

Notes from the Music Department

February is traditionally the month that we use to showcase Black History. In honor of this tradition, I decided to use this opportunity to showcase the works of two of the geniuses of our uniquely American music.

The music of Louis Armstrong will live and thrive forever. In spite of his very humble beginnings in 1900 in the seediest sections of New Orleans, Louis grew to be the outstanding person whose musicianship has had a profound and lasting influence on those who came after. His "**West End Blues**," recorded in 1928 with his band of the time, The Hot Five, is widely regarded as one of the finest pieces ever written and performed. That fanfare at the beginning!

Jon Batiste (1986-) is probably best known for his work as the band leader on Stephen Colbert's "A Late Show" but that is just the tip of the iceberg of his achievements. Like Louis, he also was born in New Orleans but into a very musical family that nurtured and encouraged his journey. Before entering Julliard where he earned both a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Jazz Studies, he released his first album at the age of 17. Most of the world has been hunkering down during this seemingly endless pandemic. Jon has released a video, "**I Need You**," developed a soon to be released album, "**We Are**," and written the music for the new Disney Pixar film, "**Soul**."

Louis Armstrong recorded "**What a Wonderful World**" in 1967 at the height of the Vietnam War. Five decades later in the April 22, 2019 issue of The Atlantic where he is the Music Director, Batiste discusses his motivations for the remake of the classic song. You can read the full article, available on YouTube. While you are at it, you could watch both performers versions of the song.

In Jon's words:

"That's why I wanted to make my own version of "What A Wonderful World." I wanted to elicit deeper meaning from the lyrics, which speak of the cycle of life and nature's divine rhyme. These words put into perspective how temporary our challenges are when measured up against the infinite expanse of the universe and time. This version is a prayer that encourages us to contemplate and celebrate the beauty and grandeur of the celestial orb on which we live."

Another quote, this time from last week's CBS Morning Show interview:

"To me, music is a spiritual practice. It is something that has been passed down from the ancestors of all of humanity as something we use to come together whether it is for rituals, whether it is for celebration, whether it is a form of worship, whether it is a social gathering. Music is always that fabric that ties us together. I feel while I'm playing that I'm a conduit for the whole of humanity and that's what makes me so happy. I feel that I'm never alone."

