's composition impressively evokes the sound and atmosphere of a hymn, a little sad but cheerful, expressing a sense of completion and liberation from the world's sufferings at the end. She foretells a coming feeling of liberation with the ending words, "the boon of Death." Simone proactively reinterprets Dunbar's poem with reflections on her own life, transforming the poet's voice into her own through her music.

5.6 Simone's Rendition of "Little Girl Blue": Engaging the Past and Present, the Individual and Collective

In her rendition of "Little Girl Blue" on her 1959 debut album of the same name, Simone's resonant voice exudes warmth as her female singer-persona gazes at a grieving girl. The singer talks to the girl with complete understanding and tenderness, saying, "Sit there, count your little fingers/ What can you do?"[61] Simone's empathy for the girl is underscored by her emotionally evocative piano accompaniment that weaves her jazz improvisation of the traditional Christmas hymn, "Good King Wenceslas" with her lyrics throughout. That hymn testifies to the personal and divine blessing of serving those in need, by recounting the legend of a Bohemian king and his page who braved a seemingly impassible snowfall to feed a far-off poor man on the Feast of Stephen, the traditional second day of Christmas.[62]

Simone's rendition contains additional complexity, too. Simone replaces the phrase "unlucky little girl" in the original with "unhappy little girl" as Joplin would follow her in doing a decade later, but unlike Joplin, Simone uses the phrase only once at the song's beginning. After that, the feeling of unhappiness gradually softens as the singer-persona observes and speaks to

the girl. This sense of building stability resembles that of Ella Fitzgerald's recording, but in Simone's version, it is clear that Simone's adult singer-persona, not a guardian man, is watching the girl.

The girl who is the object of Simone's singer-persona's deep compassion in fact embodies the singer's earlier self. Simone's singer-persona looks at the girl's sadness and calls out to her, slowly reeling off memories of sorrows that she herself has experienced. Simone as the singer-persona is both the wounded girl-protagonist and the adult woman who gazes at her. This merging reflects Simone's continuing identification with her actual earlier self, named Eunice Waymon, who had previously had to give up her dream of becoming the first professional Black concert pianist.[63]

And Simone goes even further. As her voice conveys personal emotions in performing the drama of the song, it also expresses collective emotions of both sadness and hope to be embraced by the audience. The singer-persona's past sadness comes back to life and is healed by being close to the present sadness of the girl-protagonist suffering in front of her. In Nina Simone's voice, there is a pathway between the present and the past, between the individual and the collective. Simone had a deeply self-reflective mind and often sought to heal her loneliness by absorbing the collective consciousness and strength from the songs of the past. Harkening back to traditional Black blues, Simone invites listeners to feel that they can now somehow accept life's unfavorable experiences through the let-it-go act of counting fingers.

Indeed, at her riveting July 24, 1965 performance at the Antibes International Jazz Festival, Simone connected the collective past and present when she began by singing a deeply moving version of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," which depicts Southern lynchings of Black Americans, directly followed by "Little Girl Blue," offering a tender, much needed voice of compassion for her community's suffering, as well as a hint of hope for the future.[64] In her performance at the 1976 Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland during a period when she lived in Liberia, Simone took it a step further. She made many lyrical improvisations including declaring little girl blue to be liberated and now a lady. And in the song's final stanza that asks why no one has sent a "blue boy to cheer up little girl blue," she substituted for "blue boy" the Swahili word *umojah*, which means "[t]o strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race" and is one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa.[65]

6. CONCLUSION

At the 1976 Montreux Jazz Festival, Simone also sang her rendition of singer-songwriter Janis Ian's song "Stars," which describes the loneliness and fleeting nature of stardom. Near the end, Simone improvised her lyrics, in fact paying homage to her fellow women singers Janis Joplin, Billie Holiday, and Janis Ian. Beginning softly and then increasing in volume and intensity, Simone sang about how, throughout the song, she had been "trying to tell [her] story," then acknowledged how, in telling their stories, "Janis Ian told it very well. Janis Joplin told it even better." Billie Holiday even told it even better." She then crescendoed to a soaring declaration: "We always, we always, we always have a story."[66]

Simone's connecting her own life and music with those of these other courageous and vulnerable women singers who daringly revealed themselves to the public through their songs once again demonstrates Simone's bringing a collective past to the present. Simone clearly saw a link between her music and story and that of Joplin—two extraordinary women from very different backgrounds who through their singer-personas shared the experience of loneliness and their efforts to contend with it in very different ways.

All popular singers in some way must navigate a delicate balance between their public persona and their private life. This is especially true for women, African American music celebrities, and other singers whose position in society is marginalized. Some skillful singers are able to merge their public and private voices, as well as their present individual voices, with the collective voice from the past.

Janis Joplin suffered from alienation from the very beginning of her singing career. She longed to connect with the collective voice of a community other than that from which she came from, and she sang about her personal feelings in her own individual voice to make them public, even though she was not a folksinger. Joplin took this approach to the extreme and stood out for her uniquely raw and forthcoming voice during the social revolution of the 1960s. Joplin's life tragically ended at the age of 27.

Nina Simone went through an even lengthier and more complex process than Joplin. In discussing Nina Simone, her career as a civil rights activist, struggles with bipolar disorder, and life's complexities are often highlighted. However, her songs and music—or, as I've been calling them, her voices—deserve greater attention.[67] She layered the collective voice on her individual voice in a song. She sought to intertwine her singing-

Fig. 4. Nina Simone, Michael Pollard, and Janis Joplin at Fillmore East,1969. Photo by Charles Stewart. Official Twitter for Estate & Legacy of Dr. Nina Simone, https://x.com/ninasimonemusic.

persona's voice with her personal thoughts and feelings to express the stories and characters' emotions in the songs as if they were her own. Over time, Simone's activist voice grew louder, but this was not the voice of hers that people most love and remember. By overlapping multiple voices, she created her own unique voice of a suffering human being who survives and sings for joy.

Janis Joplin and Nina Simone both sang at concerts at Fillmore East in 1969. Among the songs Joplin sang was "Summertime" (*Fillmore East 2/12/1969*). In her live psychedelic rock rendition of the song, Joplin's voice conveys a sense of despair, magnified by her powerfully intense repetition of the word "no" near the end which deepens a sense of denial of the literal meaning of the words she is singing:

> One of these mornings, You're gonna rise, rise up singing.
> You're gonna spread your wings, child,
> And take, take to the sky, lord, the sky
> But until that morning, honey, nothing is going to harm you now.
> No, no, no, no ...[68]

Simone's rendition of "Summertime" at her 1959 concert at New York's Town Hall (*Nina Simone at Town Hall*, 1959) creates a very different impression:

> One of these mornin's, you goin' to rise up singin'.
> Then you'll spread yo' wings, an' you'll take the sky
> But till that mornin', there's a-nothin' can harm you.
> With Daddy and Mammy standin' by.[69]

Simone's beautiful piano playing as she moves into the second stanza expresses the light-filled shimmer and great openness that resembles the

spreading wings of Icarus from ancient Greek mythology. It visualizes hope and joy in human imagination. In the final phrase's reassurance, "with Daddy and Mammy standin' by," Simone expresses through her voice the tenderness and trusting strength of those watching over us. Simone's "Summertime" speaks of a love of life, which is glorious and precious. Simone was in agony for the latter part of her life but was able to celebrate her 70th birthday two months before she slept in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

[1] Paul Oliver, Max Harrison and William Bolcom, *Gospel, Blues and Jazz with Spirituals and Ragtime* (New York: Norton, 1980), 36–178. Daphne D. Harrison, "The Blues," *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thompson Gale, 2006), 297–309.

[2] For the further information about the persona of blues singers, see Keiko Wells, *Kokujin-reika wa ikiteiru: Kashi de yomu America [Black Spirituals, Past and Present: Reading America in Song Lyrics]* (Tokyo: Iwanami-shoten, 2008), 151–188; Wells, *Tamashii wo yusaburu uta ni deau: America kokujin bunka no rutu e [Singing and Talking to Survive: African American Songs and Tales]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Junior-shinsho, 2014), 150–183.

[3] Bessie Smith, songwriter/vocalist, "Back-Water Blues," 78 rpm single (New York: Columbia Records), 1927.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Leslie Gourse, ed., *The Billie Holiday Companion: Seven Decades of Commentary* (London: Omnibus Press, 1997), 77.

[6] Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers, "Little Girl Blue," (© Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Group, Concord Music Publishing LLC, 1935).

[7] *Billy Rose's Jumbo*, directed by Charles Walters (Beverly Hills: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1962), film.

[8] Nina Simone, *Little Girl Blue*, recorded 1957, (New York: Bethlehem Records, released 1959), LP; *Janis, Little Girl Blue*, directed by Amy Berg (New York: FilmRise, 2015), documentary film.

[9] Bill Graham and Robert Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 204; cited in Ulrich Adelt, *Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White* (Rutgers University Press, 2010) *ProQuest Ebook Central*, 112.

[10] Adelt, *Blues Music*, "Janis Joplin's Blues," in chapter 5.

[11] "The North American ring shout can be defined as a religious service that includes singing, percussion, dance-like movement, and height-ended emotional expression, and that takes place in the ring formation. The shouters steadily increase the intensity of the devotions until they begin to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst. Once the period has been invoked, the shout becomes an expression of communion. … Today, many scholars consider the ring shout to have been the most important religious ritual of enslaved Africans, and the first generation of freedmen." Jonathan C. David, "Ring Shout," in *The*

Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1103–1105. See also *Slave Shout Songs from the Coast of Georgia* (Folkways Records, FW04344, FE4344, 1984) for good examples of the ring shout.

[12] Janis Joplin, songwriter/vocalist, "Kozmic Blues," track 6 on *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* (New York: Columbia Records), 1969.

[13] Adelt highlights this perspective multiple times. Joplin's discomfort with her surroundings is supported by interviews in David Dalton, *Piece of My Heart: A Portrait of Janis Joplin* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1991).

[14] Holly George-Warren, *Janis: Her Life and Music* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2019) digital edition, 47.

[15] Joplin, "Kozmic Blues."

[16] Janis Joplin, songwriter/vocalist, "One Good Man," track 3 on *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* (New York: Columbia Records), 1969.

[17] Dalton, *Piece of My Heart*, 5.

[18] Eleanor Lanahan, ed., *Zelda, an Illustrated Life: The Private World of Zelda Fitzgerald* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996).

[19] Laura Joplin, *Love, Janis* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017).

[20] Joplin, *Love, Janis*, Kindle edition, 281. Laura Joplin writes, "The novelty of being a white, female blues singer made Janis fabulously successful. It also held her in a prison whose limits she was just discovering."

[21] Joplin, *Love, Janis*, Kindle Edition, 145–46.

[22] Janis Joplin, "One Good Man."

[23] Janis Joplin, songwriter/vocalist, "Move Over," track 1 on "Pearl," by Janis Joplin and the Full Tilt Boogie Band (New York: Columbia Records), 1971.

[24] "Janis Joplin On Attending Her Upcoming High School Reunion, The Dick Cavett Show," aired June 25, 1970, YouTube Video, 5: 19, https://youtu.be/V71B5fFSg1E?si=8FHJiCjDAoo33R69. This interview is referred to in Dalton, *Piece of My Heart*, 52.

[25] Bessie Smith, vocalist, "Reckless Blues," 1925, by Jack Gee and Fred Longshaw, songwriters, 78 rpm single (New York: Columbia Records), 1925, on *Bessie Smith, The Singles - 1923/1928*, Vol. 6, track 3 (Digitally Remastered), 2018.

[26] TheaterMania, "Theater News, Jumbo and More, The New York Theatre Company's Newest Set of Musicals in Mufti Honors and the Legendary George Abbott. New York City," October 25, 2002, https://www.theatermania.com/news/jumbo-and-more_2711/; *American Musical Theatre, A Chronicle*, 3rd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 547–548; Geoffrey Block, *Richard Rodgers* (Yale Broadway Masters Series), (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 85.

[27] Nursery Rhymes Form Mother Goose, "Little Boy Blue," 2012–2024, https://nurseryrhymesmg.com/rhymes/little_boy_blue.htm.

[28] Gloria Grafton, vocalist, "Little Girl Blue," by Lorenz Hart (lyricist) and Richard Rodgers (composer), (New York: RCA Victor), 1936, Discography of American Historical Recordings, s.v. "Victor 25269 (Black label (popular) 10-in. double-faced)," https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/object/detail/23529/Victor_25269; "Gloria Grafton with Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra – Little Girl Blue, 1936," BlondieJohnson YouTube, 3: 26, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol_8cPp-1J0.

[29] "Doris Day – 'Little Girl Blue' from Billy Rose's Jumbo (1962)," Night Owl TV, YouTube video, 4: 55, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxtcNwbODUw; TheaterMania, "Theater News, Jumbo and More."

[30] Janis Joplin, vocalist, "Little Girl Blue," by Lorenz Hart (lyricist) and Richard Rodgers (composer) with significant lyrical adaptations by Janis Joplin, track 7 on *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* (New York: Columbia Records), 1969.

[31] Ibid.
[32] Janis Joplin, songwriter/vocalist, "Turtle Blues," track 5 on *Cheap Thrills*, by Big Brother and the Holding Company (New York: Columbia Records), 1968.
[33] Nina Simone, *Little Girl Blue*, recorded 1957, (New York: Bethlehem Records, released 1959), LP.
[34] Nina Simone, vocalist, "I Loves You, Porgy" by Ira Gershwin (lyricist) and George Gershwin (composer), track 7 on *Little Girl Blue* (New York: Bethlehem), 1959.
[35] Gus Kahn (lyricist) and Walter Donaldson (composer), "My Baby Just Cares for Me," (New York: Donaldson, Douglas & Gumble, 1930), retrieved from Musescore, https://musescore.com/james_brigham/my_baby_just_cares_for_me; "Eddie Cantor-My Baby Just Cares For Me (1930)," YouTube video, 4: 34, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BXRGTBLVuA; *Whoopee!*, directed by Thornton Freeland (Sam Goldwyn Productions, 1930), film.
[36] Nina Simone and Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York: DaCapo, 2003), 60.
[37] Nina Simone, vocalist, "My Baby Just Cares for Me" by Gus Kahn (lyricist), and Walter Donaldson (composer), with lyrical adaptations by Nina Simone, track 6 on *Little Girl Blue* (New York: Bethlehem), 1959.
[38] "Chanel No 5 - Share the fantasy," ADSchoolUK, 1987, YouTube video, 0: 45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCgvj9GoMOI; David Brun-Lambert, referres to in *Nina Simone: the Biography* (London: Aurum Press, 2005), 279–80 (discussion of "My Baby Just Care for Me" and Chanel No.5); Alan Light, *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2016) 231–232.
[39] Nadine Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 150.
[40] The audio recording of the same song is "Old Uncle Rabbit and Sea Lion Woman," Library of Congress (https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200196570/).
[41] Nina Simone, vocalist, "See-Line Woman," lyrics by George Bass, track 9 on *Broadway-Blues-Ballads* (Amsterdam: Philips), 1964.
[42] Bob Dylan, vocalist/songwriter, "Just Like a Woman," track 8 on *Blonde on Blonde* (New York: Columbia), 1966.
[43] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Just Like a Woman" by Bob Dylan (songwriter), with lyrical adaptation by Nina Simone, track 2 on *Here Comes the Sun*, (New York: RCA), 1971.
[44] Nina Simone, vocalist, "The Ballad of Hollis Brown," by Bob Dylan (songwriter), recorded 1964–65, track 8 on *Let It All Out* (Amsterdam: Philips), released 1966.
[45] Nina Simone, vocalist/songwriter, "Four Women," recorded 1965, track 2 on *Wild Is the Wind* (Amsterdam: Philips), released 1966.
[46] Cohodas, *Princess Noire*, 203.
[47] Cohodas, 145.
[48] Cohodas, 145.
[49] Melanie E. Bratcher, *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 57.
[50] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Backlash Blues," by Langston Hughes (lyricist) and Nina Simone (composer), track 6 on *Nina Simone Sings the Blues* (New York: RCA Victor), 1967.
[51] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Sinnerman," traditional, arranged by Nina Simone, track 9 on *Pastel Blues* (Amsterdam: Philips), 1965.
[52] Nina Simone, vocalist, "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," by Weldon Irvine (lyricist) and Nina Simone (composer), track 7 on *Black Gold* (New York: RCA), 1970.
[53] Nina Simone showed the symptoms of a mental disorder in 1967, which her husband, Andy Stroud, first noticed in their conversations. It took nearly 20 years until she was

diagnosed with multiple personality disorder and was medically treated as such. For details, see Cohodas, *Princess Noire*, Chaps. 16 and 25; Alan Light, *What Happened*, Chap. 13.

[54] Light, *What Happened*, 156.

[55] Cohodas, *Princess Noire*, 223–225. Light, *What Happened*, 158–165.

[56] For more information about Simone's relationship with her mother before her career was established, see Cohadas, *Princess Noire*, Chapters 2–5; Light, *What Happened*, Chapters 2 and 3.

[57] Cohodas, 62. Light, 48.

[58] Blind Willie Johnson, vocalist/songwriter, "It's Nobody's Fault But Mine," 78 rpm single (New York: Columbia Records), 1927, rereleased as track 3 on *The Complete Blind Willie Johnson* (New York: Columbia and Sony), 1993.

[59] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Nobody's Fault but Mine," by Blind Willie Johnson with significant alterations to words and music by Nina Simone, track 2 on *Nina Simone and Piano* (New York: RCA), 1969.

[60] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Compensation," Paul Laurence Dunbar (poet/lyricist) and Nina Simone (composer), track 5 on *Nina Simone and Piano* (New York: RCA), 1969; Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Project Guttenberg E-book, 2006), 256, (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18338/18338-h/18338-h.htm).

[61] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Little Girl Blue," by Lorenz Hart (lyricist) and Richard Rodgers (composer) with lyrical adaptations by Nina Simone, track 4 on *Little Girl Blue* (New York: Bethlehem Records), 1959.

[62] Hymnary.org, "Good King Wenceslas," lyrics by John Mason Neale (1853) to 13th Century Spring Carol, https://hymnary.org/text/good_king_wenceslas_looked_out.

[63] It is very well known that Waymon intended to become the first Black classical pianist. She devoted her time until the mid-1950s to fulfilling that dream, which her mother also shared. In her autobiography, Simone writes: "I knew how lonely music made me, how I couldn't talk about it to anyone, and how the hours I devoted to it stopped me from having a normal life." Nina Simone with Stephen Cleary, *I Put a Spell on You*, 35.

[64] Nina Simone, "Nina Simone: Live in Antibes — July 24th, 1965 (Full concert)," Nina Simone, YouTube video, 1:00:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwTitp3omXY.

[65] Nina Simone, "Nina Simone: Live at Montreux 1976 - Little Girl Blue," AntPDC, YouTube video, 10: 18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJ164V4HK4U.

[66] Nina Simone, "Nina Simone - Stars / Feelings (Medley / Live at Montreux, 1976)," Nina Simone, YouTube video, 17:07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf_5l1yTKNY.

[67] Bratcher's *Words and Songs* is a significant exception and is an insightful new study that analyzes Simone's songs with an interest in their subject matter and themes.

[68] Janis Joplin, vocalist, "Summertime," by DuBose Heyward (lyricist) and George Gershwin (composer), track 4 on *Janis Joplin–Filmore East 2/12/1969* (Swingin' Pig), Limited Edition 500 copies, TSP 500–75/1.

[69] Nina Simone, vocalist, "Summertime," by DuBose Heyward (lyricist) and George Gershwin (composer), tracks 6 and 7 on *Nina Simone at Town Hall* (New York: Colpix), 1959.