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ODYSSEY



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SPECIAL "ENDEAVOR" EDITION

A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WISCONSIN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA



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WISCONSIN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA VISITS ODYSSEY!

Odyssey's Class of 2026 was thrilled to welcome Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's CEO, Joe Loehnis, to class on October 8th along with Bill Banfield, composer and organizer of a five-year Musical Landscapes in Color project celebrating and recording the works of living Black composers. Composer and bass soloist Xavier Foley shared his music, and composers Regina Harris Baiocchi and Eric Gould shared their journeys. Composer Autumn Reed and members of WCO's staff (including Odyssey alum Britney Sinclair and marketing team Audra Lange, Alix Lawrence, and Luci Randall) joined our class as well.



The part of this class that stuck out the most to me that I can remember vividly is Xavier Foley's "Lonely Child." I could really feel the story he was trying to tell and the emotions behind it. From

the very first phrase I was mesmerized. I've always focused on the melody when it comes to music, so to really be able to focus on the melody without the words was quite an experience. It's another reason why I gravitate towards older music before words came into the picture. A melody/beat can tell more of a story than words can ever tell. Me being someone who doesn't express how I feel in words very well resonated with what Regina and Eric said because music will always be able to tell a story or how I feel better than my words ever will. **(Laura Bass)**



After hearing from our special guests in class today, all I can think about is how much black excellence filled the room. I love how Xavier effortlessly played the bass. When I think of orchestra players, the first thing that comes

to mind is not African American men or women. So, I enjoyed meeting these successful black players and composers.

The biggest thing that stuck with me was hearing a little of everyone's back story. **(Serene Boyd)**



I was immediately drawn into tonight's class with the performance from Xavier Foley. He did a wonderful job intertwining his craft and emotion into the music. The vibrations carried through the air as he played with

passion. **(Lisa Brown)**



I noticed Xavier Foley most out of everyone. He played so well and detailed! My question for him was how long it took him to learn and play how he does because of all of the hand movement it took to play. Both hands were actually doing

different jobs, something I don't think I would be capable of doing, mainly because of my ADHD.

(Richard Butler)



I got a sense of calmness. My heart and brain feel relaxed. I think this helped me understand that there's more to music, not just Hip Hop or R&B. I think a lot of times that we people in this world are so stuck on regular music that we forget the power in classical music.

Xavier was extremely awesome. He has so much talent and has had so much success in music. I felt my heart beat to his rhythm. His bass music gave me different type of vibes like calm.

Music is powerful and has so many meanings such as sad, happy, calm, wild, all types of things, and tonight I felt calmer than ever. The composers' words gave me peace and wisdom that I did not know music had.

I thank you so much for letting us hear them talk and play such beautiful music. **(Cquemiah Clark-Richmond)**



What I can remember about the beginning of class is not much because of such a stressful week and overwhelming work day. But I can remember how I felt.

I felt emotional! I cried listening to Xavier and I asked myself why am I crying? I'm not sad. But what I noticed is that I felt a sense of release, like I felt lighter, calmer, peaceful.

I do listen to classical music when I'm stressed, so today was yet again universal as almost every class has been a new endeavor. That's what keeps the Odyssey so interesting. Tonight was inspiring because I want to learn how to play piano and now I have some insight/information on how to go about learning the piano, which has been on my bucket list for a while now. Tonight also inspired me to sign up and be a part of Endeavor concert Friday night. **(Valencia Collins)**



I will remember hearing Eric talking about how he didn't know exactly what he wanted to do with his life and how long it took him while everyone moved on.

Xavier playing "Lost Child" was amazing! I mean, you could feel the emotion in each note. You could tell he was playing with his heart. It was so beautifully written. When the notes hit, they just flowed. I can't explain how when he was playing you could just feel the song and what it was about without hearing the lyrics. **(Paola Damiani)**



What I got out of class is that a few of them grew up with a music background. From a very young age, for example, Regina started in a band and continued all the way to her adulthood. Eric had many people in his family who

listened to different types of music; he took that and figured out his liking and got into music from the help of family members. Xavier playing the bass was really good but I don't think band/orchestra is really for me. But if I could go to their concert, I could really see if I would like it. It is kinda slow for me, but overall I did enjoy it and it was pretty interesting. **(Tida Drammeh)**



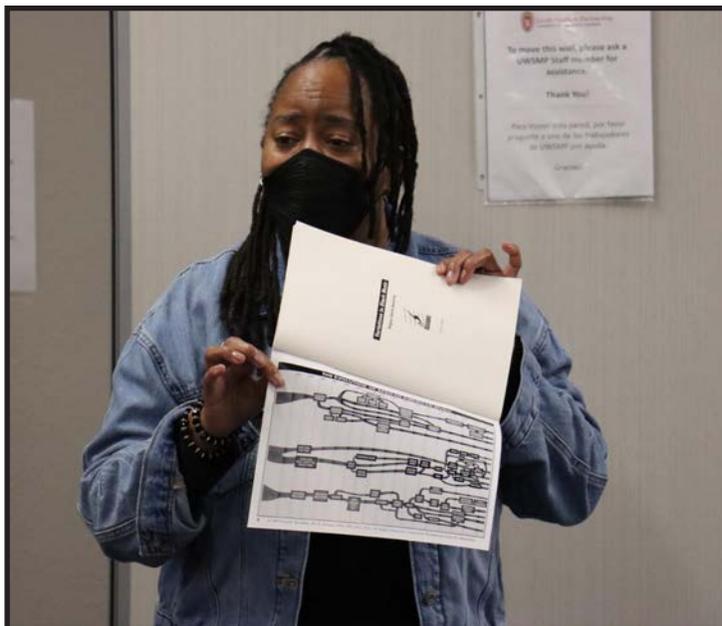


When Xavier started playing, I immediately was drawn to his music. I felt like I was getting lost into every note, in the best way. It was so soothing and emotional. All I could think was how talented he is and how enchanting his music felt. I could listen for hours and I will be looking him up to do so. He wasn't a man of many words, but his playing said everything. The emotion in his face and how that flowed into his music was fascinating.

Hearing how music is the composer's life meant a lot. As a listener I love to know that the music means everything to the artist. I think that is what Bill was talking about when he referred to trash music. He can tell the mainstream media music doesn't have as much soul and emotion. You really do experience music; I had never thought of it that way before. **(Kiana Galloway)**



Hearing Xavier play his bass made me excited to attend the orchestra concert Friday. His pieces made me feel the title. I liked that he told us the titles after he played the songs and you can feel the emotion each song brings. You can see the emotion in the way his body moved with each sway of his bow.



What stuck out to me is Bill Banfield stating that "what they are doing is real music, real talent," which I can agree with. Each one of them studied their profession, learned to read and write music, and how to identify music with color. The music that is now advertised is not original. It has lost the realness of composing actual pieces (songs) beats. A lot of artists now can barely read music or have actually studied. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**



I think everybody had a unique story about their life and music. They learned about the different sounds of music, the instruments, just things they love that helped them in life and moving forward. Those were amazing people. I learned that music affects people in their own way. It's a part of life, it's a part of our culture, and it brings people together. It was an honor to hear from the composers. **(Larry Grant)**



Stepping into each week touches me a lot. Music has always been a joy to me—singing in choir, playing violin, and acting in plays and dancing. I am hoping to find my inner peace again to express myself through music someday—a very expressive therapy. **(Antejah Greer)**



We were able to listen to Xavier Foley play oh so beautifully two of his very own pieces. The first was called "Diva"; the second was something about a child. What I noticed about these two pieces was the tempo. In "Diva" it was a happier, up beat tempo. As for "Child" it was more of a sad story tempo and you could feel the emotion.

Listening to Ms. Regina Baiocchi tell us about the piece she wrote for her father and how it was her way of expressing her words to him was beautiful. Music is able to put our feelings out that we are unable to say with words ourselves. **(Shataya Hall)**



Honestly classical music is not something I ever thought about exploring, but after hearing Xavier play the feeling that came over me; it felt so relaxing. Hearing Eric speak about all the trials and tribulations he went through before becoming the genius composer that he is today gave me hope. It made me feel that with time and patience I can accomplish anything. Bill was funny and long winded and had very strong opinions about some things, but I think all music has a meaning, so you just need to know which music you should be influenced by. **(Jacqueline Hawkins)**



Each guest was very compassionate about their passion for music! I loved how they expressed the passion and dedication behind the talent they all have. The music we heard delivered a message which took years to develop. I loved how they told us to be great at anything and everything we do. I was actually interested in having Xavier Foley play at my wedding. I also loved how they all were from different places and were able to come together as one. After hearing from each of them, I see how so many musical geniuses could come together and make art. **(Brittany Hughes)**



Xavier Foley: I felt his music, his feelings, his words through those five strings on that beautiful majestic instrument, the bass. What melodious music came from just those few strings. And then there was Regina Harris Baiocchi. I fell in like with her story and journey. I couldn't take my eyes off her and couldn't stop my ears from loving every word that flowed from her—her stories of her family, her mentor Gwendolyn Brooks and how she took her in.

In summary the concert's themes are shaped by soulful artists, poets, and classical music. Imagine that. **(Angel Moore)**



Xavier Foley's performance was truly emotional. I could feel the intensity and passion as he played. The mastery of his art was out of this world, and I was inspired by particularly the fact that he was a black male. I particularly enjoyed when he played his own composition. Once he played Bach, I could tell where his influence came from.

Regina and Eric were also very impressive, and I for one was interested to hear their compositions. I was intrigued and very excited to learn how their writing process occurred. To compose a song seems to me like a daunting task I could never accomplish. It was nice to get a sense of how that process takes place. Their motivational words have inspired me to do more with my own art. **(Viwe Mpurwana)**



Well, I can say the most unforgettable moment was Xavier Foley's performance. After seeing him on the bass, it made me wish that we could have also gotten a snippet of music from Eric and Regina. You could definitely hear the soul in his music as well as pain.

It seemed that they all were very dedicated to their craft. All of them immersed themselves in music of all types and varieties. And how amazing to be able to compose music on the level we witnessed Xavier display.

I would have really liked to hear Eric play the piano. To grow up with so many different genres of music would make him an unpredictable composer. I'm probably going to look up some of his music. **(Shelton Murphy)**



Thinking back on this class today, it brings me back to when I lived in Iowa. My siblings and I would have to go to an after-school program. At this time, I was currently working on a puzzle; close to being done, I was ready to give up. It was time consuming. It was building up my frustration because I just wanted to be done. I got up and walked away. My teacher said, "Roche, persevere, keep going, just imagine how you'll feel once you finish." She knew I was working hard on it. This makes me think of all the words of encouragement that were given. It's very reassuring. Listening to the bass being played brought chills to me. I felt like I was feeling his emotions as he played. Very inspirational. **(Roche Palmer)**



Today marks an important day for me. I met and was able to speak to real life composers. Not just any composers but living genius composers. This will mark a day when in the future they will be talked about, and I can say I met them. I was able to see Xavier play Bach's piece; the emotion he displayed and the feeling I felt as he played moved me to the core. After his song, I had decided I would see him play live no matter the challenges I might face getting there. **(Lilibeth Sobrevilla)**



I really enjoyed the Bach piece and it was calming and beautifully played. Regina knowing since youth that she wanted to be a composer is so crazy because as an adult I still can't figure out what it is I want to be LOL. But overall, the guests today showed me how inspiring it is to want something and go for it. I appreciate that insight on their earlier lives and journeys that led to them being composers. **(JuJu Stallworth)**



Having Xavier play on the bass was a new experience to me; having never heard that in person, it was cool. I learned about composers in music. I really can't wait until Friday to experience great orchestra band. I hope I can get to learn about different genres of music because I really only listen to Hip Hop and R&B. I hope that this will get me to start listening to new things, thanks to Odyssey. **(George Sydnor)**



I valued and appreciated Xavier's intention in expanding on his talents with playing the bass. Learning a new skill is hard, but with commitment and the soul passion, a dream becomes reality. He somehow managed to be nonchalant and astounding at the same time. That skill was natural.

When Regina spoke about “writer’s block,” it spoke deeply to me. She mentioned believing that you are simply not meant to create that piece at this time. I personally, or others I know, will feel if we can’t force a product out or find a root of inspiration for it that it speaks to our own creative abilities. The truth is that authenticity and being organic creates the most beautiful pieces of art and life. What is meant for you will never miss you, including a creative spark. **(Shaneece Taylor)**



Listening to Regina Harris Baiocchi was very inspirational. The fact that she said she was a composer before she knew what it was spoke volumes. I can relate to the point of being born to be something. For example, I believe I was born to lead, and every day I live by that giving back to my community.

Eric Gould’s story stuck out to me; he said all of his friends were going off doing great things, but it seemed like he was left behind. He was patient and found something more resonating to his career.

I will always remember how energetic and proud Bill Banfield seemed when introducing the composers. He gave them the flowers they deserved, and I know that left them feeling appreciated. **(Joseph Thigpen Jr.)**



Xavier’s performance of “Lost Child” really spoke to the emotional place it seemed to be centered in. Before even hearing the title, you could feel his music. Eric spoke about the diversity of music he experienced in his life and the inspiration. There was a question on their process and it seemed emotion based but more goal oriented when it’s a job. Regina gave a lot of information and left music, and I appreciate that to be able to gain some insight on her. **(Kharmen Thomas)**



What will stick with me from today on out is when Eric Gould explained music. He said music is like a heartbeat—each one has a sound but it beats differently. That stuck with me because it made me think about how we all can be listening to the same song but it will sound different to each person and mean something different. What sounds good to me could sound terrible to the person next to me. That idea opened my mind to how personal music truly is. I feel music connects through emotion.

When Xavier Foley played, his music sounded so beautiful. You could tell it flowed straight from his heart. You could feel the passion in every note. The sound made me want to dance, nod my head, and create words in my head to match the rhythm. It was like the instrument was speaking directly to the room, telling a story without a word being said. He allowed his heart and soul to flow through his gift.

I also had the honor of sitting next to Regina Baiocchi, and she was so warm and personable. She encouraged me to stay the course and follow my heart’s desire to be a nurse. She told me I was welcome to come to any of her shows for free. She even told me to stay in touch, which meant so much to me. It’s amazing how one moment can connect you with a lifelong experience. I’ll never forget that conversation. It reminded me that inspiration can show up in unexpected ways, through people who see something in you that you may not see in yourself. It pushes you to keep going. **(Shakila Woods)**



ODYSSEY VISITS WCO!

Thanks to the generosity of the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra and sponsors such as American Family Insurance, Madison Community Foundation, and Deirdre Garton, many Odyssey students were able to attend the October 10th “Endeavor” concert at the Overture Center, preceded by dinner at Ian’s and a pre-talk show, and followed by a post-show reception. Here are some of students’ comments about the evening.

Attending the WCO concert on Friday was beautiful. At first, I didn’t know if I would enjoy it or not. I kind of was going just to be doing something different. I am so glad I attended because it was more than just a concert; it was an emotional journey through sound, history, and identity. Years of silence and brilliance were finally being heard in beautiful harmony. The music from these composers holds weight, carrying stories from struggle to joy to love.

I did not just hear this music. I felt it in my bones. When those eight singers came out, they didn’t just sing; they spoke to the audience. I felt a sense of pride not from the music I was hearing but for the composers. It was just a reminder to me that black brilliance has always been around, creating beauty even when the world refused to listen. **(Shataya Hall)**

Friday night was such a special experience. The Overture Center was absolutely beautiful and had such an elegant atmosphere. Even though we were running late, Katie [Odyssey coordinator Katie Arredondo] went above and beyond, and she brought pizza for me and my partner before the show! That was incredibly sweet and really made the night start off right.

The Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra was incredible. The music was captivating, and the soloist completely drew me in. It was easy to get lost in it all. Unfortunately, I had to leave halfway through because of a migraine, but I’m still so glad I went. I want to give a huge thank you to Odyssey for helping make the night feel so meaningful. **(Kiana Galloway)**

Friday’s Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra concert was nothing less than amazing. It was an honor to watch the artists and composers being in their elements. Xavier’s performance blew me away. I felt so much passion when he played his bass. His solo performance was outstanding. He had a standing ovation from most of the audience.

I have not attended the orchestra since grade school through MMSD. It brought back memories to be in that environment, like the old school field trips. Upon leaving, a certain piece that Xavier played was stuck in my head. I just kept humming and humming the beat. The “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was inspiring, having Mt. Zion Choir there, and having some of the audience singing the lyrics to it—that was deep. I’m very excited that I took on the opportunity to go see the orchestra’s “Endeavor” performance. My sister also really enjoyed it and was blown away. **(Tikoya Gilmer)**



This was my first opportunity to see the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. What an incredible experience to be a part of, a first time at that! The “Endeavor” concert drew you in with each piece carefully orchestrated, leaving you wanting more. I remember Regina Harris Baiochhi describing her piece “Muse for Orchestra” at the pre-show talk. She went on to highlight sounds of bird calls being an addition from members of the orchestra. Regina’s piece was the first to be presented. I listened and observed closely for the calls.

The passion that exudes from Xavier when he is in his element is unmatched! The music carries and leaves you tapping your foot or nodding your head along. It was a special treat having witnessed what I felt to be a VIP exclusive Wednesday night. Eric Gould and Autumn Maria Reed and Omar Thomas’s pieces were just as spectacular.



All were intricate and unique, aligning with the composer. I would also like to give credit to Andrew Sewell. He conducted with much enthusiasm and genuine respect for every piece. At the post-show reception, I was able to thank Autumn and Regina for sharing their craft, not only with us but the world.

Black excellence and representation matters. I am very proud to see it highlighted in classical art and music. I left feeling proud, seen, and eager for more. This may have been the first show I attended (a damn great start) but will not be the last. **(Lisa Brown)**

The concert was amazing—a great first experience! It was so powerful and moving to me. It made me feel like I had to write or sing. As I was listening to the pieces, I was rapping what I was going to say. What I was saying didn’t really make sense, so I just wrote down everything and came up with this poem!

Six six six
In the world of cartoons where laughter was born,
Tom and Jerry’s chase, and Looney Tunes mourn.
From vibrant screens, my childhood grew,
A foundation of dreams, and lessons too.

Through trials and triumphs, I forged my path
In the Odyssey Project, I conquered my wrath.
Balancing school, work, and home
Every day I rise no longer alone.
Life’s equations, like carbon’s core,
Six protons, six neutrons, and much more.
In every atom, life’s essence we find,
A symbol of growth and the ties that bind.

We may falter, we may fall,
But in each misstep, we stand tall.
For in the end we find the key,
To life’s mysteries and our own degree.

“I know I can, you can” the instruments sing,
A melody of hope, a powerful thing.
From childhood to now, my journey’s been bright.
A testament to life, and its infinite light.
(Valencia Collins)

My night started with a long walk because I accidentally parked by the wrong Ian's Pizza. Once I finally got to the right one, I was greeted warmly, made to feel included like I was a piece to a missing puzzle, and it felt very welcoming. I had one veggie pizza, one pepperoni slice, and a cup of fruit punch before walking over to the concert venue. I was very grateful to put something in my stomach after the long walk. I arrived a little early and had the chance to chat with a few of my classmates. I was surprised to see people I knew from the community there. The space itself was beautiful, like a piece of art. I was seated in the perfect spot, high enough to see the entire stage, and the view made the experience even better.

I didn't expect to enjoy it as much as I did, but I found myself completely drawn in by the performance. I even went home and started searching YouTube for more of their music because I wanted to hear more. It was truly an inspiring and unforgettable night. Thank you for granting me an opportunity as such!
(Shakila Woods)

The orchestra event was immersive. I started just curious because I love music. I left with an appreciation for classical music. Watching Xavier play there was different from class. When he played there, it was much more emotional. Singing the song you feel alone in a room, but the music engulfs you when the orchestra plays. Even the conductor creates an anticipation for what is to come. It was hard to just sit quietly without tapping because I was into it. I went with the mindset of trying something outside my "norm." I'm glad I

did because it would have been disappointing to miss the immersive experience. I'm grateful for the experience and opportunity. It has ignited a spark in me to explore classical music and similar experiences. **(Kharmen Thomas)**

OMG!! The concert was amazing! Listening to the composers talking prior to the show gave it an extra excitement when I heard their pieces. One that I remember clearly was the one inspired by a poem from Regina Harris Baiocchi. The poem and her masterpiece were just perfect! Delightful! Every piece made me feel something from sorrow to joy. I don't know how to describe that, but I enjoyed the concert a lot.

Something new for me was to see Mr. Foley's passionate way of playing the Bass. It was romantic, nostalgic, exciting, impressive!! Just an extraordinary show! And I think the most important thing for me was to see them on the stage getting the recognition and respect they deserve.

Thank you so much to the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra for your amazing generosity. Your contributions are changing lives.
(Marisol Gonzalez)



As I stepped through the grand doors of the Overture Center, a magnificent sanctuary of the arts that held history of the most profound composers and celebrated artists, I felt a rush of excitement and reverence and nervousness. I carried my manners; sit up straight and express gratitude with heartfelt “Pleases” and “Thank yous.”

My ticket to the Musical Landscapes in Color “Endeavor” concert led me to seat number J237 in the balcony, which I treasured as the best seat in the house. There I was at the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra to witness, to hear for myself the incredible works of living Black American Composers!

The compositions of Regina Harris Baiocchi served as a vibrant sonic map for me! With each note affirming the possibility that my deepest dreams could come true, her compositions didn’t just sound beautiful; they lifted me to the realization of my own potential. Just as she “always knew she wanted to be a composer before she knew what a composer was,” her music gave me a sense of direction, validating the powerful desire to finally discover and fully inhabit the person I was always meant to be.

Xavier Foley didn’t speak much in the classroom, and his answers during the pre-show were brief and to the point, but through his music he needed no words to convey the depth of his talent as if his soul itself were singing in sound. As a Young, Gifted and Black musician, composer, writer, and artist, every note he played, every chord he struck, and every strum of his double bass revealed an intimate connection to his instrument. It was as if his instrument was an extension of himself. In his silence, the fullness of his voice resonated through his soul. And he invited the listeners to witness his stories without a single word spoken. Oh, and he received four standing ovations. He was breathtakingly amazing.



The conductor, Andrew Sewell, is obviously a masterful conductor. His awesome ability to direct every instrument to synchronize with great precision literally breathed life into the music with a steady and expressive baton. He guided that orchestra like a seasoned storyteller. Again, it was without words, but every phrase reached my heart. I was truly taken away!

How wondrous is the music you have woven into creation! Last night as the symphony played, each instrument lifting its own song but blending with strings singing, brass shining, woodwinds dancing, and then becoming the sound of birds singing in the early morning, percussion resounding, my heart, my very being was drawn to Imagine The Harmonies of Heaven.

Thank you, Odyssey! Thank you for the opportunity to learn how to hang my words. I still have a ways to go, but what an experience.
(Angel Moore)

First and foremost, I do want to thank you all for providing us with that incredible opportunity to attend the concert! It was a great opportunity to be able to witness beautiful music via instruments. I attended Ian's and the first half of the show. Unfortunately, I had to work overnight at 10:45 pm so I left at the intermission around 9 pm. The parts that I was able to listen to were very soothing, peaceful, so peaceful for me that I had to keep catching my sleep deprived self from falling asleep. I enjoyed Xavier's performance in class, but I enjoyed his performance in the concert 20 times more. You can tell that he really enjoys playing bass! I also enjoyed Regina's music as well. I loved her theatrical tones. Her music sounds like music I'd hear in movies! Overall, it was a great experience. **(Roche Palmer)**

I was able to sit and enjoy dinner at Ian's and sat through the ending of the pre-show talk. While I was unable to stay for the full concert, I was able to watch up until the intermission. I loved every second of it, but I'd have to say my favorite part was Autumn Maria's Mental Health Suite. It told a



story, and it was played so beautifully! I also loved Xavier Foley's Soul Bass. You can tell he loves what he does. He played with so much passion and emotion and even played an additional piece as he received a standing ovation! I'm so happy I was able to attend. My partner also enjoyed the show and was sad, as I was, that we couldn't stay for the full show. **(Laura Bass)**

Last night's Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's (WCO) *Endeavor* concert featuring *Xavier Foley* unexpectedly left me with life-affirming hope, inspiration, and the deepest appreciation for the partnership between the Odyssey Project and the WCO. Before I attempt to describe the beautiful soul-stirring music that I was blessed to absorb, as I sat in the lovely Capitol Theater, I felt the deepest appreciation for American Family Insurance and all of the sponsors that enabled the WCO along with the amazing Dr. Bill Banfield to gift our city the Musical Landscapes in Color. Outside the splendor of the Overture Center, there were tens of thousands of red and white draped Badgers in town for Homecoming. Not that it might matter to anybody but me (well, okay, maybe others,) but as I parked my car one mile away from the Overture Center and began my walk towards the concert, I was keenly aware that I was one of a handful of people (out of, I'm guessing, the twenty thousand people that I passed on my walk) who were not wearing Badger colors—and was not white.

As I tried to "pep step" (I'm getting old) to Ian's, where WCO's and Odyssey's wonderful partnership provided free dinner for Odyssey students and alumni to dine before the concert, I wanted to be on time to greet students with Sarah, Katie, and the WCO's fantastic Britney Sinclair (who happens to be an Odyssey alum too). Having lived in Madison, mostly, since 1979, I have walked from James Madison Park to the old Civic Center thousands of times. Last night as I walked, I could not escape reflecting on how much the homes and buildings along my route and the City of Madison have changed over the years. As I picked up speed and dodged through the

thousands of white, mostly privileged, mostly intoxicated, loud, looking to drop some cash, do some shots crowd, for a split second, I honestly almost found solace that some things in Madison never change. Any attempt at faking nostalgia faded when I observed that although the homes are fancier and the buildings are grander along my path, as I stepped closer to the concert, there were perhaps a scattering (too many to count) of hundreds of people of color, which appeared to be houseless and destitute, all with forlorn faces and bodies racked with traumas. They were not there in 1979.

When I arrived at Ian's (on time) the place was packed, a literal steady and stationary mass of hundreds of red and white covered Badger fans of all sizes, shapes, ages, but not races. Having the pleasure of getting to know my Odyssey family (perhaps the only people of color in Ian's) better over a delicious slice was great, and that led me to thinking that I wished that we had more opportunities like this partnership between WCO and Odyssey to socialize. Inside the lavish Capitol theater, after a delightful, informative, intimate preconcert talk, with food digesting, fatigue from a grueling day setting in but energized by the four gifted composers and Maestro Sewell's words, I was ready for the music, and boy oh boy, I got much more.

Comfortably seated next to one of Odyssey's gifted current students, I looked around the theater as the orchestra was tuning and strange unfamiliar feelings set in. The last time that I felt this way was last year when I attended the Musical Landscapes in Color "Convergence" concert. I closed my eyes and imagined that if at every arts venue throughout Madison and Dane County, on any given night, there would be so many beautiful, diverse people of all backgrounds in attendance, in my humble opinion, our world would be on a path

to becoming a paradise free of insidious racial disparities, inequities, and past traumas as we heal through the arts.

Autumn Maria Reed's "Mental Health Suite for Chamber Orchestra," a four-part composition, resonated to my soul as a social worker and one that has supported personal and others' mental health. While I have not had the honor of hearing composer Reed's work before, I deeply relish the opportunity to learn more about this home-grown artistic treasure.

Having the great privilege of emceeding a Concert on the Square event this summer, it was an extreme honor to introduce Regina Harris Baiocchi's Muse for Orchestra, and I was even more excited to hear it played again last night. After Regina's visit to the Odyssey Project's classroom last Wednesday and learning that she intertwines poetry, writing fiction, storytelling, and so much more in her genius, I consider Regina my new super heroine and look forward to learning more about her works. And oh I love the sea gulls in that masterpiece.



Listening to Eric Gould's commissioned piece titled "An American City for Orchestra" while knowing it was inspired by Canton, Ohio's two hundredth birthday celebration, I heard sounds of my hometown Milwaukee, and I visualized through sound the humans, industry, and place making that creates any city. While I know little about music and a fair amount about urban history and development, I suspect that there is an interplay between writing music and building structures, places, cities.

Omar Thomas's "Our New Day Begun": I also had the honor of hearing this musical offering last summer. Having grown up during the Civil Rights movement in Milwaukee, this piece took me back to the old, musty, inner-city church basements as I would join hands with other Black eight-year-olds in 1968 and sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at the top of our lungs. Despite a racist, brutal world that we, as kids, as a people, had to navigate daily, in the words of that song, we became superior if not equal to anyone on this Earth. Listening to Omar Thomas's piece and the WCO gifted musicians (dang, they are good) last night with foot-stomping singing by Mt. Zion believers left me with a much-needed sense of conviction to speak out against social injustices. Just as in Madison, the US has not changed much since 1968 when it comes to civil rights and justice. Omar's composition reminded me to find the beauty in the struggle and to cultivate resiliency to serve others.

Please forgive my language but Xavier Foley--Holy S**t! That young man gave this sixty-six-year-old papa of five something that presently put a spark in my soul and the greatest of hope for future generations. Not to sound overly dramatic but listening to Xavier was like the time (I know, different genres of music) that I heard Wynton Marsallis live in Madison at the old Merlin's Club on State Street in maybe the early 1980s when Wynton was the same

age as Xavier. In a person's lifetime they are lucky to witness one young musical virtuoso live. I will never forget Xavier's bass playing, with his body movements that appear to shift, and shape sounds beyond the instrument's capabilities, crafting music that absolutely-blew-me-away! Damn, Xavier! You have me sending your YouTube videos to everyone in my orbit.

I sprinted out of the Overture Center to race to my car, escaping the hordes of Badgers, and all my consternations about Madison's racial disparities in full bloom before me. Later, on the drive home, I passed through the district that I once represented politically on the Common Council and marveled how much the Isthmus had changed with the high rise, glass, and concrete buildings filled with thousands of mostly young people that can pay exorbitant rents, making East Washington Avenue a canyon filled with credit card-toting twenty-somethings. I thought that for an old guy, I do like change and don't mind Madison leaving me in its dust. I am hoping that last night's WCO concert might serve as a model for all of Madison's arts community: that it takes vision, passion, commitment, and truth-telling to make Madison arts and healing accessible to all. Thanks, WCO and Odyssey! **(Brian Benford)**

