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Odyssey Oracle

Special "Harmony in Black" Edition

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Music Royalty Visit Odyssey

On Wednesday, October 11, Black composers Bill Banfield and Patrice Rushen, along with Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra CEO Joe Loehnis and other staff members, visited our Odyssey class and engaged in conversation with the Class of 2024.

When the CEO of the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra (Joe Loehnis), Patrice Rushen, and Bill Banfield came into class on Wednesday, October 11th, I felt encouraged and influenced by them. I learned from Bill as he stated "plan your work and work your plan." I found this saying to stick with me as I was able to apply this to my daily life, coming up with a plan and executing! I will remember as Patrice stated to "look for those angels that come into your life." This stuck with me because oftentimes I disregard individuals, but it's good to keep an open mind. (**Dontaeva Acklin**)

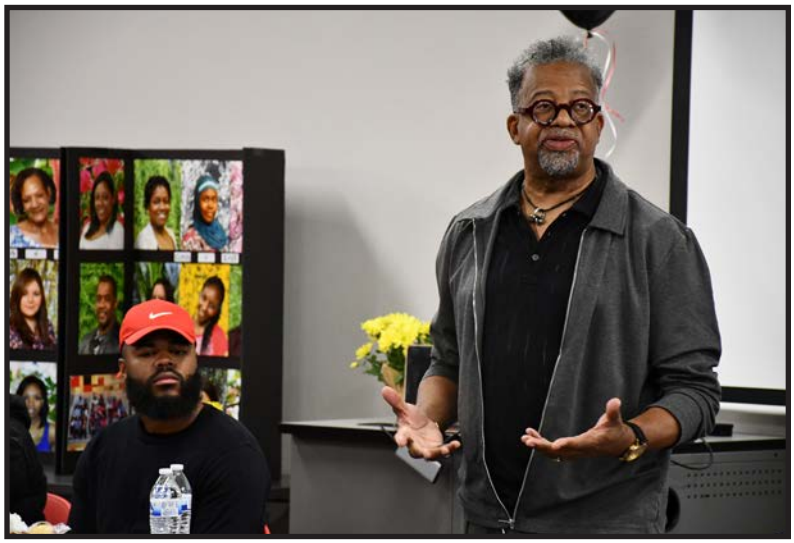
Overall, I really enjoyed the visits last week. To take a dive back in history/ time through music with two legends was amazing. I enjoyed asking Patrice and Bill about how they overcame adversity as well. I am also enjoying the diversity of this class, as it is never boring. I enjoy how much the class participates in the discussion and paid genuine attention to what was being said and the music that was played. **(Carissa Andrews)**

I enjoyed the visit from the composers. It was inspiring to hear the amazing journeys that they both embarked on to get where they are now. What I will remember most is what Patrice Rushen said. She stated "silence is perfect." (**Danika Bethel-Johnson**)

Patrice's and Bill's stories were nourishment to the soul in the same way that their music has put a pep in my step. They tell us not to meet our idols, but our guests were generous with their time and experience and so real. It was beautiful and bittersweet to hear about their upbringings in hubs of black excellence. Beautiful to hear their stories about growing up surrounded by black excellence, but I felt a bit of self-pity to have grown up in white Wisconsin. So, thank you so much for bringing your art and excellence here to nourish our hearts, minds, and souls. **(Lucas Benford)**

I first learned it doesn't matter where you start out in life. If you "plan your work and work your plan," life can really be amazing. I learned that music can and is a driving force to punctuate a person's effort or struggle. I love their enthusiasm toward us and music. The way they explained the coordination of life to music to history, it was awesome to be a part of. **(Jasmine Benson)**

As an African American woman, I find seeing successful black women/ men is always a starstruck opportunity for me. So, to have even just a little time to poke their brains and get some insight on the mindset that led them to be successful is beyond powerful. In my 25 years of being here a significant thing that has always impacted me is the reminder that at one point even the most successful person was once in a similar place in their life. It gives you hope to keep going; it's a reminder to keep going. That is another thing I can thank Odyssey for. My only complaint is I wish we had more time! **(Mia Cannon)**



It was an honor to meet our guests Patrice Rushen and Bill Banfield. I truly enjoyed listening to their wisdom. They are now my heroes of music! **(Vernell Cauley)**

I remember Patrice saying "silence is peace" and hearing different sounds and melodies that also sounded of peace. And I loved Bill's energy. You could tell it wasn't just a job but something he loved to do. **(Fataeshia Clark)**

I believe a lot of what was being said related to my life directly, and they were raw with their words. They shared how important music was to their life, but also how important music was to everybody's life without even noticing. To having something mean so much to you and not have it be a child or something but to treat it as your child is amazing. **(Mekicia Davis)**

It was an honor to meet Bill and Patrice. It was very interesting learning how music came into their lives at a young age. I learned the meanings of the different types of music: jazz, blues, gospel, classic. I enjoyed how Patrice explained how music is an art form, and how and why are part of the struggle. **(Aleesha Flowers)**

I learned that music sticks with you throughout your life. All/most music has a story no matter what it is. **(Andreya Gavins)**

I learned to never give up no matter what anyone says. It's up to me to keep fighting to be a better me every day. Whatever happened today, there is still a tomorrow. I loved them both, and their energies lit the room up. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**

I enjoyed the speakers. I liked hearing about their journey and their childhood and how to get creative and how to write music. I really appreciate them coming. **(Mikaylah Harris)**

Having Bill and Patrice attend class was empowering. Seeing two African Americans become success stories was a beautiful thing, and I was able to sit next to them like regular people. It was also beautiful to see people speak with so much passion about their careers. **(Synquar Harston)**

It was nice to learn about them as people. I also enjoyed hearing about what they're trying to do with symphony orchestra music. It's brave and creative for both of them. When I say brave, it reminds me of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. It must be scary to push for something so unique and unheard of. I really commend them. **(Cierra Jackson)**

First of all, I really admire how humble their souls are. Despite being important celebrities, they transmit their passion and knowledge in a noble manner. Their voices are as powerful and inspirational as their music, and they create awareness about different circumstances in life. **(Blanca Laine)**

My reaction was to feel inspired. They talked about music from Michael Jackson to Tupac! **(Rosanna Lopez)**

I am still scratching my head as to why Dr. Banfield had us write "the story of our life, the passport to truth" in our notebooks just as the short film began. Patrice Rushen had us ask ourselves "why are we here?" I was impressed by her wisdom. She said so many perfect little things that I felt like I needed to hear in that moment. I could listen to her speak all day, so I can only imagine how great of a jazz pianist she is. Dr. Banfield was infectious—you could feel you were in the presence of greatness. Some people carry with them vibration that is strong enough to inspire. I liked when he started dancing. **(Giana Mason)**

The visit was very powerful. It was my first time seeing in person two black composers. I appreciate y'all coming in and giving us this opportunity. **(Tanisha Milligan)**

I am really impressed. Bravo to Bill Banfield and Patrice Rushen. If you love music, music will always touch you in different ways regardless of the type of music. Music is universal. (**Souleymane Nikiema**)

In the short time I was there, cause I was late, it was great. It was a lot of different music. What I like the most is it was very deep. I also liked the diversity. **(Terance Nix)**

I feel very honored to meet two very well-known music composers in person. It was very nice of them to come visit our class in their busy schedule. They were very lively and made the class exciting. It was good seeing Bill make some dance moves to the music as he spoke. I liked where Patrice said, "Seek your how, it will lead towards your why. Your why will resonate with your truth." Also, I loved where she said "struggle is not failing, it helps us learn more." **(Sally Phelps)**

Patrice Rushen was from California. Bill Banfield was from Detroit and said Motown had a big effect on his life. Barry Gordy really influenced him. Patrice was the was the only female at the time in her field, which

was male dominated, and they didn't expect much from her other than the bare minimum. But because of personal beliefs and feelings, she excelled and went above and beyond. She also likes Tupac and Michael Jackson. Bill said if one song had to describe him it would be the Temptations "Dancing in the Streets." **(Isiah Pickett)**

I just loved how passionate they were about what they do. What I took from it is basically music has a story and it doesn't just have to come from the lyrics. Just their journey from where they started to where they are now is so motivational. **(Rodney Poe Jr)**

I was in shock when I got to class and Patrice Rushen and Bill Banfield were sitting in our class. First of all, I didn't get a chance to do my homework last weekend because my family and I had experienced a devastating death within our family. I didn't even get a chance to watch the video. It was all brand new to me. It was amazing that the two were in our class, kicking it. Laughing with one another. That was special. When I got home, I called friends and family, raving about the Odyssey Project, telling others the benefit of Odyssey including recommending that they apply for the project. I learned that Patrice Rushen was not just a musical artist. I learned that she was also a pianist from out of Los Angeles. And how she went to daycare at three years old and ended up at UCLA and started her career. I learned that Bill Banfield was out of Detroit and his family history of how they got into music. **(Kimberly Rodgers)**

I remember the quote "silence is peace" by Patrice Rushen. I also remember her being this little old thing with such a big and clear voice. I remember Bill playing the videos and dancing and I also remember him telling us about Detroit and how his family moved there looking for the American dream. **(Marcy Tibbs)**

First off, thank you! Just hearing you both talk and talk about your upbringing and the impact it had on you as an adult is awesome. Hearing about the influence your parents had definitely hits home. My parents' music has a lot to do with the type of music I listen to. I will always remember the positivity. Makes me want to find my passion and put my best foot forward. **(Amanda Von Behren)**

Two things that stuck out that were said when Bill and Patrice were in our class were "why are you here?" and "plan your work, and work your plan." And to those statements I'm here because I want to better myself as a person and continue my education to be a better provider for my family. And I'm learning to plan my work so I can be more organized and focused, and it will give me a better opportunity to work my plan and see results at the end. I also learned that Thomas Edison made "Mary Had a Little Lamb." LOL. Music plays a big part in this world and we would be very lost without it. It's good for the soul, and I'm glad we got the pleasure of meeting them. They opened up more light on music. **(Endia Walls)**

As a little boy I used to listen to Patrice Rushen. It was definitely an honor. Patrice gives back to others by teaching. **(Ron Watson)**

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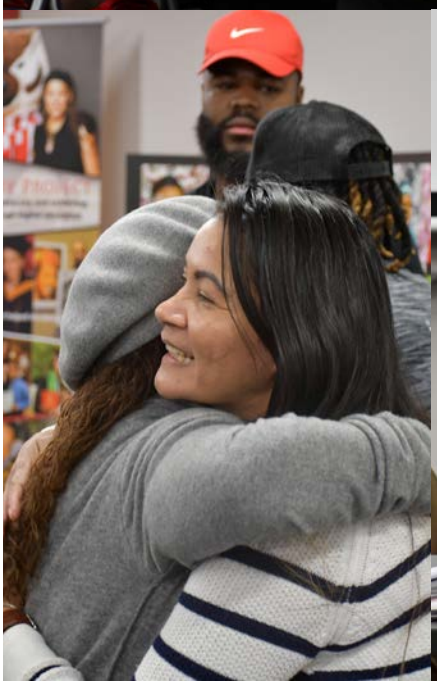

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Harmony in Black

On Friday, October 13, current and past Odyssey students had pre-show pizza at Ian's, attended pre-show and post-show talks in Overture's Promenade Hall, and enjoyed a performance of "Harmony in Black," a special Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra concert featuring the works of Black composers Bill Banfield and Patrice Rushen responding to Martin Luther King Jr., Frederick Douglass, and Paul Robeson.

I want to wholeheartedly thank and commend the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra (WCO) for offering Odyssey and its members an opportunity to participate in Friday's "Harmony in Black." The compositions by Dr. William Banfield and Patrice Rushen were deeply moving under the care of conductor Andrew Sewell. The concert had more significance because the WCO facilitated an authentic, intentional relationship between the composers, Odyssey students/alumni, and WCO staff. Having Dr. Banfield and the incomparable Patrice Rushen come to an Odyssey class and personally extend an invitation was profound and impactful.

Profound because, in my observations, Black people living in Madison are not often afforded the opportunity to attend not only WCO performances but also most of the events that take place in the Overture Center for the Arts. In the past, I have lamented that I was one of only a handful of Black or brown faces in these traditionally white spaces. This opportunity was impactful because it was clear to me that WCO is committed to changing this dynamic. In a city that suffers from some of the worse racial disparities in the nation, access to the arts can not only serve to enrich but can offer tremendous healing and reflection. Basing their compositions on the lives of great Black leaders like Dr. Reverend King, Paul Robeson, and Frederick Douglass allowed Odyssey students and alumni a fantastic opportunity to reflect on the writings of King, Robeson, and Douglass that we discussed as part of Odyssey. It was a joy to listen to and feel the composers' musical interpretations of these transformative heroes' words and lives.

I write with sincere hopes that WCO will continue efforts like Harmony in Black well beyond the funding period and Dr. Banfield's involvement. For Madison to be a city where all can thrive, WCO has created a model for other community-based art organizations to emulate. Bravo! (**Brian Benford**)

I wouldn't have been in that room sitting across from composer Dr. Bill Banfield, composer Patrice Rushen and music director Andrew Sewell if it weren't for the Odyssey Project. The pre-show talk was a treat. It gave me a guide for my ears and you could see the raw passion from both composers as they shared with us in loving detail what to listen for as an audience. During the show, I found it beneficial to actually close my eyes and absorb the music that way. My favorite moment was the violin solo from Banfield's Symphony No. 8. I also remember a moment when the music shifted into a lovely, rhythmic sound reminiscent of swing. This was during Symphony No. 8 as well. I love unpredictability, and I enjoyed Symphony No. 8 because it had little pops so unexpected. (**Giana Mason**)

Friday night was a great experience to remember for life! Everything started at Ian's pizza with a mix of flavors and good atmosphere with the Odyssey family. Later on, I was delighted with an exclusive pre-show with the maximum exponents of "Harmony in Black": Composer in Residence Bill Banfield and Grammy nominee Patrice Rushen. Finally, I embarked on an elating musical Odyssey performed for WCO (Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra) maestro Andrew Sewell where everything was coordinated and magical.

Definitely a great night to celebrate music and community.

Thank you, Patrice Rushen, Bill Banfield, Andrew Sewell, Emily Auerbach, and the Odyssey Program for such a memorable experience. (**Blanca Laine**)

My daughter and I joined the Odyssey Project on October 12, 2023 to go to the Overture Center to watch Harmony in Black. We got a chance to take pictures and enjoy the concert. It was wonderful to have to watch the orchestra live for the first time. Thank you, Odyssey Project, for the exciting opportunity. (**Kimberly Rodgers**)

It was my first time ever; I am new to classical music. When I first entered the hall, the musicians were trying their instruments and I was oh no, what is this, what is that cacophony. Then, before I realized what they were doing I told myself they probably had something great to share with the public, otherwise we wouldn't have this audience, so just be patient.

But the music was not that new. It reminded me of a few movies I have seen, or cartoons like Tom and Jerry. I always liked this type of music because of certain films, but I have never attended a concert of this type of music before.

The conductor, Andrew Sewell, seemed strange to me at first, then I quickly understood that he is the centerpiece of all this harmony. He spoke without words and directed everyone in the orchestra. It was he who calculated and gave the timing of when, how, and how long an instrument should be played. Everyone was attentive to him and followed his instructions. It probably takes a ton of work to get to that consistency, that perfection. If playing it takes that much effort, how much effort is needed to compose it?

I loved the sound of the saxophone, not that everything else didn't sound right or lovely but because I always loved the sound, but I didn't know which instrument made that sound. I have discovered many other things that I will get lost trying to describe all of them.

This gentleman, the narrator, gave me very good feelings, He made me feel Frederick Douglass; he brought the story to life. It was just magnificent. (**Souleymane Nikiema**)

The breaks in between each section of music reminds me of the transitions we go through in life. It reminded me of Disney fairytales. (**Synquar Harston**)

This experience was amazing. I have never been to a concert where there is such beautiful music and no lyrics. Being able to hear the different instruments was pretty cool. I caught myself closing my eyes a few times and smiling. I loved the bounce back of speaking and the instruments.

I think the thing I will remember most about this night was the meet and greet and just hearing the passion and hard work that went into that historical moment. Both Ms. Rushen and Mr. Banfield are so passionate about their work, and it is really inspiring. When she talked about being quiet and sending energy back and forth, it reminds me of the Odyssey program. Whether the teachers are literally cheering you on or not, you can feel it.

My dad said he had a great time and it was a great experience. He's a big fan of Ms. Rushen, so he fan-girled for a minute LOL. He was a little confused at first, but by the end he felt like he was able to make some connections. Thank you! (**Amanda von Behren**)

I attended the "Harmony in Black" concert, and it was an amazing experience! I have never been to an official orchestra concert, so the experience altogether was one of a kind. The music was inspirational and vibrant! **(Dontaeva Acklin)**

I attended the "Harmony in Black" concert and it was very nice. Hearing the way the orchestra responded to each person was amazing. The different chords were interesting as I have not ever heard some of these genres being played in person, with these instruments. This was my first orchestrated concert, and it will not be my last. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**

The "Harmony in Black" event at the Overture was a new beginning for black and white composers to unite. My memorable moment was watching Andrew (WCO conductor) direct music that was composed by two awesome musicians (Patrice and Bill).

It was awesome to be a part of the trailblazing that Madison is doing for equality within music, as we were the first to be a part of this harmony of equality. Composers should be encouraged to bring their vision to life without having to deal with discrimination.

I would like to thank everyone who was involved with inviting the Odyssey Project to Harmony in Black. **(Erik Huelsbeck, Odyssey Beyond Wars veterans' class)**

The WCO orchestra conveyed the voices of issues facing Black Americans during painful times with love and understanding. Thank you for providing this life-changing performance to the Odyssey Project and others. (**Char Braxton**)

I enjoyed the orchestra. It was an eye-opening experience, I think I'll do it again. **(Isiah Pickett)**

I attended the concert and it was amazing. It was my very first time seeing an orchestra. It was interesting. The music was powerful. I liked the way they had all the instruments going. I saw one lady that was moving around and playing multiple instruments. (**Tanisha Milligan**)

Oh my, the concert was amazing. I really enjoyed every cough, every laugh, every sneeze but most of all I loved the music. The melody of every instrument stuck like glue to my soul. **(Marcy Tibbs)**

This last week I had the amazing opportunity to attend the WCO at Capitol Theatre for Harmony in Black. It was such an iconic moment for me, as this was my first time at the Overture Center and first time listening to a live orchestra. Being at the Overture Center for a historic moment hopefully opens the eyes of other symphony orchestras that music in any way needs to stay diverse, as everyone living the human experience is individually diverse. We need to celebrate our diverse experiences and love each other more for being unique.

I had the opportunity to see the "Harmony in Black" concert, and I thought it was amazing. I have never been to an orchestra performance before, but I'm glad I got the chance to do so. The music was very mesmerizing and made me feel like it was telling a story. I also learned about each composer and was intrigued by their backgrounds. I am so grateful the donors decided to gift us with tickets. Without their generosity, I would never have had the experience. **(Tai'Kiah Phillips)**