

“Pick stars for to-morrow!”implored a 1936 ad for the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, plugging a new radio contest for prospective singers. Whether behind closed doors or airing to millions, the 1930s-‘60s saw an explosive increase in all types of singing contests, from radio amateur hours to international music competitions.¹ These contests were compulsory for launching careers, not only for abstract “prestige” but also for specific capital such as scholarship monies and operatic contracts.² Early-career biographies of mid-century singers reveal a litany of such awards: Shirley Verrett, for example, noted she “entered every contest that came along...I had to”—and these competition prizes were absolutely pivotal for her success.³ Despite such ubiquity and significance, the role of musical contests as patrons or gatekeepers has received little critical attention, particularly in terms of representation. Incorporating broader questions about mediatized performance, institutional practices, and bias, this paper explores how mid-twentieth-century singing competitions offer a unique lens into voice and race.

Musical competitions are ideological projects, offering an alluring illusion of institutions where skill is the only salient factor and the best singers *always* emerged victorious.⁴ Lindsay Wright, Will Cheng, Katherine Meizel, and Matthew Stahl have analyzed this frame in relation to 21st-century talent shows as “musical meritocracies.”⁵ But, as Lindsay Wright notes, meritocracy is in fact “an impossibility and fantasy”: in fact these contests “perpetuate inequality rather than abolishing it.”⁶ And even *if* musical performance could somehow be “quantitatively rationalized,” juries compound competition bias.⁷ In her work on contemporary international music competitions, Lisa McCormick analyzes the various controversies about *who* sits on the jury panel, *what* exactly these jurors are assessing, *how* secretive jury processes are obscured from the public, etc.⁸ As a pipeline, competitions are deeply unequal spaces for entering the profession.

And in this collision space between opportunity and inequality, competitions were particularly fraught for Black singers, for multiple reasons. To name a few: 1) as Kira Thurman notes, “classical music, like whiteness itself, is frequently racially unmarked and presented as universal—until people of color start performing it;”⁹ 2) as Jennifer Stoeve and Nina Eidsheim have analyzed, Black classical musicians always already contended with racialized hearing by white listeners;¹⁰ and 3) as Julia Koza and Lindsay Wright explain, the notion of “innate talent” versus musical skill was structured through eugenicist discourse.¹¹ Thus as Black singers in the United States attempted to desegregate mid-century musical institutions, competitions were both *critical* for access *and* a potent tool for exclusion (often veiled in discourse about musical meritocracy).¹² In this paper, I’d like to offer some early work on this intersection. Drawing on archival documents, radio programs, memoirs, and press coverage,¹³ I present 3 case studies on mid-century classical voice contests which illuminate historical connections between singing, race, media, and money.

I. In 1935, the Metropolitan Opera initiated a new mechanism for entering its company, a radio show called the “Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air.”¹⁴ As tryouts had traditionally taken place privately for Met personnel, press releases heralded these radio auditions as a “new and just path,” a “modern and more democratic” method.”¹⁵ The Met insisted these broadcasts were *not* radio talent contests or amateur hours—and though audience comments were welcomed, the judges alone would choose winning contestants.¹⁶

Interested singers submitted a paper application to showrunners;¹⁷ if they passed this initial screening, they moved on to an in-person preliminary audition for Met conductor Wilfred Pelletier.¹⁸ From this second round, Pelletier selected a few dozen singers to actually sing on the

radio show: in 1935, for example, initial applications led to 700 in-person auditions and 48 singers on the broadcasts.

Sponsored as a sustaining program by the Sherwin Williams Paint Company, the Auditions of the Air aired on NBC for half an hour each Sunday.¹⁹ Recorded in front of a live audience at Radio City Music Hall, the shows featured two to three aspiring singers a week, each performing a canonic operatic aria and an “encore” song.²⁰ Show personnel came directly from Met:²¹ the jury comprised a Met conductor, box office manager, general manager, assistant manager, and a member of the Board of Directors.²² Over the course of the fifteen-week radio season, dozens of contestants were winnowed down to semi-finalists, finalists, and 2-3 winners.²³ Winners always received money, plaques, and concert opportunities, but the Metropolitan Opera had considerable latitude *if* they would actually award contracts to radio show prize winners.

These auditions were a hit with radio audiences—drawing an estimated 4 million listeners each week—and promised a new, meritocratic pathway to America’s most prestigious opera house. Press coverage underscored that the auditions were “open to all young American singers,” with equal and fair opportunities for all.”²⁴ In reality, the auditions remained racially exclusionary.²⁵ The prize (an opera contract) was centrally important because the sponsoring entity—open *only* to white singers prior to 1955—was perhaps the most infamous segregated musical institution of this era. Judging criteria expanded possibilities for racist/subjective exclusions: Auditions of the Air contestants were assessed on voice, musicianship, and dramatic ability but also “appearance, personality, intelligence” and even how they would “appear on the stage of the Metropolitan.”²⁶ So for Black singers, the Metropolitan Opera Auditions were a uniquely inequitable competition.

Perhaps *for* this reason, the Auditions of the Air also seemed like a potential stepping stone towards desegregating the Met. I'll highlight three moments in this longer story. *First*, Auditions of the Air administrators in the 1930s and 40s only asked about contestants' age, experience, gender and voice type in their paper application—race was an unmarked signifier (built on racist assumptions that only white singers could sing opera).²⁷ This gatekeeping strategy for preliminary auditions was challenged by in the early 1940s by Black activists, such as journalist Isaac Jones from *The Detroit Tribune*. In 1942, Jones queried the radio committee on this point, receiving a response from them that “anyone who thinks he or she can qualify may enter, regardless of race, creed, or color.”²⁸

Second: if the committee began to *accept* applications from Black vocalists in the early 1940s, it remained opaque how applicants might obtain an in-person audition or sing on an actual radio broadcast. By the late 1940s, activists drew attention to these pressure points. In 1948, public relations expert Neil Scott—who managed the careers of multiple Black musicians, including his wife, celebrated contralto Carol Brice—published a nationally syndicated article in the Black press concerning the Met radio auditions.²⁹ Calling out the Met as a “jim crow” house, Scott “publicly” submitted applications for Charles Holland, Helen Thigpen, James Hall, and June McMechen to the Auditions of the Air.³⁰ These singers all happened to be his clients, but Scott also offered to submit forms for other interested vocalists. None of these singers, however, made it past the initial screening.³¹ Simultaneously, renowned soprano Muriel Rahn sang twice for the Auditions of the Air Committee but likewise did not make it to the broadcast stage.³² In August 1949 Rahn took her “one-woman campaign” to the airwaves, discussing Met segregation

and auditions on Clifton Fadiman's "This is Broadway" radio show (carried by 167 national CBS stations).³³

Third: the 1950 appointment of Rudolf Bing as Met general manager seemed to offer real opportunities for integration (though his actual record on racial politics was complex).³⁴ One of the major changes Bing instituted was that Auditions of the Air prizes were no *longer* contracts (though the Met had the option to "retain" the winner).³⁵ Though more Black singers began to move through application and audition bottlenecks to *actually* singing on the broadcasts, the Met's racial exclusions were still obvious (see, for example, this internal memorandum noting Mildred Hill's race).³⁶ In spring 1951, baritone Fred Thomas became the first Black singer to win second place in the auditions.³⁷ No Met contract ever materialized. Robert McFerrin was the second Black audition winner in 1953; he entered the Met's training school for thirteenth months and made a Met stage debut (but did not receive a contract for regular employment).³⁸

In 1954, the radio auditions were reorganized as the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, broadcast on ABC;³⁹ the next year, Marian Anderson was finally the first Black singer to appear in a Met stage production. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Black singers were winning Council auditions *and* signing Met contracts, such as Martina Arroyo (1957), Grace Bumbry (1958), and George Shirley (1961). Yet even at this point, the auditions were hardly a "fair and friendly" space, as demonstrated by Shirley Verrett's recollection of repertoire allocations. Overall, the Met auditions had a mixed role: they were a highly symbolic space with important potential for integration. Yet institutional sponsorship and methodologies facilitated exclusion of Black vocalists via subjective and secretive decisions at every stage of the process, a clear example of the insidious intersection of media, "meritocracy," and competitions.

II.

In 1941, Marian Anderson received the \$10,000 Bok Award from Philadelphia; in her acceptance speech, she vowed to use the money to help “poor, unfortunate, but nevertheless very talented people to do something for which they have dreamed all their lives.”⁴⁰ By 1942, Anderson established the “Marian Anderson Scholarship Fund,” with a mandate of “aiding talented singers in need of financial assistance” (she also noted the wartime context as a reason to particularly encourage the development of young American artists).⁴¹

The inaugural Marian Anderson Scholarship Fund competition was held in winter 1942. In subsequent seasons, application forms were sent upon written request in March, eligible contestants were notified of their audition date by August, and in-person auditions were held in Philadelphia each October at the Ethical Society in Rittenhouse Square.⁴² Contestants were required to sing two numbers: an operatic aria from a set repertoire list and a song of their choosing. The song should be sung in the original language, have “recognized worth in the field of classical music”—“folk songs and songs from Operetta or Musical Comedy will not be considered.”⁴³ Though no additional guidance was given about the required song, a handwritten list in the Anderson Fund papers lists songs by composers including Harry Burleigh, Nathaniel Dett, Lillian Evanti, and William Grant Still.⁴⁴

In terms of racial politics, every aspect of the Anderson fund contrasts with the Met. As the “institution” behind the award, Marian Anderson’s own role in civil rights and her “sterling character” were foregrounded in reportage. One letter from Madison, WI, for example, noted “we hope that some of the group who tried to prevent you from singing in Washington some time ago will note the fine thing you did last week for the hundreds of young singers and artists who are now undergoing the difficulties that beset many of the talented juveniles in the operatic and

allied fields.”⁴⁵ As prize, the Anderson award did not dangle an operatic contract or other institutionally specific award: instead, the fund targeted singers between the ages of 16 and 32 who needed financial assistance for additional *training*.⁴⁶

From its first iteration, the contest was open to both Black and White singers.⁴⁷ This drew national attention; a Springfield, MA newspaper article noted “Miss Anderson is indeed generous to include white artists, for she must have bitter memories—of her treatment in many places where she has sung in this country.”⁴⁸ Beyond the applicant pool, the contest facilitated interracial musical encounters in other ways. All contestants were required to use an “accompanist supplied by the trustees” (always a white pianist).⁴⁹ The jury—promised as “competent”—began as an interracial panel comprised of Harry T. Burleigh, Franz Rupp, and Mary Saunders Patterson, though subsequent years typically featured an all-white jury.⁵⁰

Applicants for the Marian Anderson Scholarship also encountered an administrative structure that was both Black-run *and* family-owned. Both of Marian Anderson’s sisters—Alyse Anderson and Ethel de Priest—worked as the competition’s main administrators, stretching them thin as they answered mountains of correspondence.⁵¹ The initial board of trustees included two prominent Black attorneys—Alexander L. Jackson of Chicago and Hubert T. Delany of New York—and the scholarship fund also operated within an important network of Black institutions, with targeted advertising in the Black press.⁵² In sum, the Marian Anderson Scholarship created a welcoming space for aspiring Black singers. By 1956, the fund was attracting about 600 applicants a year, with about 300 “qualified” for acceptance and audition.⁵³ After thirty years of competition, more than \$50,000 had been dispersed.⁵⁴ Overall, the contest awarded 109 winners with prize money, roughly 50% of whom were Black vocalists.⁵⁵ Not only did the Anderson fund

create a regular pipeline for an emerging generation of singers, it was a source of ongoing pride for the Anderson family as well. As Alyse wrote to Marian in October 1956, “it always makes me feel so proud when we see what some of the winners are doing. It must be a rewarding and touching feeling for you.”⁵⁶ And despite the award being officially targeted at *all* singers, it was often singers of color who were highlighted by the fund as particular success stories.⁵⁷ Overall, as a competition the Anderson fund established policies and structures that seemed to remove *some* of barriers of access and fairness (though others remained, such as the cost of traveling to the auditions and relatively rigid repertoire lists).

III. As my final case study, I situate US race relations within the context of international singing competitions and mid-century Cold War politics. As Kiril Tomoff explains, competitions popped up all over Europe in the first decade after WWII, becoming “central components of a systemic ongoing cultural struggle between the new postwar empires....[often] explicitly conceptualized as forums for rivalry between the Soviets and the West.”⁵⁸ As the Soviets tailored their institutions to maximize prizewinning, the “cultural diplomacy” of the US likewise devoted considerable resources to international musical competitions.⁵⁹ Numerous agencies supported young American contestants abroad, including the United States Information Agency (USIA), Eisenhower’s People to People program, and the Institute of International Education.⁶⁰ This 1958 memo, for example, demonstrates how the People-to-People Program’s Music Committee assisted “qualified” US candidates in “foreign competitions.”⁶¹

Racial politics were central to these Cold War propaganda battles, as Soviet messaging highlighted US white supremacy to repudiate American claims of democracy.”⁶² As counter-narrative, the State Department deployed prominent Black celebrities as musical ambassadors,

often placing these musicians in markedly difficult circumstances during these encounters (as Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Ingrid Monson, and Penny von Eschen have analyzed).⁶³ While Cold War politics, music, and race has been widely studied vis-à-vis the jazz ambassadors, the role of *competitions* in this context has been little examined. There are many crucial stories here: for the sake of time I'll highlight two revealing examples.

In 1966, baritone Simon Estes and soprano Veronica Tyler were supported by the Institute of International Education's cultural programming in music, paid for by the State Department. They were part of an extraordinarily large contingent sent abroad to compete for the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition, among the most symbolically important of the Cold War musical contests.⁶⁴ This was the first year singers could compete in the Tchaikovsky competition and the US clearly prioritized this category (and indeed won 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes in voice).⁶⁵ Tyler sang selections from *Porgy and Bess*—described as a “favorite with Moscow audiences”—and received five minutes of wild applause and Soviet audiences shouting “first prize, first prize.”⁶⁶ Estes recalled not being sure how the State Department even knew who he was, and that they “sent me the music, but no money to study” the Russian repertoire (forcing him to learn his songs in a wild set of circumstances, including from an actress on his plane ride).⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Russian audiences *also* shouted “first prize” for Estes. These competitors were sometimes ill-prepared or unsupported in these roles as cultural propaganda—yet also found favor with Soviet audiences both for their own vocal skill *AND* for the ways they fit into preexistent Cold War paradigms about music, race, and politics.

Soprano Jessye Norman moved among similar structures at the outset of her career. In the summer of 1968 she was sponsored by the United States Information Service and People-to-

People on a two-month concert tour of the Caribbean and Central America;⁶⁸ later that same summer, she was awarded a grant by the Office of International Education to enter the ARD Bavarian Radio International Radio Competition and Geneva International Music Competition.⁶⁹ The ARD competition, started in 1952 and located in West Germany, attracted US cultural diplomacy efforts as one of the most prestigious international competitions. Eight singers of color from the US won vocal prizes in the first twenty years of the ARD competition, comprising 50% of *all* American prizewinners during this period.⁷⁰ Yet while the Cold War US devoted significant resources to sending Black classical vocalists abroad to competitions such as the ARD, these competitions remained troubling terrain for Black singers.⁷¹ As Jessye Norman recounted, the adjudicators of the 1968 competition subjected her to different rules than the other contestants (barring her from using her accompanist and attempting to force her to change her repertoire). Norman ably defended herself against these irregular requests, and ultimately won 1st prize. Yet her experience demonstrates the double bind for Black opera singers, who were both expected to “win” for the United States yet also subjected to the dubious playbooks of international competitions.

As these initial case studies suggest, the specifics **matter**: sponsoring institutions, admin and jury personnel, required repertoire, and the nature of the prize all help determine equity.⁷² And while we are decades removed from the temporal focus of this paper, many of these problems remain—competitions still reign supreme for young singers as they commence their careers, yet these competitions can still be deeply unequal, harmful spaces (as my headlines indicate). Ideally we could engineer a better, post-competition vocal pipeline....but if not, we can learn valuable lessons about how to better address bias in these contests.

¹ Philip Bohlman has studied the national and nationalist implications of competition (particularly in folk and popular music). He notes, “I turn frequently to competition because, though on its surface it is about those who ‘get into the nation,’ it reveals a great deal about those who are marginalized or, even more critically, have been historically excluded.” Philip V. Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (Routledge, 2011).

For more on radio and television amateur hours, see Lindsay J. Wright, “Televising Talent: Musicality, Meritocracy, and the Aesthetics of Exclusion.” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 18 (2024): 33-55 and David Goodman, “On fire with hope: African American Classical Musicians, Major Bowe’s Amateur Hour, and the Hope for a Colour-Blind Radio.” *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 2 (May 2013): 475-94.

For more on Cold War competitions and international politics, see Kiril Tomoff, *Soviet Music and Imperial Competition during the Early Cold War, 1945-1958* (Cornell UP, 2015), 47 and 55.

² For more on the connection between music competitions and prestige, see Lisa McCormick, *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

I would also argue some of these changes had to do with different systems of patronage for performers—moving to grants, scholarships, etc.

³ See pages 25, 36-40, 42-43, 52-53, 70-71. The Naumburg award granted a Town Hall concert appearance. Shirley Verrett, *I Never Walked Alone: The Autobiography of an American Singer* (John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

Verrett noted in a later interview “At Juilliard, I entered every contest that came along, and won them all. I had to. I started late. I needed the money which I plowed into extra coaching.” While taking the full singing course at Juilliard, she used her prize money to hire special coaches outside the school — in voice, languages, drama. It is hard to imagine a more entirely earned career than Miss Verrett’s. The contests brought her to the attention of musicians.” See *New York Times*, “Shirley Verrett Gambles on Superstardom,” 30 January 1977.

Incidentally, Shirley Verrett also entered the Atwater Kent radio hour earlier on (1949? 1950?) and made it to the second round. She was a regional winner in the Met Council auditions, not the overall winner (George Shirley won that year).

⁴ Most of what I discuss here focuses on the professional, career-bound musician, but many music education scholars have also argued that competition is toxic to young musicians for all sorts of reasons. Music education scholars such as James R. Austin and Melissa Lalonde have argued that competition can be an impediment to both pedagogy and music-making due to a range of factors ranging from elitism, neoliberalism, capitalism, ability segregation, and diminishing the “competence, self-worth, and self-efficacy of those who ‘lose.’” See Melissa Lalonde, “Reshaping competition to redefine music education,” *Canadian Music Educator*, 55, no. 2 (2013), 20-23 and James R. Austin, “Competition: Is music education the loser?” *Music Educators Journal*, 76, no. 7 (1990), 21-25. Thank you to my music education colleague Judy Lewis for these sources and many formative discussions about the roles of competition and music education.

⁵ See William Cheng, “Staging Overcoming: Narratives of Disability and Meritocracy in Reality Singing Competitions,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 11, no. 2 (May 2017): 184–214; Katherine Meizel, Ch. 3 of *Idolized: Music, Media, and Identity in American Idol* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Matthew Wheelock Stahl, “A Moment Like This: American Idol and Narratives of Meritocracy,” in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, eds. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 212–32; Lindsay J. Wright, “Televising Talent: Musicality, Meritocracy, and the Aesthetics of Exclusion,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 18 (2024): 33–55.

Cheng specifically notes the way American competitions connect to the “meritocratic ideals of the American Dream.” (189).

Me: though the techniques of earlier programs such as the Metropolitan Opera Auditions were obviously different than *The Voice* or *American Idol*, press coverage still tended to play up “human interest elements” and overcoming narratives in ways similarly targeted to attract audience engagement.

Cheng continues about the connections of meritocracy and the American Dream: Meritocracy is an American power ballad, a fight song, a national anthem, and an earworm prone to reach fever pitch during election seasons when politicians build campaigns on dreams of upward mobility. Slogans for meritocracy are legion: the cream rises to the top, you get out of life what you put into it, and additional platitudes that stress individual achievement through labor, skill, and sheer will. But recent scholars have denounced meritocracy as a myth, a seductive ethos that belies disparities arising from genetics, inherited wealth, nepotism, and luck. “[T]he tenets of the American Dream comprise an ideology of inequality,” explain Stephen J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller, Jr. “For a system of inequality to be stable over the long run, those who have more must convince those who have less that the distribution of who gets what is fair, just, proper, or the natural order of things.” Common critiques of meritocracy peg it as a philosophy favoring the (already) privileged—a retroactive, top-down justification of hierarchical status quo. And even though meritocracy is not an official form of government, it implicitly poses as the rule of law in employment, academia, popular culture, and everyday life. Meritocracy is a virtual reality.... Appeals to merit-based results dangle a utopian brand of fairness, spinning out false yet comforting justifications for who wins and who loses. (190–191).

⁶ Emphasis is mine.

She adds that “talent shows, she argues, attempt to ‘naturalize ‘talent’ and ‘merit’ as stable objects able to be recognized, rated, and ranked.” Wright briefly defines meritocracy as “the common notion that with enough hard work and talent, anyone can rise to the top.”

In discussing some of the recent rhetoric around representation and meritocracy, Lindsay Wright notes, “In the ensuing years, agreement that ‘representation matters’ has only increased within and beyond American cultural discourses. Academics, activists, and corporations alike have called for more effective meritocratic systems that enable people—across categories of race, sexuality, gender, physical or cognitive ability, class, and region of origin—to occupy positions of power and visibility in media contexts and beyond. This agreement stems from a widespread belief that representation operates as a tool of social justice as well as a metric of the current meritocratic system’s effectiveness. This belief underlies the ubiquitous #representationmatters hashtag on social media; this belief is a starting place for many scholarly discourses about the complex mechanics of representation in media.⁹ Indeed, even as fantasies of attaining an ideal meritocracy continue to fray in the wake of mounting economic and social inequalities, and even as critiques of meritocracy proliferate, the pursuit of a system that recognizes and rewards some concept of merit—rather than social rank, wealth, or nothing at all—remains a common cause” (34–35). See Wright, “Televising Talent.”

⁷ As Lisa McCormick has analyzed, the attempts to “quantatively rationalize” music generally meets with resistance, “yet at music competitions a jury is enlisted for the sole purpose of producing a ranking from best to worst.” Lisa McCormick, *Performing Civility*, 170. Problems: McCormick also notes that “the nature of music-making is fundamentally at odds with the competition format and that the history of music competitions comprises the evolving negotiations of these competing cultural commitments” (179).

⁸ As Lisa McCormick notes:

What to judge: She adds that jurors are often evaluating or “left to decide for themselves how to weigh various aspects of performance, such as musicianship, knowledge of style, technical mastery, individuality, and stage presence” (180). McCormick also noted judges often rated competitors as well on visual and gestural components how they “dress, walk, bow, or sit on stage” (176). Sometimes juries assess promise, sometimes accomplishment—the prize may determine this (180).

She adds that “the mystery is even greater at high-profile music competitions where, for reasons of confidentiality, decisions are announced to the public but the criteria used to produce them are never explained...to complicate matters further, stylistic convention is not strictly defined and is often bitterly debated.” (170, 174). She continues, “Voting systems designed to keep deliberations “clean” can make matters worse. By concealing what must be hidden to protect judges from undue influence, the results can be as much of a surprise to them as they are to the audience. This makes it even more difficult to justify controversial decisions that the juror may or may not have supported in the first place. For example, one respondent recalled getting impatient when he was asked repeatedly by audience members if a jury’s decision had been unanimous” (189).

Worries about cronyism.

What results? Split juries (the winner is nobody’s first choice) (191).

⁹ Thurman is also in dialogue with Mark Burford’s work on this point. See Thurman, *Performing like Germans*, 11 and Burford, “Sam Cooke as Pop Album Artist—A Reinvention in Three Songs,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

¹⁰ Sound is racialized through the listener’s ear—what Jennifer Stoeber calls the “sonic color line”—and this racialized hearing permeates reception of Black opera singers, as Nina Sun Eidsheim has explained. See Jennifer Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (NYU Press, 2016), 4.

Nina Sun Eidsheim argues white US listeners connect Black singers with a “phantom genealogy activated by non-sonorous cues.” Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Duke University Press, 2019), chapter 2.

Kira Thurman (in a discussion that includes Black instrumentalists) explores the tensions between racialized hearings and German-Austrian constructions of “musical universality” in *Performing like Germans*.

For an interesting discussion of a later reality music competition and race, see Katherine Meizel, Chapter 6, *Idolized*.

¹¹ Lindsay Wright calls attention to the ways musical talent was racialized in the United States: “the innate musical talent was explicitly racialized in the US. The specific belief that a musician’s innate talent can be measured through a standardized evaluation was popularized by music psychologist and eugenicist Carl Seashore, who developed the first music aptitude tests in the early twentieth century.” See Wright, “Televising Talent,” (41).

See also Julia Eklund Koza, *Destined to Fail: Carl Seashore’s World of Eugenics, Psychology, Education, and Music* (University of Michigan, 2021).

¹² William Cheng, “Here, we see the rationalizations of meritocracy cutting both ways. By playing up the priority of vocal merit, judges and producers had a convenient excuse to eliminate Poe without addressing any stories of disability, deception, and special dispensation that were otherwise being foregrounded in the news and social media” “Staging Overcoming,” (198).

¹³ Lindsay Wright’s work on talent shows argues that the format is actually the most critical element of these shows. See Wright, “Televising Talent.”

¹⁴ The radio shows will run for 20 seasons in this basic format; reorganizations into the Metropolitan Opera National Council will happen in 1954 and then the radio programs will stop entirely in 1958.

¹⁵ Among a number of reports, see: 1) “the idea of this program is to bring to the public over the air for the first time a series of regular opera auditions which have always been withheld from the public.” *Times Herald*, 21 December 1935. 2) for more modern and democratic, see *Time Magazine*, 10 April 1939, 44. 3) For “not behind closed doors,” see *Hamilton Spectator*, 3 January 1936. 4) For “This new Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air program is not only breaking tradition in the musical world, but creating a new and just path to the singing roster of the great Opera company,” see *The Tennessean* 22 December 1935.

There was also a nationalistic imperative for these auditions: Edward Johnson, general manager of the Metropolitan Opera company, says “for hundreds of years before America was born, creative art has been supplied by the European market. But today Europe is confronted with war in Spain and international dissension elsewhere on the continent; and we know that unrest and discontent do not create beauty. Art is born of peace. So where there is unrest, creative art must necessarily be in abeyance. Think what this may mean to our young, ambitious artists. It is conceivable that the old order of things will change and, as is now true in architecture, the old world may call upon us for a new idiom in music.” Johnson hopes to be able to contribute to America’s musical preparedness in such an event, and he looks hopefully to the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air program which provides and opportunity for 3 singers at each broadcast to compete for a contract to sing with the famous opera company....*Times Herald* 3 November 1936.

A year later, Johnson also noted, “Oddly enough, American music and musical organizations offer the strongest type of propaganda and in addition, Mr. Edward Johnson declares that the “Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air” is the most all-American vehicle....He says: ‘after traveling for four months from one country to another in Europe, I have come to the conclusion that the strongest form we have to combat international propaganda, the closest bond between America as a whole and its citizens is the “Auditions” program... The program was built to offer young America an opportunity to reach the highest goal of musical endeavor and also keeps millions of listeners “America-conscious.”’ *The Daily Non-Parail*, 13 December 1937.

¹⁶ As was explained last year, the “Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air” series is not a contest; it does not even remotely resemble any of various amateur hours; It is strictly the regular auditions which the Metropolitan Opera Company gives to singers of proved ability who are seeking a place within its ranks. The only difference is that these auditions, formerly held in private, now are, for the first time in the Met’s history, heard publicly. The Metropolitan Opera Audition committee will judge each singer as heard in these broadcast auditions. and in the semi-final and final programs will select the singers to be awarded contracts. *the Bismarck Tribune* 18 October 1936. “Radio Gives Opportunity. Success of Scores of Entertainers has Come through Auditions. Opportunity, the word that has filled the dreams of many young men and women, has come through radio. Despite the abuses that have crept into auditions and amateur hours in the last few years, this type of competition has not been without merit. In fact, radio auditions and amateur hours have opened the door to success that otherwise might have remained closed forever. Going back to the days of those national auditions sponsored by a radio set maker, we find a number of names that first were heard of in the auditions, now figuring in the headlines. *The Akron Beacon Journal*, 29 October 1936.

In terms of rules for these contests, you did not necessarily have to be an amateur, and did not have to be native-born. You could audition more than once.

“Welcomes listener comments but not an amateur contest or popularity poll.” *Asheville Citizen Times*, 22 December 1935.

¹⁷ Cecil, Warwick, & Cecil (Richard Nicholls). See *The Buffalo News* 4 January 1936.

¹⁸ In later years, the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air began to run preliminary regional auditions in other cities, to avoid the “Gothamcentric” nature of only auditioning singers in New York. One year, for example, they auditioned prospective singers in Cleveland.

¹⁹ The shows later switched to ABC networks. Farnsworth Capehart became sponsor in 1948. Can look into this more. The listenership statistics can be finessed a bit more—this one is from 1948, see letter in Metropolitan Opera Archive (p. 10 of 153).

²⁰ For example, Felix Knight on January 16, 1938 sang “O Paradiso” from *L’Africain* by Meyerbeer ; “I’m Falling in Love” by Victor Herbert. Sometimes the contestants sang duets or trios, and the orchestra often had at least one or two solo orchestral numbers. The operatic repertoires was initially described as “the type of music everyone loves/ hit tunes,” one newspaper said “high-class without being high-brow.” *The Kokomo Tribune*, 21 December 1935. See also BROADCASTERS DUBIOUS. Yet, in spite of the fact that radio listeners are responding wholeheartedly to the finest that music can offer, broadcasters themselves seem doubtful of the public's intelligence. NBC, for example, in its politic advance announcement of the Sunday Metropolitan Opera Auditions, tries hard to disguise the essential artistic quality of such a program. “The music will be the sort that everybody loves,” says NBC in its most cajoling manner, “favor- ords. its gems from favorite operas. In other words, the ‘hit tunes’ of opera brought down to the level of Mr. Average John Q. Public..” Bringing radio fare “down to the level of Mr. Average John Q. Public” usually results in just so much tripe, and NBC knows this as well as you and I do. The Auditions of the Air series represents broadcasting at high rather than low ebb. Why apologize for it? *The Oakland Post Enquirer*, 27 December 1935. High-brow comment from *The Paris News* 12 January 1936.

The shows seemed to be threading a needle between talent hours and unnecessarily elitist :)

The repertoire choices varied a bit year to year—for example, the first season included only 1 song. Sometimes the singers sang thematically linked numbers all from the same opera, sometimes they also sang duets or trios, etc etc.

²¹ There were various other features on the shows as well: coaching from famous singers, interviews with previous winners.

²² “Pick Stars for To-Morrow.” Here you see the men who decide the fate of young operatic aspirants who appear on the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air program, heard over an N.B.C.-WEAF network each Sunday afternoon at 3:30. The five members of the committee of auditions, seated at the table, are, from left to right: Earle R. Lewis, box office treasurer, Metropolitan Opera Association; Dr. John Erskine, chairman of the managements committee and member of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Opera Association; Edward Johnson, general manager Metropolitan Opera Association Edward Ziegler, assistant general manager, Metropolitan Opera Association; and Wilfred Pelletier, conductor, Metropolitan orchestra. In the rear are Jack Warwick, who built the program, and Richard Nicholls, who directs it. *The Hamilton Spectator*, 21 January 1936.

The jury panel was exclusively white and exclusively male.

²³ There was some variability over the years about how many weeks consisted a season.

²⁴ Auditions were “open to all young American singers,” *The Gazette Montreal Canada*, 23 September 1938.

“The auditions will be open to all talented singers,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch* 27 June 1941.

29 February 1936: The operatic aspirant who now complains “I can’t get a chance to have a Met audition,” had better look to a more conclusive excuse. Every singer that has asked for an audition has received one, and those whose voices have warranted such have gone on the Sunday program. Source?

Also “the agency says that any operatic aspirant in the world can obtain an audition before the member of the committee on auditions.” *Los Angeles Citizen News* 16 October 1936.

Please emphasize to teachers or managers that no talent has any greater entree to the Metropolitan than does the singer who appears in these radio auditions; that there are no “inside” tracks to which any one teacher had greater access than any other. The MOAA is by far the best medium America has yet produced for giving equal audience rights to all. *Kingston Daily Freeman* 15 November 1937.

Earle Lewis Leads Young Hopefuls to Metro’s Auditions. . . .”The Metropolitan Opera Association is extremely sympathetic toward the aspirations of youth,” Lewis said. “It is not a soulless institution, but a very human organization striving to maintain an ideal. The MOAA are an excellent method of bringing the public in closer touch with the opera. They offer a new opportunity not only for singers, but to a public we believe is becoming increasingly opera-conscious. They are fair and friendly auditions, not sharp and decisive affairs.” *The Atlanta Journal*, 13 December 1936.

²⁵ There were a few (very limited) examples of singers of color who participated in the auditions, namely Indigenous soprano Lushanya Mobley in 1935 and Mexican tenor Gustavo Carrasco in 1936.

26 See judging form included in *Radio Parade*, April 1941. *Evansville Courier and Press*, 25 December 1938.

"We note that both winners present nice appearances, which points to the fact that the candidates may be selected with an eye to motion pictures and stage along with vocal talent." *Buffalo Courier Express* 26 March 1940.

For "intelligence" comment, *St. Louis Post Dispatch* 16 August 1941.

In 1942 the finalists asked to appear onstage to judge stage presence as well.

Interestingly, this letter was sent from Rudolf Bing to Gutman, Adler, and Defrer on February 23, 1951 asking them as members of the Auditioning Committee to "never pass judgement or critical comments on auditionists. Officially it is your duty to judge whether auditionists have sufficient vocal or artistic merit to justify inviting them for another audition on stage in the presence of conductors and myself. It is not the Committee's job to advise auditionists on the status of their singing ability or the quality of their voice; still less is it advisable to make any remarks that may be taken as criticism of teaching methods. In my experience the best way is merely to thank the auditionists for having come and to say that they would in due course be advised whether or not they would be invited. Anything else is bound to lead to trouble as I have already experienced from one or two auditionists who complained about having received critical comments after their auditions." Barcode 918202 Bing Correspondence, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

27 At this point in the Met contests and much of the singing world in general, gender and voice type were conflated as some sort of "natural" pair.

28 The full notice read: "The Eighth Season of the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air will start over the Blue Network Nov. 23 and will be heard each Sunday night at 6:30 to 7pm over a coast-to-coast Pine Network. The series will run 15 weeks after the opening date.

A release received by this writer from the Auditions committee states that preliminary auditions for those who wish to try for a chance to compete on the air for their goal of singers aspiration, are underway in Radio City, New York.

Any one who thinks he or she can qualify may enter regardless of race, creed, or color. For further details, contact this writer at 575 Columbia East, Detroit, Mich.

You may be interesting in knowing that William Gillespie is the name of a young colored baritone, discovered by Columbia Broadcasting System on the west coast. He was given an audition and soon became a regular member of the musical staff on "The Sunrise Salute Show" and is heard each morning 6:15 to 7:15 am Pacific Coast time, over radio station KNX in Los Angeles. " *The Detroit Tribune* Nov 28, 1942.

29 Scott is a fascinating figure. A native of Louisiana, he attended both Southern and Dillard Universities (HBCUs). In the early 1940s, he was a singer himself—he met Brice on the set of *The Hot Mikado* and also sang baritone with the Hall Johnson Choir. During the war years, he worked as labor correspondent for major Black newspapers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *New Amsterdam News*. He worked in get out the vote, Black radio and publishing, managed contests, created a new market for Black models, organized events such as Joe Lewis day, a benefit concert for Isaac Woodward, the Negro Freedom Rally (1947), and the Amsterdam News Welfare Fund Music Festival. He handled publicity and promotion for Black musicians such as his wife. He was also involved with multiple civil rights groups such as the Consumer's Protective Committee in Harlem and the NAACP. He proposed a boycott of segregated concert venues such as Constitution Hall by both Black and white artists in 1948. He worked with the movie industry as well.

The *Alabama Tribune* noted in 1948 that Scott "is recognized throughout the country as one of the ablest leaders among the race in the never ending fight for better conditions and improved relations. The *Tribune* article was in reference to Scott's organization of the 1949 Amsterdam News Welfare Fund Music Festival. June 25, 1948.

The issue of *who* managed Black artists was contentious (even taking into account the activist efforts of white managers such as Sul Hurok). See, for example the January 18, 1947 issue of *New England Bulletin* which notes "Miss Brice has been handled and publicized for the last 7 years by the Negro public relations firm, Neil Scott & Associates, which proves that Negroes can be successfully publicized and counseled by a Negro business man. The Scott office recently secured a five year recording contract for Miss Brice with the Columbia Recording Company." For more on Scott, see also *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*. Scott was involved with the Consumers' Protective Committee in Harlem. He was a member of CPC, a founder and vice chair in charge of public relations.

³⁰ October 29, 1948: by Neil Scott. "It is high time that Negroes become members of the Metropolitan Opera Company, the nation's greatest musical organization. The circumstances of color prejudice should rapidly be ended which, until now, has kept the golden tones of some of the world's finest singers from ringing through the mighty halls of the Metropolitan Opera House. Even as the barriers against Negroes playing professional basketball, golf, football, tennis, being heavyweight champion of the world have been torn down—so must Negro America now gird itself for an all out fight to see to it that our men and women of vocal, histrionic and artistic might get their chance to gain fame and fortune in the opera houses on the United States. There is no question but that Marian Anderson, Dorothy Maynor, Carol Brice, Ellabelle Davis, Larry Winters and other gifted Negro artists, if given the incentive and the opportunity to appear in America's major opera houses, they would more than hold their own. Each of the artists named above has widespread following among music lovers who pay hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to hear their golden voices, and thrill to their artistry. Yet, none of these artists are members of the Metropolitan Opera Association. No Negro has trod the stage of the Metropolitan, singing an operatic solo. Certainly Marian Anderson and Carol Brice could match the vocal prowess of any two other contraltos presently members of the Met; the same holds true for Miss Davis and Miss Maynor, as regards sopranos. Taking into consideration the fact that the Metropolitan is a Jim Crow institution, it is high time that the battle to get Negroes into that organization was begun. Accordingly, I have submitted the names of three talented Negroes for the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air; Mr. Charles Holland, a golden voiced tenor, Miss Helen Thigpen, a silken voiced soprano, and Mr. James Hall, a basso profundo. It is my intention to submit the names of many other young Negro singers, if they will contact me for one of the application blanks for the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air. I am calling on all Negro musicians, newspapers, and civic leaders to join with me in the fight to break down the Jim Crow barriers at the Metropolitan Opera House. (*Alabama Tribune* 29 October 1948).

³¹ Charles Holland, two others get "Met" auditions. New York: Although no public announcement has been made of their reception, three Negro singers were recently auditioned by the Metropolitan Opera Co. Met officials heard James Hall, basso profundo; Charles Holland, tenor, and Ruth Stewart, dramatic soprano. Neil Scott, artists' representative arranged the auditions. He said there would be further ones, and added that the opportunity to be heard by such keenly critical personages as the Metropolitan officers would cause young Negro singers to prepare more thoroughly. *Los Angeles Tribune*, December 4, 1948.

Breaching the Met through these auditions was part of a larger project; in December 1948, Scott proposed a boycott of any segregated musical venue (such as Constitution Hall) by white and Black musicians. December 17, 1948: Neil Scott proposes boycott of Constitution Hall by both Black and white artists. *Alabama Tribune*.

³² "Muriel Rahn Wedges the Met with Role. Chalk up the year 1948 as an eventful one in the career of Muriel Rahn. Besides her coast-to-coast concert tours, the former star of "Carmen Jones" has quietly gone about the business of opening a "wedge" in the employment ranks of the great Metropolitan Opera Company in New York. Utilizing every possible means at her disposal to focus attention of the Met powers on her talent and that of other young Negro artists, she has made two preliminary auditions for the Met Auditions of the Air, programs (which were not broadcast but which were listened to by the Auditions Committee) and has sung two performances of the title role of the opera "Aida" with the Salmaghi Opera Company, to which she invited Edward Johnson, Met Manager, and others of importance....*The Detroit Tribune*, January 1, 1949.

³³ The "one-woman campaign" wording was used at the time, seemingly in reference to the multiple tactics Rahn was using to attempt to gain access to the Met's stage. See *Detroit Tribune*, August 27, 1949. Campaigns for Negro Singers at Met. Muriel Rahn's "One Woman Campaign" to focus attention on the Metropolitan Opera Company's failure to use Negro singers received a shot in the arm last week when 167 stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System aired a frank discussion of the problem over the popular one hour Clifton Fadiman show, "This is Broadway." Miss Rahn stated that although she had sung "Aida" at the Boston Opera House with the San Carlo Opera Company, and had given several performances with the Salmaghi opera Company at the Stadium in New York, as well as the Brooklyn Academy of Music and had other roles at her finger tips, she couldn't even get an audition at the Metropolitan. Said Mr. Fadiman, "If our government can use the services of Dr. Ralph Bunche to advantage, and if we can use the likeness of a Negro scientist on a three cent stamp (George Washington Carver), I don't see why the Metropolitan shouldn't avail itself of the talent of Negro artists." *Detroit Tribune*, August 27, 1949.

³⁴ See my chapter in *Black Opera* edited collection and Maurice B. Wheeler, "An Unlikely Champion: Rudolf Bing and the Demise of Jim Crow at the Metropolitan Opera," *Notes* 75, no. 2 (December 2018): 207-236. Interestingly, it seems there was an attempt to get the auditions on TV when Bing came on board. See Barcode 918201 Bing Correspondence, letter from August 4, 1950, John Gutman to Rudolf Bing, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

³⁵ See letter from John Gutman to Rudolf Bing, September 5 1950, Barcode 918201 Files 1949-1950, Bing Correspondence, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

³⁶ This memorandum is likely from John Gutman and postdates 1951 but likely predates 1954.

³⁷ Fred Thomas: Very brilliant concert artiste. Won a Metropolitan Opera Audition of the Air in month 1951. A baritone, he studied on a scholarship with the David Mannes School as well as with private teachers. Served in U.S. Army in World War II and was a member of the De Paur Infantry Chorus. Has appeared in Broadway productions, among them Showboat and Call Me Mister. Was also member of the summer paper mill playhouse, Millburn, N.J. Gave highly successful concert at Town Hall, New York, March 1951. Is booked with Symphony Orchestras for appearances in America and Abroad. *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 June 1951.

Fred Thomas, left, 38-year-old baritone from Norristown, PA is the first Negro to win the \$3,000 in scholarship money in ABC's Auditions of the Air. Maria Leone, also a winner accepts congrats from Rudolph Bing Mgr at the Metropolitan. *Detroit Tribune*. (Includes photograph) *Detroit Tribune*, April 14, 1951.

³⁸ "Usually, the winner received a contract and six months of training. In McFerrin's case, he received no contract, and his training lasted for thirteen months. McFerrin did not object and later lauded the program for teaching him fencing, ballet, and other aspects of stage deportment." <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/robert-mcferrin-sr-3266/>

³⁹ At least some of the discontent with the Auditions of the Air on the part of the Met had to do with domination of the contest by New York contestants; Reginald Allen of the Met in 1953 drafted a memorandum to Mr. Newberry to lay out a new idea of organizing the auditions via the National Council. See Barcode 901825 Bing Correspondence, Metropolitan Opera Archive.

William Marshall of ABC was in charge of preliminary auditions (see Metropolitan Opera Archive correspondence, Louise Florian to Betty Freireich July 27, 1954).

⁴⁰ The Bok award was an annual Philadelphia Community Service award given to the Philadelphian who has "performed an act calculated to advance the best interests of Philadelphia." See *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* March 18, 1941. For information on the Anderson quote, see press release, 1941. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁴¹ See draft of letter by Ethel de Priest for trustee Mr. Alexander Jackson, [1972], Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. The award remained specifically and only for vocalists (often a matter of inquiry). For information on the Anderson quote, see press release, 1941. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁴² Male contestants received a small amount of flexibility based on military service. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁴³ Specific wording was: "there is no required song, so each contestant may sing a song of his or her own choosing. Folk songs and songs from Operetta or Musical Comedy will not be considered. It is expected that the song chosen will be of recognized musical worth, in the field of classical music, and that it will be suited to the voice of the singer. It should be sung in the original language. The second song must be an Aria chosen from the printed sheet." See letter from Alyse Anderson to Mr. Henry Elkan, May 11, 1956. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. And also letter from Alyse Anderson as a form blank to all accepted applicants, August 1, 1963. MS College 200 box 243, Marian Anderson Collection.

⁴⁴ It's not clear what this very long list of handwritten song titles was for, except they are not opera arias. The list is predominately (though not exclusively) American composers, and contains a fairly large number of works by Black composers. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁴⁵ Letter to "Miss Anderson, unsigned, originally published in *The Madison Capital Times*." Reprinted in many national newspapers, including *The Sheboygan Press*, April 15, 1941.

⁴⁶ Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

There were quibbles about what exactly the prize money should be used for (just music lessons?) and where (just within the United States?). See letter from "Marian Anderson" (probably an admin) to Hope Stoddard, September 2, 1964. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁴⁷ The initial press release noted “the committee will consider all applications from young men and women who fit the requirements stated by Miss Anderson. The amount of the annual reward will not be a fixed one, but will vary with the requirements of the winner for that year. The Anderson Award will not be strictly limited to the field of music though applicants in this field will be given preference. The prize is open to both Negroes and Whites.” Some of this changed later on; by 1963, for example, the first prize was fixed at \$1000 with two prizes of lesser amounts. Judges were described as “**competent**.” See Melvin L. Larson, Scholarship Coordinator to C.J. Williams, July 26, 1963, Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. Very occasionally, contestants would ask whether they were “acceptable” candidates and identify themselves racially (though this was unusual). See letter from Gregory Simms, Mary 20, 1956. Ms coll 708 Box 22 Marian Anderson Award.

⁴⁸ *Springfield Evening Union* December 24, 1941.

⁴⁹ See contest rules from 1964, Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. Accompanists varied but often included Ralph Berkowitz in the 1940s. Berkowitz info from Wikipedia: From 1946 to 1951, Berkowitz served as an executive assistant to Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood and later became Dean of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood in 1951, a position he held until 1961. As Dean, he presided over a faculty that included Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and many others. Illustrious students in those years included Zubin Mehta, Lorin Maazel and Claudio Abbado. He, along with Boston Symphony manager Todd Perry, was largely instrumental in keeping the Tanglewood Festival alive following Koussevitzky's death. Bacharach had attended Eastman and served in the Army in WWII; see Annegret Fauser for more on Bacharach. For a large percentage of contestants, this interracial music making mirrored Anderson's own professional relationship with Franz Rupp.

⁵⁰ See Melvin L. Larson, Scholarship Coordinator to C.J. Williams, July 26, 1963, Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. Rupp was of course Anderson's accompanist, and Mary Saunders Patterson a prominent Black soprano and Philadelphia voice teacher (who had taught Marian earlier in her life). Other judges included Franz Rupp in the 1940s, Olga Samaroff in 1945, William Lawrence (1951, 1955, 1957, 1958, 1960, 1962, 1972), Morton Howard (1955, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1972).

⁵¹ The level of details and minutiae that held to be dealt with was enormous; see handwritten notes from Alyse (?) detailing “You tipped the waiters, I don't know how much” or “The doorman works overtime, his time is till 3 P.M. We give him 2.50 each day.” Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. They also decided in time to no longer notify people who had not won the competitions (too much correspondence). See Ms Coll 708 Box 22, Marian Anderson collection. Sometimes worried about quality of contestants, and finding judges was a recurrent, stressful nightmare for Alyse Anderson and the other organizers. See letter from Alyse Anderson to her sister, October 17, 1956, which notes “no more than 3 choir singers.”

⁵² See press release for 1972 winner, Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. By the late 1960s, Hubert Delaney had been replaced as trustee by Mrs. C. Newbold Welsh of Haverford, PA (a wealthy white philanthropist in Philadelphia). See press release, 1942. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection. One interesting case, a small direct grant outside the normal contest rules to Coleridge Taylor Perkinson, son of NYC pianist Vereda Pearson. This \$100 granted directly to Coleridge Taylor Perkinson was massively unusual as it was not in the normal scholarship confines and came about through the agency of Rachel Davis Dubois to Hubert Delany. See letter from September 28, 1949. Ms coll 708 Box 22 Marian Anderson Award. The advertising in the Black press is still a bit underexamined; there is a proposal in the archive from J. Mark Hyman of the Philadelphia Tribune and Associated Negro Press that proposed a special publicity campaign with the 155 major Black newspapers, college, fraternal, and religious periodicals and “several Negro magazines.” Unclear what Marian Anderson fund did with this. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁵³ This was an article from the Philadelphia Tribune, 11 September 1956. This included applicants from practically every state as well as Vienna, Austria. Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁵⁴ The prize was ultimately discontinued in 1972 over feelings that the original mandate and use of the money was no longer occurring. Specifically, the press release noted “The Marian Anderson Scholarship Fund was established in 1941 and has continuously held competitions and awarded scholarships annually. The purpose of the Fund is to give financial aid to talented and promising singers who are without other means of securing the necessary funds for study of voice. This however has become a disappointment. Although the rules clearly state that the award is to be used for the study of voice, the Fund has been paying various bills for award winners who were under some other scholarship that included voice study, nevertheless, the Marian Anderson Scholarship has kept its commitment to every award winner. The Fund has therefore paid out thousands of dollars for purposes other than the one for which it was established. For this reason the Marian Anderson Scholarship Fund will discontinue its competitions and awards until further notice.” Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁵⁵ This is ongoing research (some singers are better known and easier to locate their life stories than others), but I’ve got dossiers for at least 51 of the 109 singers.

⁵⁶ See letter from Alyse Anderson to her sister, October 17, 1956.

⁵⁷ Such as a 1972 press release highlighting eight winners of the past, 7 of whom were Black singers. “Shirley Verrett, McHenry Boatwright, Grace Bumbry, Camilla Williams, Betty Allen, Joanna Simon, Reri Grist, and Gloria Davy.” See press release for 1972 winner, Ms Coll 200 Box 243, Marian Anderson collection.

⁵⁸ Kiril Tomoff, *Soviet Music and Imperial Competition during the Early Cold War, 1945-1958* (Cornell UP, 2015), 47 and 55. Tomoff notes other fields that were important for Soviet-Western competition included chess and the Olympics.

⁵⁹ Probably the best-known author on US Cold War cultural diplomacy and music is Danielle Fosler-Lussier, “Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization: The University of Michigan Jazz Band in Latin America,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1 (2010): 59-93 and Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 2015). See also Emily Abrams Ansari, *The Sound of a Superpower: Musical Americanism and the Cold War* (Oxford UP: 2018).

⁶⁰ President Eisenhower’s People to People program was initiated on September 11, 1956 to “enhance international understanding and friendship through educational, cultural, and humanitarian activities involving the exchange of ideas and experience directly among peoples of different countries and diverse cultures.” He thought of this being run by US citizens but did start it out with the United States Information Agency. Lots of wonderful documents on the Presidential library website. The USIA operated from 1953-1999 and was the largest PR service in the world, basically a propaganda program. People to People Ambassador program was privatized in 1961. Ansari notes of the US Information Agency (USIA) as a new propaganda agency created by President Eisenhower in 1953 to promote American economic and cultural achievements overseas and publicize the benefits of US policy. The USIA was an important distributor of American classical music during the Cold War, making available thousands of recordings through US Information Service libraries in US embassies and creating documentaries about American music for international audiences. (23).

See a very important article on this issue in Sondra K. Gorney, “Young American Talent Competes Abroad,” in *International Educational and Cultural Exchange: A publication of the US Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs* Summer 1968 IV, no. 1 (Summer 1968).

⁶¹ Here, the Music Committee collaborated with the Martha Rockefeller Fund & the Institute of International Education to fund Joyce Flissler and Van Cliburn in the Inaugural Tchaikovsky Competition.

⁶² As Danielle Fosler-Lussier explains, “it was impossible to sell America’s message abroad while the country’s image was tarnished by obvious and cruel inequality.” *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, circa p. 171.

⁶³ Fosler-Lussier noted that “State Department officials actively sought to include both Black and integrated groups in its tour programs to counter Soviet claims about the oppression of African Americans in the United States.” Danielle Fosler-Lussier, “Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization: The University of Michigan Jazz Band in Latin America,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1 (2010): 59-93.

⁶⁴ About 19 musicians participated in the Tchaikovsky Competition. They were also two of 30 musicians selected to participate in 7 international competitions that year. The Tchaikovsky Competition was massively important due to its location in the Soviet Union but also the pivotal memory of Van Cliburn's triumphant win in piano in 1958. See source, which notes: "Cultural programs in Music: IIE's program, made possible by State Department financing, under which young American musicians are assisted to participate in international competitions, was especially rewarding this year. Of the 30 musicians selected by the Institute's Music Committee to participate in seven competitions, 16 were awarded prizes. At the Third Tchaikovsky Music Competition in Moscow, Jane Marsh, soprano, was awarded first prize in the vocal competition. She was the first American to take first prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition since Van Cliburn, another IIE grantee, did so in 1958. Veronica Tyler, soprano, and Simon Estes, basso, both IIE grantees, shared the second prize for voice in Moscow...." See *Institute of International Education* annual report 1966, page 7. <https://p.widencdn.net/g1rw2o/1966-IIE-Annual-Report>

⁶⁵ Singing was perhaps emphasized even more than cello, violin, or piano (which were seen as categories which often favored the Soviets)

⁶⁶ See *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 27 June 1966. The rest of the coverage notes, "Miss Tyler, a Negro, was especially cheered here for her arias from "Porgy and Bess," the Gershwin opera which is a favorite with Moscow audiences. She is a former student at Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory of Music and the Juilliard School in New York. She won first prize last year in the international singer's competition in Munich, Germany. Miss Tyler got five minutes of wild applause when she sang her final selections Friday night. Mr. Sveshnikov finally had to ask the audience to be quiet so the competition could continue. Voices in the audience shouted "First prize, First prize." Besides the Gershwin number, she sang arias from Charpentier and Tchaikovsky."

⁶⁷ Estes's anecdote, at length, is: "Well, you know, I'm very touched that - you know how unusual it is - because, you're right. I'd never seen a conductor from an orchestra pit, and I'd never sung with an orchestra. And I wasn't nervous. And I don't say that because I was overly confident or cocky. I was simply naive. You don't know the little humble beginnings I come from, from Centerville, Iowa. So I just knew I had to sing it. And I didn't know I could memorize that. I never did that before in my life. And the coach I worked with at the Deutsche Oper: his name was Hilsdorf. And he taught me Ramfis, and he was shocked himself. And so Mr. Kelos told me to call him after the performance. He said, "Simone, how did it go?" I said, "Well, I think it went okay, because the director of the opera house wants me to come see him on Monday." And I said, "Mr. Kelos, all of the singers were singing and vocalizing or something before they sang." He said, "Didn't you vocalize?" I said, "You didn't tell me I had to vocalize before I had to sing." And he said, "I'll talk to you when you get back to New York." I just walked out on the stage - this is the honest truth - and I just sang. And then they offered me more contracts. And in 1966, the state department - to this day I don't know how they knew who I was - they contacted me and wanted me to represent the United States in the first vocal Tchaikovsky Competition. I fly over there; I'd never studied Russian. They said they were going to send me money to study Russian, which they never did. But I flew next to a German actress from East Berlin to Moscow. And she asked me in German because I spoke a little German then... "Why are you going to Moscow?" I said "The Tchaikovsky Competition." She's oh, wow, wow... She was a Russian of course. And I said, "I have this song in Cyrillic and Russian." I said, "Could you teach me a famous song by Tchaikovsky?" She taught me phonetically 'Ni slova, o drug moy' on the airplane from East Berlin to Moscow. And I arrived and Irena Zorina was my accompanist in 1966. And I arrived. She said in broken English, "What's in your Russian, round two?" I said, "Well, this 'Ni slova, o drug moy'..." "Russian, not bad but we make better; we make better." So after the first round - because the state department...they sent me the music, but no money to study. And so I was advanced to the second round and you had to sing four pieces. And one, I sang Gremin's aria, and then I did 'Ni slova, o drug moy' and all these other songs and in Gremin's aria - I'm sure you've heard Eugene Onegin in your lifetime...This aria lasts about six minutes. I did it in two minutes. It's like A B A section. I left out the whole (middle section). I had learned it and all these other Russian songs in two days. And I walked out on the stage, but I just had a mental blank. George London was also on the jury. He talked to me later when we got back. But so when I left out most of the song and the poor accompanist was turning her pages trying to find out: where is he, where is he? I just finished it. And the people in that Tchaikovsky Hall: they all went "ahhhh"; they gasped when I miss Gremin's aria...it's like Old Man River in America. And all the rest of the songs went well. The other three things in Russian and I sang something else, I think Philip's aria from Don Carlo. I was sure I was going to be on the next plane to go back home. They advanced me to the third round and I got the bronze medal. And George London told me, back here in the States, he said, "Simon, you would have gotten the first place, if you hadn't messed up that aria. You know why we advanced you? Not only cause of your talent - because you didn't fall apart. He said they really were moved that you didn't just collapse on the stage. And that's why they advanced you and you ended up getting the bronze medal." See Simon Estes, interview with Marc A. Scorca, *Opera America*, 15 July 2021. <https://www.operaamerica.org/industry-resources/2022/oral-history-project/an-oral-history-with-simon-estes/>

⁶⁸ Specifically Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

⁶⁹ *Traverse City Record-Eagle* 13 July 1968.

The ARD International Music Competition/Bavarian Radio International Music Competition was founded in 1952 by a consortium of West German public radio broadcasters. The ARD designation is an abbreviation for “Arbeitsgemeinschaft – der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten – der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” and these were radio stations in the FDR (Federal Republic of Germany/*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*/West Germany). Also known as the Bavarian Radio International Music Competition (Bayerischer Rundfunk internationaler musikwettbewerb), the competition takes place in September and is now in its 71st year.

Each year, ARD highlights different solo instruments or ensembles in its four prize categories; voice appeared for the first time in 1954. More specifically, the voice competition seems to have run every year from 1954 through 1972. Starting in 1972 it ran every other year; starting in 2000, it ran every 3rd year.

After multiple rounds of elimination, the competition culminates in a concert accompanied by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, after which laureates receive prize money and concert engagements.

Designed to feature young artists on the cusp of fame, the competition from its beginnings attracted a large number of international participants. There is usually an age cutoff for these competitions; in 2024, for example, vocalists had to be born between 1992 and 2004 (so between 20 and 32 years of age).

⁷⁰ The voice category was only added in 1954. My list of singers here wanted to look primarily at the 1950s, 1960s, early 1970s, so I am counting 1954-1974 (although I did survey later as well). See list of laureates at https://www.br.de/ard-music-competition/laureates/all-laureates-since-1952/preistraeger-pdf114~attachment_node-cf4c1bb9-0607-41aa-895b-d903c1a95bc0_-e533fb5083e8f02f17ff999c9cd8519ecccc48f6.pdf? There were 72 winners of some level of vocal prize from 1954-1970. As of 2021, there have been 205 vocal prizewinners in the ARD competition. Of that overall number, 43 have been US singers (or about 20.97% overall). Of those 43 US singers, 13 have been Black vocalists (so about 1/3 of US winners). Overall, Black singers from the US comprise about 6% of overall winners.

⁷¹ For more on the broader context of race, classical music, and Germany, see Kira Thurman’s excellent *Singing like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Cornell University Press, 2021).

⁷² Lindsay Wright’s work on talent shows argues that the format is actually the most critical element of these shows. See Wright, “Televising Talent.”