

Notes

Coloring Book (2015)

“They will never, so long as their whiteness puts so sinister a distance between themselves and their own experience and the experience of others, feel themselves sufficiently human, *sufficiently worthwhile*, to become responsible for themselves, their leaders, their country, their children, or their fate.”

- James Baldwin, “An Open Letter to My Sister, Angela Y. Davis” (1970)

Ted Hearne's piece *Coloring Book* sets the words of three Black American writers of different generations — Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin and Claudia Rankine. Hearne sets these texts, each addressing the idea of identity, in surprising and personal ways, using stylistic juxtaposition to explore the boundaries separating the authors' conception of cultural identity from his own, and to better understand the differences between them.

Coloring Book was commissioned with generous support from The Barlow Endowment for Music Composition.

texts

1. The game of keeping

[The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult.]

No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat.

No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed.

[The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting.]

Zora Neale Hurston

from “How it feels to be colored me” (1928)

2. You are not the guy

And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.

Each time it begins in the same way, it doesn't begin the same way, each time it begins it's the same. Flashes, a sired, the stretched-out roar—

And you are not the guy and still you fit the description

—roar—

still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.

This is what it looks like. You know this is wrong. This is not what it looks like. You need to be quiet. This is wrong. You need to close your mouth now. This is what it looks like. You can't drive yourself sane. You are not the guy.

And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description. Get on the ground now. Then I just knew. Yes officer rolled around on my tongue, which grew out of a bell that could never ring because its emergency was a tolling I was meant to swallow.

Claudia Rankine

from *Citizen* (2014)

3. What feels

What feels more than feeling?

You are afraid there is something you are missing, something obvious.

A feeling that feelings might be irrelevant if they point to one's irrelevance pulls at you.

What feels more than feeling?

Claudia Rankine
from *Citizen* (2014)

4. Letter to my father

Him. He

He has only heard what I

I felt. He

He is far away but I

I see him.

Him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us.

Us. He

He is so pale with his whiteness then and I

I am so colored.

Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him.

He is so pale with his whiteness then and I

I am so colored.

Zora Neale Huston
from "How it feels to be colored me" (1928)

5. Your people

Your self and your people are indistinguishable from each other,

really, in spite of the quarrels you may have,

and your people are all people.

James Baldwin
from an interview with James Elgrably in
The Paris Review (1984)

Partita for 8 Voices (2009-2011)

The score's inscription reads: "*Partita* is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another."

Each movement takes a cue from the traditional baroque suite in initial meter and tone, but the familiar historic framework is soon stretched and broken, through "speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies, and novel vocal effects" (Pulitzer jury citation). Roomful of Teeth's utterly unique approach to singing and vocal timbre originally helped to inspire and shape the work during its creation, and the ensemble continues to refine and reconsider the colors and small details with every performance. *Allemande* opens with the organized chaos of square dance calls overlapping with technical wall drawing directions of the artist Sol LeWitt, suddenly congealing into a bright, angular tune that never keeps its feet on the ground for very long. There are allusions to the movement's intended simulation of motion and space in the short

phrases of text throughout, which are sometimes sung and sometimes embedded as spoken texture. *Sarabande*'s quiet restraint in the beginning is punctured in the middle by an ecstatic, belted melody that resolves quietly at the end, followed soon after by the Inuit-inspired hocketed breaths of *Courante*. A wordless quotation of the American folk hymn "Shining Shore" appears at first as a musical non sequitur but later recombines with the rhythmic breaths as this longest movement is propelled to its final gasp. *Passacaglia* is a set of variations on a repeated chord progression, first experimenting simply with vowel timbre, then expanding into a fuller texture with the return of the Sol LeWitt text. At *Passacaglia*'s premiere in 2009, there was spontaneous applause and cheering at the explosive return of the D-major chord near the end — so feel free to holler or clap any time if you feel like it.

Of the premiere of *Partita*, *New York* magazine wrote that I had "discovered a lode of the rarest commodity in contemporary music: joy." And it is with joy that this piece is meant to be received in years to come.

-CS