



"Artist Lecture Series" | musicologist David Malvinni, Ph.D.

SOUND/STAGE #6: ORIGINAL SCORE TO *BECOMING* BY KAMASI WASHINGTON

Online Pre-Event Lecture by Musicologist
David Malvinni, Ph.D.

Friday, October 30, 2020



SOUND/STAGE #5 PROGRAM

Episode: Kamasi Washington's *Score to Becoming: An intimate portrait of Michelle Obama*

- Obama's book *Becoming* was made into a movie by Netflix
- Score by KW: 15 track, 30 minute album
- Accessible music, combines '60s/'70s Afro-jazz sensibility, with gospel, soul/funk old school vibe
- Political message: transcendence and spirituality of the Black consciousness movement of the '60s and '70s



KAMASI WASHINGTON (B. 1981)

- **Jazz icon, biggest since Wynton Marsalis (his polar opposite)**
- **West coast sensibility, embraces all styles of music, uniter of Black vernacular traditions**
- **Father, Rickey, was also a musician, he plays his father's tenor sax; played in church growing up**
- **From Inglewood/South Central LA, hip hop/ jazz environment**
- **Influences: John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Pharaoh Sanders, Albert Ayle, Sun Ra; but Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Snoop Dogg**
- **Part of a Music Collective in Los Angeles**
- **BLM: (Malcolm X), Ta-Nehisi Coates, Claudia Rankin, Kendrick Lamar= a Black cultural renaissance; spiritual transcendence and resistance**



SCORE TO *BECOMING*

- First KW album was *Epic*, about the changing of the Guard but also the protectors of music (came to him in a dream), 3 hours long with huge instrumental forces
- *Becoming*: more intimate, more popular sensibility, more groove oriented with catchy melodies
- Michelle Obama: 2018 best seller with *Becoming*
- From Jim Crow South to Chicago
- B. 1964, Michelle Robinson, families hailed from Alabama and North Carolina
- Powerful influence of her father, Fraser; attended Princeton ("not belonging")
- Successful Lawyer and Professor but gave up career for husband's political career
- Tremendous scrutiny she was under as first Black FLOTUS, and raising her daughters
- Documentary about her 34-city book tour



WHAT TO LISTEN FOR SERIOUS OLD SCHOOL JAZZ + LIGHTER SIDE OF VERNACULAR BLACKNESS (GOSPEL, BLUES, FUNK)

- “Shot out of a Cannon”: groove of hard bop, W. Shorter, open, aspirational melodic sound
- “Becoming”: minor blues tune (B-flat), with major chords as transcendence (=becoming)
- Sounds of ‘70s R & B, soul
- “Song for Fraser” a ballad that recalls “Naima” by Coltrane
- “Provocation”: dark, massive statement of resistance, orchestral dissonance
- “Connection”: return to simplicity, vamp (C-E)
- “I Am Becoming”: smooth jazz evocation
- Vernacular Black music: source of modern hip hop, connections to jazz; music as a force for a change in consciousness



FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Michelle Obama's Playlist on Spotify, "Becoming," mostly female artists: Nina Simone, "Feeling Good"; Mary J. Blige: "Family Affair"
- *The Epic*
- *Becoming*
- Kamasi Washington Playlist
- <https://spoti.fi/31UCMIU>

