

To all the writers and jazz musicians that have inspired this work; The vividness of your Music has inspired my writing, Your words and published works have gifted me melodies, Both aspects are now inseperable. All of it is music, all of it is writing.

Link to audio exercises to play along to. Practice everyday.

Chromatic World

In 2014, the Lincoln Center hosted a series of lessons on Jazz Theory with Eli Yamin and Barry Harris. What followed was a reunion between a master and his student from decades prior, gleefully demonstrating Jazz's harmonic language to a class of fresh-faced musicians. Eli Yamin is a recognized educator in his own right, but in the presence of his old mentor Barry Harris, you would be at no fault for forgetting that.

Between the two are warm exchanges of shared memories, and Harris' famously blunt approach to teaching in which Yamin was once again the recipient. Near the closing of the first lesson, Harris excitably shares a personal insight that acts as the overarching frame for which he understands Jazz;





A separate interview with Harris played in my head as he gave that impassioned story. "The first piece I learned was a church song... I was four years old and I learned this piece and I played for the junior chorus... I've been playing jazz ever since."² Harris' religious sensibilities have continued to be the divine guidance of his jazz pallet. This personal insight presents a mapping of the piano that divides the "*Chromatic Scale*": the twelve notes of the piano into two Whole Tone Scales and then three Diminished Chords with their corresponding equivalents. The "D and A", is a play on words that reflects the D flat and A natural within the C diminished 7th chord. Harris plays it off as a sort of dad joke in the moment but is also reflective of the hetero-normative nuclear family he grew up in, as one of five.

The entire time Harris presented these ideas, my eyes never averted the screen. It felt akin to a sermon the way his musicality and spirituality are presented as an inseparable whole. Although Harris presents a linkage between Jazz Harmony and faith that one would think was by (divine) design. The prevailing past and present of white supremacy would prove that such a link is by colonial ruling.

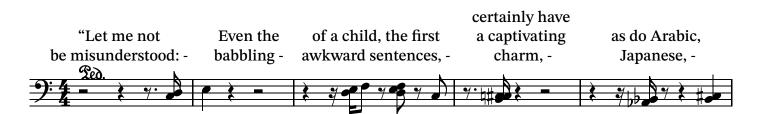
The bliss it brings me to watch such a masterclass arrives with an eerie yet familiar scent: my grandparents' house. My bruised shins still remember the tan oversized but cozy couches that competed for living space with the equally clunky wooden table sets. Both veiled with thin doilies, covering the repeating motif of roses and divine symbols. Framed pictures of our extended family awkwardly settled on the walls, pleading for surface area with an army of Jesus pictures. In the wake of Jamaica's violent colonial past that continued far beyond its independence, the image of Christ as liberator and healer was a necessity. Even then, the framed image of white Jesus seared within my consciousness, has just as violent a connotation for the new world. Stuart Hall speaks to this in his analysis of Christianity in Jamaica;



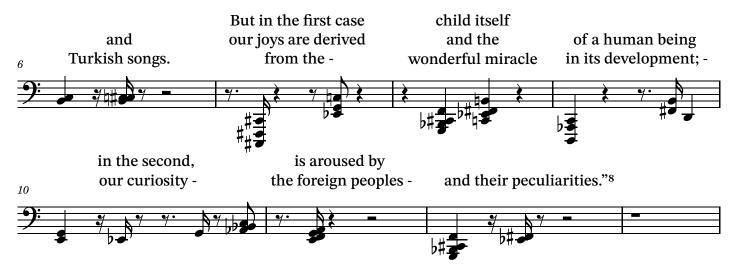


Like my grandparents' house, Barry Harris' religious account is also symbolic of the past and the grasp it still has on the present. The references to Adam, Eve, and the trinity are utilized to help understand the piano, an instrument that centers western harmony, which in itself carries a history of anti-blackness. On surface level, Harris' religious interpretation of the piano is a metaphor that demystifies the chromatic scale through the Christian fantastical. However, the fantastical becomes reality when we do acknowledge that the world was forcefully shaped in the image of the chromatic scale through colonial forces. The *"Chromatic World"* as I refer to it as, is a musical simulacrum that recognizes that the chromatic scale is the building block of (White) European music as much as white supremacy is a building block of the chromatic scale. A decolonized analysis of Western musical thought as an instrument of white supremacist structures and how the African diaspora continually adapts to these racist strategies. A mirror held between the philosophical, scientific, historical and anthropological dehumanization of blackness reflected back into the mythos that, "whites from German-speaking lands of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries represent the pinnacle of music-theoretical thought."⁴

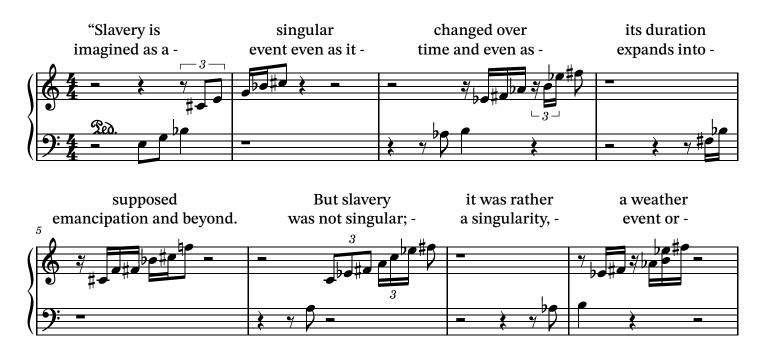
The sonic language cultivated by the Igbo, Fulani, Jola, Woluf, Yoruba and various other tribes, did not survive the excursion culturally intact. "Africans could not prepare themselves psychologically and materially for their departure to the New World, and once aboard the slave ships they had virtually no contact with their home cultures."⁵ What was left of these cultures in the new world, evolved under a European harmonic frame yet were still unable to escape their "primitive" status. Professor and music theorist, Philip Ewell examines how racial hierarchy within musical thought is foundational to prominent theorists such as Heinrich Schenker. "If Beethoven is our exemplar of a music composer, Schenker is our exemplar of a music theorist. After all, his is the only named music theory routinely required in music theory graduate programs."⁶ With that in mind, Ewell reminds us that Schenker's views on Jazz and styles under the umbrella of "negro music" was that of theft and corruption. He specifically singled out negro spirituals as a, "completely falsified, dishonest expropriation of European music."⁷⁷ Without a second thought, the emotional richness found within the globe's sonic tapestry were nothing more than novelties to Schenker. "Inferior races" for him surely couldn't produce anything of beauty, because they were not Germans, because they were not "Menschenhumus";

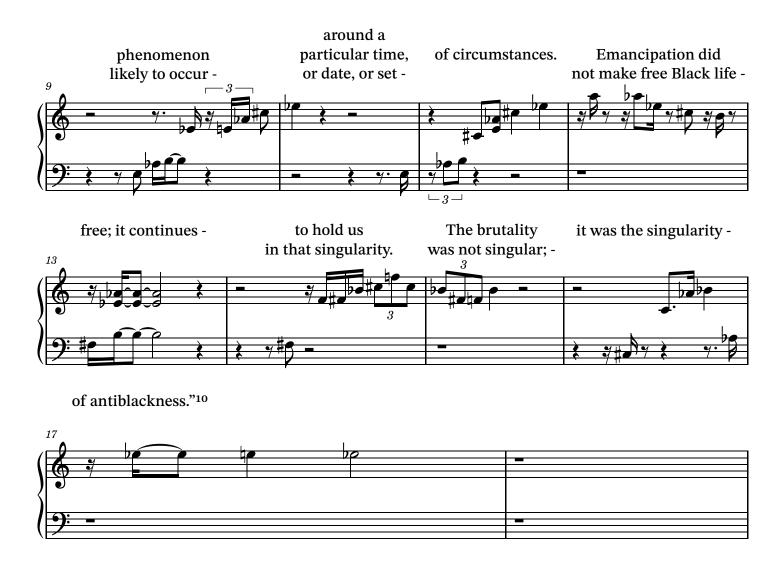


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Schenker's racism demonstrates how the *Chromatic World* is emblematic of an existence where the European structures created, continue to sustain whiteness and expunge all else from its design. As sociologist Paul Gilroy writes, "Ethnocentric aesthetic assumptions have consigned these musical creations to a notion of the primitive that was intrinsic to the consolidation of scientific racism."⁹ Schenker's explicitly racist language has been conveniently ignored, but his German Nationalism was key to his musical analysis. Music theory as it is taught from public schools to the most prestigious of musical institutions are informed by Schenker's work. Superficial interpretations of Schenkerian analysis that are still fraught and underlined with his white supremacist views. Schenker's continuous reign on musical academia is one of many examples for how the anti-black sentiment within the *Chromatic World* persists and is even institutionally accepted. This musical simulacrum continues to illustrate the real-world domineering forces that bind us to a now shaped by the before. It's a phenomenon that closely relates to Christina Sharpe's theory of slavery as singularity;





What exemplifies Sharpe's singularity and the *Chromatic World* more than the responses to Philip Ewell's analysis of Schenker? Professor Timothy L. Jackson from the University of North Texas defended Schenker by slandering Ewell's work with remarks that demeaned his blackness, stating; "why, then, are there so few Black professors of music theory in American universities? Is it because of a conspiracy by racist Schenkerians practicing their inherently racist analytical methodology, as Ewell would have us believe? … He is uninterested in bringing Blacks up to 'standard' so they can compete."¹¹ Like his theories on music, Schenker's racism has clearly been learned.

To fully grasp the *Chromatic World*, one must also understand the idea of *call* and *response*, which is a musical technique that found its way around the globe through the slave trade. A person or instrument makes a sound or gesture that is answered like one would in conversation with someone else. Within the history of the transatlantic slave trade, the sea is a symbol of pain. The *call* for black death. The "Zong" specifically, has been a well-studied massacre that saw the over boarding of slaves as was commonplace for people who were cargo. In *response*, we must remember that ships were also, "perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record."¹² Peter Linebaugh reminds us of this with his historical analysis of the sailors as freedom fighters;

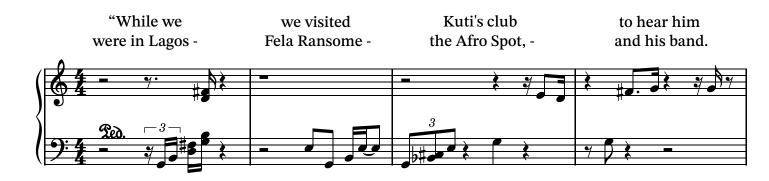




This *call* and *response* between colonial power and the African diaspora exists musically within the *Chromatic World*. The white supremacy that has created the *Chromatic World* should also in equal part, be characterized by the ways in which the Diaspora continues to navigate its oppressive forces. To recognize the historical and musical evidence that the *Chromatic World* is as much a simulacrum for pain, as it is for diasporic unity and beauty. Suffering turned into sonics that can build communities locally and across the globe. George Russell's Lydian concept for example, makes us conscious of tonal gravity. "There are essentially two kinds of tonal gravity. Vertical, that is, tonal gravity inferred by the chord... and horizontal tonal gravity, tonal gravity inferred by the scale."¹⁵ This is just one of many Diasporic musical theories. Yet, it visually illustrates that the same longitude and latitude utilized by black sea farers exist within black musical tradition. This freedom is notably impeded by borders that bolster the land ownership of various colonizers, akin to the divided twelve keys on a piano. Alas, Wayne Shorter's analysis of modal Jazz can be interpreted as a powerful metaphor that transforms the *Chromatic World* into a force that can be conquered physically as it naturally does so musically;



This tradition of musical and physical transgression is what birthed "the mutation of jazz and African-American cultural style in the townships of South Africa and the syncretised evolution of Caribbean and British reggae music and Rastafari culture in Zimbabwe."¹⁷ James Brown's tour around the world speaks to both the physical and musical facets of this phenomenon. During his 1960's trip to Lagos, he witnessed his influence firsthand in a country far from his own, providing an entrancing account that speaks to the reciprocal that is also emblematic of the *Chromatic World*;





The melody I have chosen to weave into the tapestry of the *Chromatic World* is simple.

The song I play for you now, is the amalgamation of all that I have learned now and yet to in the future.





Feeling the And

There's a series of documented lessons, I am well acquainted with. A collection of old video archives of the many jazz workshops, orchestrated by Barry Harris at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague between 1989 and 1998. They contain first-hand knowledge of someone who grew up within the jazz scene, opposed to the students who were mere observers.

One of the most prominent musical and subsequent life lessons began with a simple exercise for the class;



The majority white students followed suit and successfully clapped on beat, until a disjointed breakdown on the *and* of the four followed. Barry Harris was quick to reprimand this lapse in rhythmic unity. The collective mistake was used as a teaching moment.

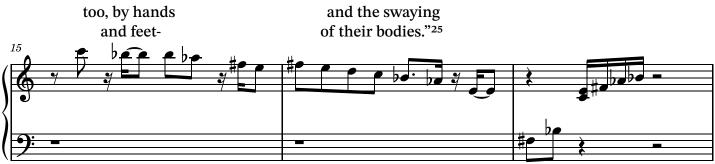
"There should be a class where people really learn about *ands*", he said.²⁰ He was explicitly referring to syncopation, a technique that is instrumental to the rhythmic make up of African American Jazz. However, Barry goes on a slight tangent that illustrates "*feeling the and*" (name taken from the title of the video being discussed) as more than just jazz theory. In a tone that bared a more somber affliction, Barry demonstrates his point with a brief glimpse into his past;



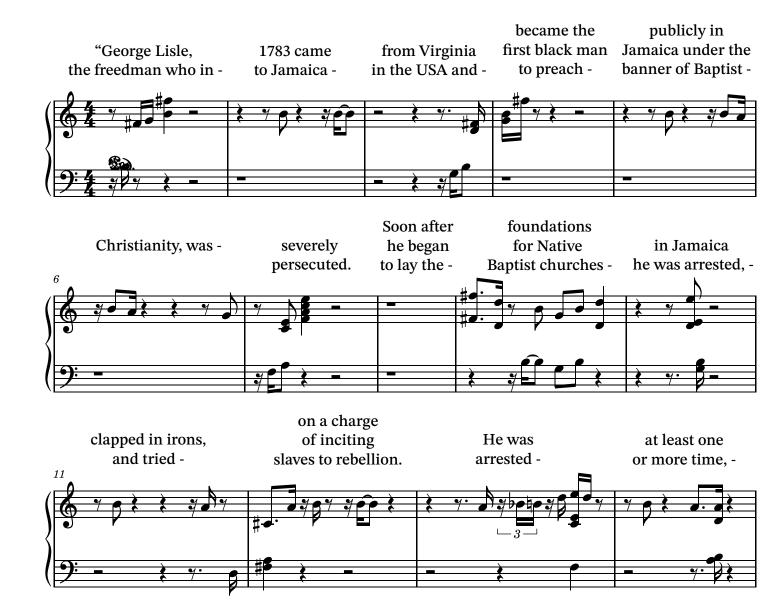
"Feeling the and" is much more of a practice in communality than it is a rhythmic exercise. Like many dance traditions throughout the diaspora, "Jazz dance exists within a continuum of rich African American cultural traditions that trace back to the continent of Africa."22 The and in this instance, goes beyond individual merit. It is a state of being achieved through traditions that encourage dance and solicit movements in sync with cultural rhythms.

"Feeling the and" can only be lived, because for the many of the diaspora it is an extension of day-to-day life. Momentary escapism from systemic violence that still runs rampant today. The and is also a resource that historically had to be fought for. I am reminded of the successful campaign against the, "proposed new Slave Code of 1826", in Jamaica. Which, "sought inter alia to prevent slaves from teaching or preaching under any denomination."²³ In 1831, "the outward persecution of missionaries ceased, and the English Emancipation Act set any remaining doubts to the rights and privileges of Non-Conformists forever at rest."24



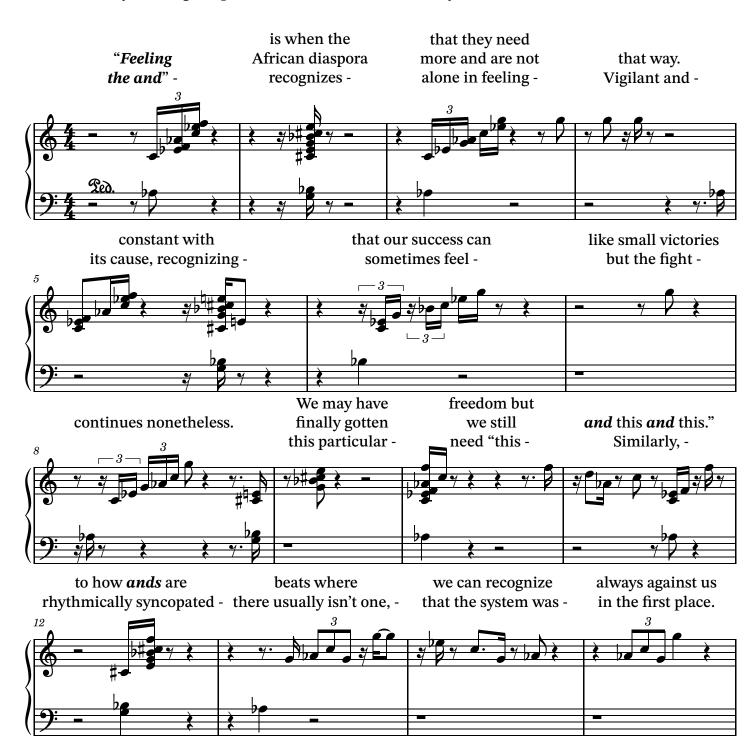


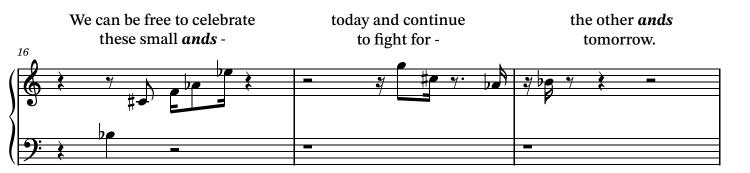
As described, the joyous dancing left in its trail a series of unfortunate sacrifices made for this particular and in Jamaica.





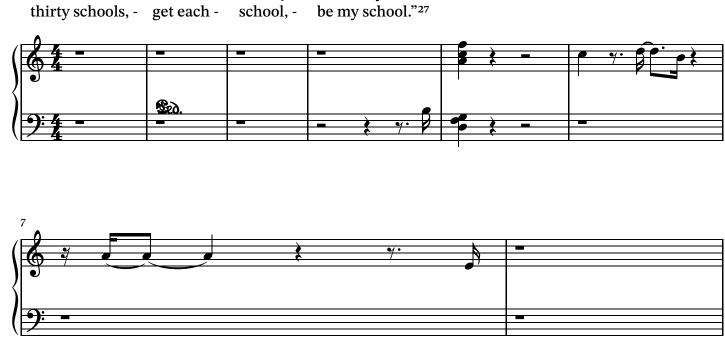
The cruel irony of being clasped to irons for conflict incited by a restriction of movement and tradition.





However, "*feeling the and*" away from a community can also mean *and* as if incomplete. To "*feel the* and", is to be a conjunction that is unable to coordinate a world that alienates them. No clauses to attach themselves to. Although the majority white student body in Harris' workshop must love Jazz, Barry is tasked with the difficult burden of teaching the *and* when it is something that they have not lived, fought, or longed for. What is more emblematic of his struggle then this statement?





GLOW OF GLENDEVON

Rastafarianism views the Earth as a loving mother and even God. Very few humans will ever get the opportunity to experience the totality of human existence let alone earth. I don't think that's the case for the people of Jamaica. Deep in the un-gentrified expanses of Montego Bay, exists large bodies of water, common place for recreational bonding amongst her people, elders of elders and their offspring alike. On most nights, the extended community celebrate, illuminated by the bright lights of distant galaxies, and fired up coal piles for jerking chicken. On somewhat rare occasions, befalls a night where neither the stars nor the moon is present, the sky is pitch black and so is the sea. An endless void of black abyss has now engulfed the tiny island. Thankfully, I never gazed back at the void. My family were as gorgeous as they were loud. Every night, they were loud.

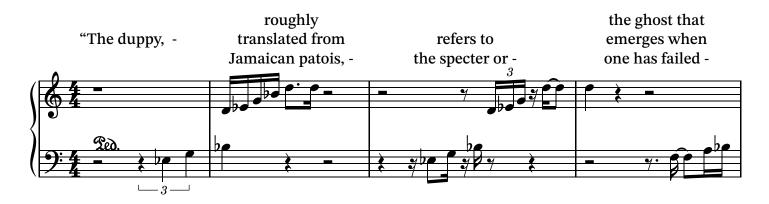
Familial reunions have become a sparse affair, so their vivid images never waned. I still remember a particular gathering where the cold winds were constant, so the fires kept dying. In the midst of the void, a faint moonlight blanketed over all of us but the moon was nowhere to be seen.

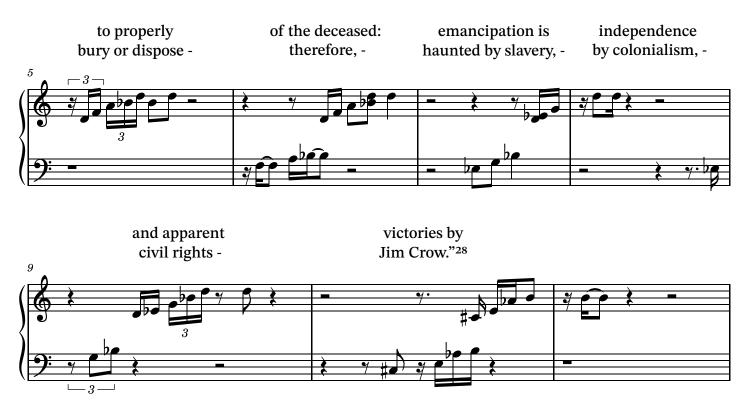


Glendevon is the area of Montego Bay my mother and eventually I would spend our childhoods. Though the vibrant pink, yellows and greens are a sign of budding new life, dusk tells a different tale. Every other night, a conflict of fired shots could be heard not too far from our area. There were more gracious nights, when the gunfire was distant and indistinguishable from celebratory fireworks. Inversely, at close proximity, it became abundantly clear that each echoing boom signaled the possible loss of life. The only semblance of security assured, came in the form of a large metal gate that lacked any necessary means to protect my family. Our home had potted plants, well attended fruit trees, and the tiny fauna that would eat the excess buds. To the right of our front yard, was another house teeming with life. Their loud arguments gathered nosey ears, entertained by tales of infidelity and a relationship in crisis. The gates and windows we forged in Glendevon were welded from crow bars in a charmingly makeshift way. Despite its propensity to quickly rust, I would argue it tied the natural flora of Jamaica with our concrete houses. The over grow of the surrounding vines, would occasionally twist and bend with the metal in a way that stunned. On long drives back to the house I could see a faint meager light on these gates. The simplified swirl designs that converged into a budding flower pattern illuminated into the heads of ambiguous entities gazing behind the metal bars.

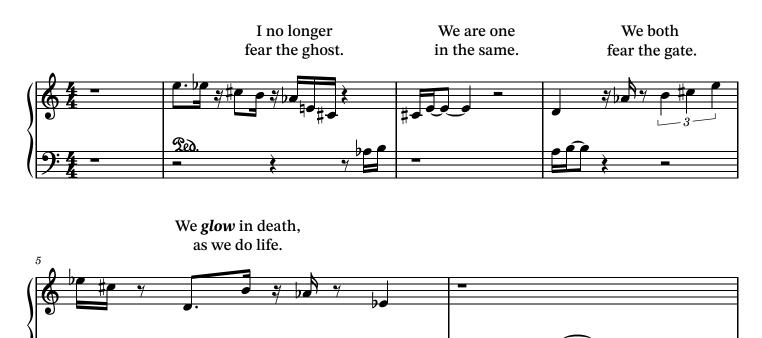


As I've grown older, I would come to learn that the gates I speak of were not born out of the ether of the Jamaican imagination. Rather, the design motif is a colonial import that stands to remind us of Britain's brutal plantations. The centuries of brutality backgrounded by Jamaican Georgian architecture imbue these gates with the ability to colonize beyond the physical realm. As their metal form would imply, it welds fragmented branches of the colonial past and present, intersecting and converging within itself. As Richard Iton analyzes in his definition of "Duppy State", these gates exist to corrupt Jamaica's spiritual realm as well;

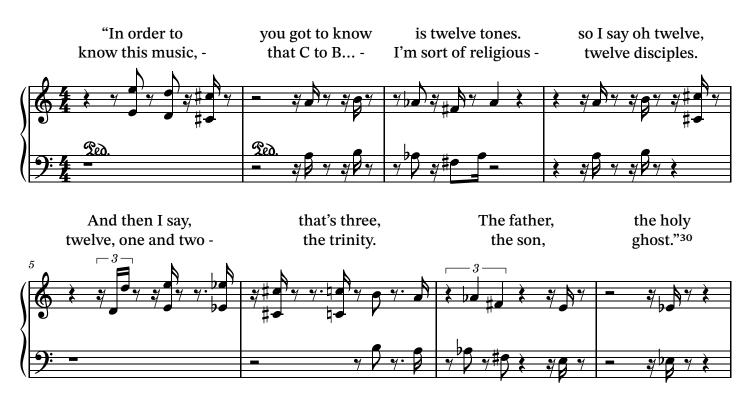




On a particularly hot night, when I was eight, I slept with my fan off because the wheezing sound it made was too uncanny. My mother kept joking that her old irritable grandfather began to haunt us so we didn't have to miss him. I have come to understand that duppy stories like these are a form of remembrance. Small exaggerated tales that commemorate the memory of a passed community member that we keep alive through our children. The causes of death would range from respiratory issues, crime, and bouts of insanity that led them to an early grave. All causes that are undoubtably exacerbated by the, "potent afterlife, mocking persistence, and resurgence rather than the remission of coloniality: the state that is 'there and not there' at the same time."²⁹ As a result, the spiritual realm runs rampant with duppies who are yet to cross over. Try as we might, no proper burial can amend what pain the "duppy state" has brought them. The afterlife suffers at the hand of colonial powers as well.



The song I play for you now, is the amalgamation of all that I love and all that *glows* in the midst of the "Duppy State". "*The Glow of Glendevon*" is a solo piece by Marie Wynn. She does not exist on a physical plane, but she is a real pianist. "Marie" is my mother's middle and "Wynn" her maiden and last name. Therefore, Marie Wynn is the amalgamation of those who came before me, and built the world in which I occupy. Marie Wynn is my vessel into the past, into the unfixed, into the spiritual realm. Although I am the first pianist in my family, it is a song I did not begin and it will outlive me. I find myself in a similar situation to Barry Harris when he provided that religious metaphor during his class at the Lincoln Center.



In the same way Harris' religious beliefs are intertwined with his understanding of Jazz, my understanding of Jazz is linked to Jamaica. We speak of different ghosts but it is all in the service to understand a concept that is equally endless in interpretation and dedication. Jazz, like the cycle of life and death is a circle that we are only in service to but rewards us with a language that marries emotion with quantum calculation. Toni Morrison, in conversation with Thomas LeClair, passionately speaks to the incongruity of this artform. This particular answer captures it quite well;





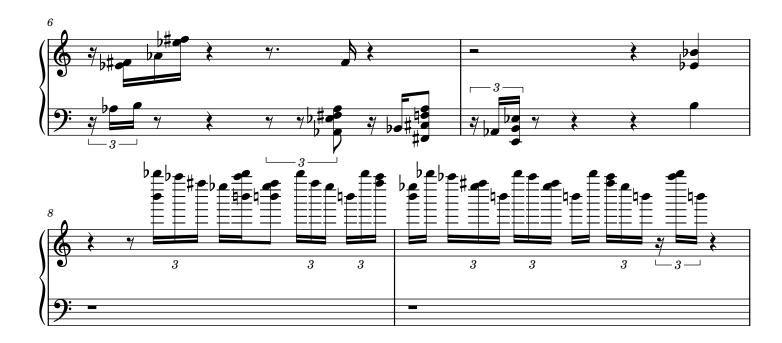
The *Chromatic World* is a musical simulacrum that analyzes the prevailing "*Call* and *Response*" between colonial powers and the African diaspora. The same Georgian architecture that permeates Glendevon, exists ad nauseam in England. Old buildings, spires, and fences contain that same sequencing motif. It's a style meant to signify symmetry and elegance but increasingly it's like the unfurling of Europe's tentacle grasp on everything. It is the visual way in which I see colonization, the way I am reminded of home. Like fractals, they curl and crystallize into branches that branch off into unseen branches and beyond. Evidenced by their commonality in parts of Europe and Africa. It's a *Call* to the past that informs our present. I can't seem to escape the past. The Jericho area of Oxford has a sequence of brightly colored pastel houses that oscillate between blue, pink, and yellow hues. This exact sequence and pallet can be found in various parts of Montego Bay. It's such a distinct aspect of home that I never thought I would witness anywhere else. It admittedly disarmed me in the moment. As I turned my head to the left of me, a narrow black Georgian gate appeared out of what felt like thin air. It's composition and swirls had the brief appearance of someone watching me from a distance. I was startled, for the rest of the night I would instinctually turn back to make sure I wasn't followed.

I have seen too many gates.

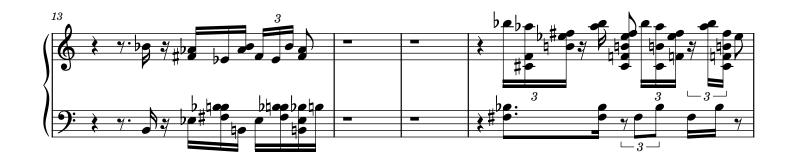
I have seen too many ghosts.

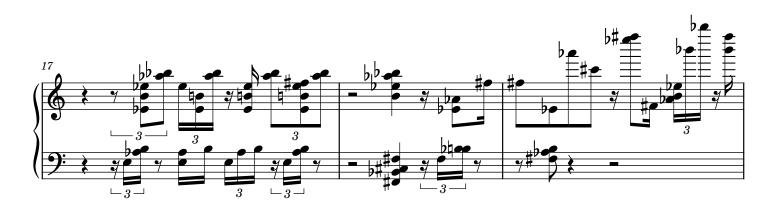
Words alone, are no longer a good enough Response.









































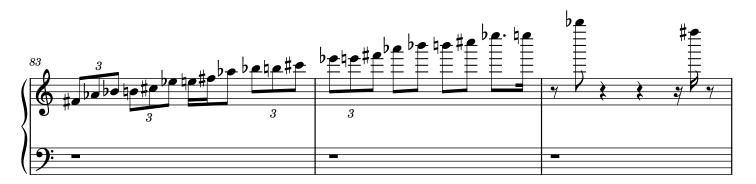
























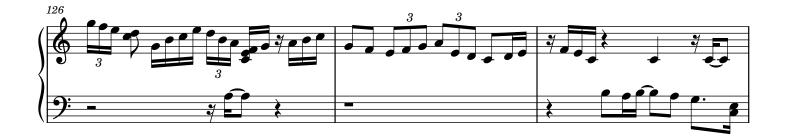








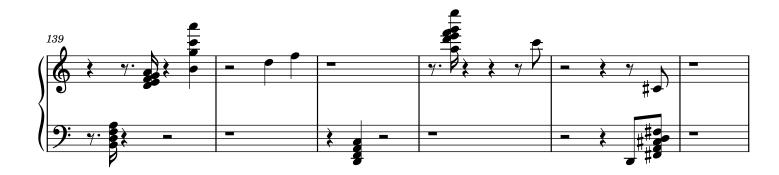






































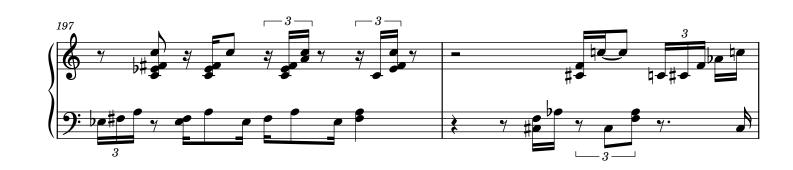






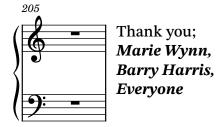












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