

Articles

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Girl talk

Girl talk: Feminist phonocentrism as act of resistance in the musical *Hair*

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Abstract

In response to Wollman's assertion that 'despite its left-leaning approach to the many social and political issues it tackles, *Hair* is jarringly old-fashioned in its depictions of women', this article instead proposes that *Hair*'s sung moments function as acts of resistance against the hegemonic, patriarchal values of musical theatre in both form and

content. By adopting Annette Schlichter's proposition of a 'feminist phonocentrism' which positions the voice as a 'metaphor of agency and self-representation [...] thereby allowing for an authentic self-presence', the analysis presented illustrates a rejection of historical discourses that persistently link the female voice to an absence of social and cultural authority. With specific reference to songs from the score and their interpretations, this article celebrates 'girl talk' forming at the margins.

Keywords

Hair

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gender

African American

In her 2014 article, entitled 'Busted for Her Beauty: *Hair*'s Female Characters', Elizabeth Wollman observes the musical's 'landmark status' but questions its 'jarringly old-fashioned approach in its depictions of women', branding it as nothing short of 'sexism' (Wollman 2014: 1). This proposition largely relies upon arguing the centrality of *Hair*'s lead characters Claude and Berger, and whilst there is absolutely no denying that they are indeed the most 'three-dimensional' characters (Wollman 2014: 2), to overlook other characters in the Tribe would be to negate the multiplicity and community that *Hair* fundamentally celebrates. Perhaps *Hair*'s attributed status as the first rock musical (Horn 1991; Wollman 2006) also subliminally reinforces the masculine discourse which dominates this genre of music, but the musical's form and structure can be less easily

classified. Wollman situates *Hair* as perhaps the first concept musical, recognizing that the 'fragmented' musical (a term proposed by Bush Jones) would also be an appropriate designate, given that the musical also reflects something of the fragmented society from which it came. Nomenclature aside, *Hair* utilizes a structure which features 'interrelated vignettes' (Wollman 2006: 47), loosely bound to a central narrative arc featuring Claude's draft into the Vietnam War. However, these vignettes speak loudly of the concerns of the counter-cultural movement of the sixties and, I believe, communicate the most pressing and urgent concerns of that era. In examining moments which do not revolve around the main characters but focus on other members of the Tribe and celebrate the female body and voice, it is possible to reveal *Hair*'s approach to race and gender which will allow for a re-positioning of the women in the musical.

Both race and gender are constructed, represented and performed on a bipolar axis. This binary positioning ultimately results in one of the two axes being inherently privileged. Judith Butler suggests this 'exclusive framework' requires reference to 'woman' as a subject that is stable, a delineation which conflates sex and gender. Considering 'woman' as a stable object thus separates the feminine from other power relations that constitute identity (e.g. race, ethnicity and class), inexorably generating 'multiple refusals to accept the category' (Butler 2006: 2). At the heart of Butler's argument is the proposition that gender is culturally, not biologically constructed and therefore, to continue to position gender on the binary axis only serves to reinforce 'the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it' (2006: 6). Salih expands by noting Butler's proposition that 'there is no "natural body" that pre-exists its cultural inscription' and this suggests that 'gender is not

something one *is*, it is something one *does*, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun' (Salih 2002: 55, original emphasis). This certainly questions the proposition of woman as a stable object; these performative acts are unavoidably influenced and informed by other cultural power relations of class, race, ethnicity. Indeed, as Butler suggests, the construction of gender is fundamentally political. Performative acts also offer the opportunity to stabilise and conversely disrupt meaning; even in performing normative expectations of gender, there must be an imagining of that which is not performed to serve as a reference point. This postmodernist approach to gender destabilizes the notion of 'woman', and highlights subjectivity and fluidity, emphasizing that gender is produced and reproduced through a variety of discourses.

Hair reflects such an approach in its representation of gender on stage. Far from positioning women on a binary axis which defines them only in terms of their relationship to men, the musical reveals female characters who largely embody the ideals of early second-wave feminism: Jeanie, Crissy and Dionne's rendition of the song 'Air' expresses urgent concern for the environment and the planet, and whilst it could be argued that Sheila is defined largely by her relationship to Claude and Berger, Wollman notes that she may 'represent the New Left and the rapidly changing woman, in a way that no other character does' (Wollman 2014: 5). Indeed, there are moments when her dramatic and musical material serve to raise consciousness about a number of wider issues; the war in Vietnam juxtaposed against patriotism ('I Believe in Love'), the right to protest freely and peacefully, social injustice ('Easy to be Hard'), and the desire to live in peace and harmony, coupled with a concern for the future of the nation ('Good Morning, Starshine' and 'Flesh Failures'). Sheila functions as an important protagonist in

the Tribe, highlighting some of the central tenets of the musical and encouraging the pot-smoking, free-loving, somewhat egocentric Tribe we are introduced to at the start of act one to consider wider, more pressing issues in American society.

Wollman urges the reader to assess the material in order to gain a deeper understanding of *Hair*'s cultural moment, and therefore, I have identified sung moments in the musical that offer more concrete examples of the values aligned to the early stages of the second wave of feminism. Moreover, these sung moments specifically celebrate the African American female voice, thus intertwining the values of the feminist movement with those of the Civil Rights movement.

The female voice has perpetually been linked to the absence of cultural authority. Cavarero proposes that 'in the symbolic patriarchal order, man is conceived as mind and woman as body' thus demarcating the voice (*phone*) as 'purely feminine' and the meaning it produces (*semantikon*) as masculine (Cavarero 2005: 107). However, a feminist reconsideration of the *phone semantike* relationship – one which does not reinforce a patriarchal hierarchy – would recognize the voice's 'essential destination' in speech: the 'vocalized rhythm and corporeal drives that anchor the "speaker" to the embodiedness of [...] her existence' (2005: 133–34). Indeed, Dunn and Jones avoid the term 'voice', favouring instead 'vocality' as a cultural construct, thus asserting 'the centrality of gender in shaping that construction' (Dunn and Jones 1994: 2). A similar call is issued in the feminist phonocentric work of Annette Schlichter who argues that 'the act of producing a song should not be fully detached from the messiness of the social and cultural regimes it is embedded in', thus suggesting that the sonority of a voice in itself can become political. Such feminist phonocentric approaches allow for a

consideration of the voice as a 'metaphor of agency and self-representation [...] thereby allowing for an authentic self-presence' (Schlichter 2011: 38). Subsequently, this offers the opportunity to reject historical discourses that persistently link the female voice to notions of madness, irrationality and absence of social and cultural authority. These positions considerably complicate (or perhaps, broaden) the argument which remains at the centre of a feminist phonocentric approach to this form of analysis; do we consider that the female voice is an act of self-agency and therefore an expression of interiority, or does the very act of analysis merely continue to draw attention to the cultural practices that produce gendered subjectivity? My analysis of sung moments in *Hair* does not endeavour to negate one for the other, instead, it will consider both in an attempt to highlight the agency of the performer and identify the ways in which the voice has the potential to either stabilize or disrupt meaning.

Black Boys / White Boys

Hair's sub-title (the American Tribal Love-Rock Musical) might be interpreted as speaking more to the connection between this popular music genre and the counter-culture of the 60s than to the actual styles embedded in its score. Indeed, there was a 'shared belief that rock (and, in particular, progressive rock) could articulate [the counter-culture's] concerns' (Whiteley 2000: 23). In this context, the counter-culture's marginalization of women, exemplified in the popular music of the time, is particularly troubling; Whiteley notes that 'both the lifestyle and the musical ethos of the period undermined the role of women, positioning them as either romanticised fantasy figures, subservient earth mothers or easy lays' (2000: 23). Labelling *Hair* as a 'rock musical' – albeit as a light-hearted gesture – is certainly misleading; a survey of the styles used in

the score point to an eclectic array of musical sub-genres including folk-rock, teeny-bop, funk and doo-wop. Whilst it would be somewhat reductive to reiterate and exacerbate arguments surrounding the perceived 'gendering' of these styles, it is clear that the male bias in discourse concerning popular music of the era fails to recognize that the 'girl group' culture in particular, saturated popular music of both the late 1950s and early 60s and was 'revelatory to both sexes; through their music, girls actively initiated a dialogue with, and required a response from, boys' (Stras 2011: 8).

As 'Black Boys/White Boys' refers directly to a pastiche of one of these girl groups (The Supremes), and also suggests adolescence in its very title, it is worth considering my use of the term 'girl' at this point. Whilst those who discuss the importance of girl group culture struggle with the application of this term, many of them acknowledge the power in its use. Jacqueline Warwick recognizes that the term is 'highly complex and contradictory' but asserts that the growing field of scholarship in the subject matter seeks to identify the term 'girl' as 'distinct from both "woman" and "youth"', the latter being 'an ostensibly gender-neutral term that often signifies only male adolescents' (Warwick 2007: 3). Driscoll does not attempt to apply the term 'girl' to a specific age group but instead defines it as representing 'an idea of mobility preceding the fixity of womanhood and implying an unfinished process of personal development' (Driscoll 2002: 47). The extended period of youth for a girl is influenced by social practices, the spaces they inhabit, their bodies, the alternative identities they explore, and the social relations they form. Furthermore, these experiences are informed by the intersections of race, gender and class: an African American girl may develop a greater awareness of racial identity prior to exploring her gendered identity, particularly when the spaces and

social practices available to her are restricted. 'Girlhood' is also influenced by a number of external forces: material culture, the media, and cultural idols contribute to a growing awareness of self and agency but for African American girls such cultural artefacts may include images of stereotypes and oppression. Nevertheless, these complex factors also allow girls to feel a sense of identification and 'sameness'. Whilst recognising that the realm of cultural production is inevitably male and that girls are merely 'consumers', the fact that girls are 'subject to the same commercial conditioning' also contributes to this sense of identification; 'the desire to be different (or differentiated) may fuel a group's formation, but it is the desire for conformity that sustains its power balance, both within its community and against those that it excludes' (Stras 2011: 17).

Conformity was evident in both the carefully crafted costume choices and choreography of these girl groups and this is reflected in the scene in *Hair*, where both female trios are uniformly attired. This erasure of difference is a common feature of girl groups of the 1950s and 1960s and, as Warwick argues, these uniforms expunge 'elements of individuality and humanity as they explicitly proclaim the wearer's membership in a group and discourage seeing her as unique' (Warwick 2007: 77). Whilst this sense of identification can be considered powerful, it could also be viewed as a form of violence enacted on these groups. However, Barbara Lee Horn observes that during the original performance of 'White Boys', the scene 'takes on added theatricality when the trio step apart and their seemingly three dresses are in fact one' (Horn 1991: 75). This action appears to draw attention to the artificial, the theatrical, and is a moment in which 'the subject laughs at and plays with her own image – in other words, to imagine her distancing herself from her own image by making fun of, and out of, that image – without

losing sight of the real power that image has over her' (Robertson cited in Warwick 2007: 83). *Hair's* employment of playful, camp strategies throughout the musical – particularly in the Margaret Mead scene which utilizes drag as a means to contest normative gender codes – comment on gender identity in a way that is recognizably artificial, a bold gesture that serves to provoke and prompt the audience to reconsider their understanding of femininity and the manner in which it is nothing more than a patriarchal construction.

Similarly, there was a clear patriarchal order inherent in the girl-group choreographic process too; the 'vocal choreography' – a term devised by Cholly Atkins, the most prominent African American choreographer of male and female singing groups – featured two distinct separate vocabularies. Prior to his tutelage, girl groups were generally taught choreography by male doo-wop groups, and Atkins continued to develop movement which reinforced binary notions of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, the very act of girl groups primarily being taught choreography by 'boy' groups, which is then further refined through the locus of a middle-aged man, suggests that their visual presence and embodiment has resulted in their conforming to patriarchal 'artificial sensations of their bodies and selves' (Warwick 2007: 57).

The politics of production of such music was complex. Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, there appeared to be what Warwick refers to as a 'hierarchical' relationship between performer and producer, with many instances of the (invariably always male) record producer overshadowing the (frequently male) performer. Arguing that there was significantly less self-aggrandizement where female performers were concerned, Warwick notes that many producers used 'the malleability of adolescent female singers' to establish themselves in the music business and, in many cases, crossover into the

mainstream popular music charts (Warwick 2007: 93–94). To support her observation, she uses Berry Gordy as an example, stating that his ‘sense of Black women as unthreatening and comforting in comparison to Black men corresponds to a prevalent stereotype of Black woman as mammy’ (Warwick 2007: 94). These are all difficult propositions to reconcile; the public image of girl groups was so carefully crafted and constructed by middle-aged men who maintained a form of patriarchal control over every aspect of production. Certainly, the power of visibility and success is evident but in terms of independence, self-presence, authority and agency, less so. This is further reinforced in the popular releases of girl groups and singers in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the lyrics of such songs as ‘I Met Him on a Sunday’ and ‘Will You Love Me Tomorrow?’ (The Shirelles, 1958 and 1960) and ‘Please Mr Postman’ (The Marvelettes, 1961) speak of waiting for an affirmation of love. However, whilst there remains a troubling dichotomy between the production and dissemination of this music, and the performance of the music, the fact that such girl groups provided ‘feminine archetypes’ for women cannot be ignored; their songs were a means of providing ‘girls with a way of approaching, admiring and commenting on boys in a socially acceptable fashion’ (Greig 1989: 31). As Stras proposes, without these archetypes ‘later feminist voices, both Black and White, would not have been heard quite so loudly or effectively’ (Stras 2011: 17). For example, even in ‘I Met Him on a Sunday’ there is a hint of how the music is beginning to progress towards interiority, which is further cemented in slightly later releases such as Lesley Gore’s ‘You Don’t Own Me’ and Dionne Warwick’s ‘Don’t Make Me Over’, both released in 1963 and echoing the sentiment that any attempts to change these women will be futile. Such songs function to communicate either internal conversations in the mind

of the singer or actual conversations between friends, thus further cementing notions of 'sameness' and identification. The lyrics of these songs progressively became more demanding and urgent and by the time of *Hair's* premiere off-Broadway, female voices were heard demanding 'respect', perhaps most notably in the late Aretha Franklin's hit of the same name (1967).[¶] Whilst the lyrics of these chart hits certainly point to a progression in the way women were expressing themselves, none go quite so far as to objectify the male form in the same way the female form had been objectified in other hits of the era. The lyrics of both 'White Boys' and 'Black Boys' in *Hair* however, directly respond to this.

Initially, the songs were presented in the reverse order, with the African American female group singing about White Boys, before the white female group closed the scene. The order was switched when producer, Michael Butler recognized that the tempo and rhythm of 'White Boys' provided a more satisfying climax to the scene. In terms of musical style, the two songs contrast significantly. 'Black Boys', written in B major, features a simple melodic line of crotchet movement which, even after the bridge, remains and does not modulate. Part-writing is homophonic throughout and the song resolves into a plagal cadence, not suggesting complete formal closure (which is further indicated by the instruction 'segue as one') but instead prolonging the resolution across three bars, accompanied by an ascending melodic line (see Figure 1).

The image shows a musical score for three measures, numbered 30, 31, and 32. The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The vocal line (top staff) has lyrics: "Black, black, black, black, black, black, black, black, Black Boys". The piano accompaniment consists of a right-hand part (middle staff) and a left-hand part (bottom staff). The right-hand part features sustained chords, while the left-hand part plays a simple bass line. The score ends with a double bar line and the instruction "Segue as one".

Figure 1: Bars 30–32 of 'Black Boys'.

Working on the assumption – echoed by Berry Gordy’s comments above – that music produced and performed by African American men suggested intense sexuality and sensuality, this melodic material does not seem to communicate or reiterate the features of the subject of the song. Musically, the song ‘White Boys’ is far more rhythmically and harmonically ‘intense’; with syncopated melodic and harmonic lines, the song features the flattened third, fifth and seventh throughout suggesting the use of the heptatonic blues scale. The accompanying vocal harmonic line is just as complex; whereas ‘Black Boys’ features an accompaniment of on-beat sustained notes, the backing singers here are afforded a more syncopated line with evidence of nonsense ‘clanka-lanka’ syllables (Figure 2).

11 12

moth - er calls 'em lil- lies,

Doo - da-do-do Doo - da-do-do, Doo - da-do-do, Doo - da-do-do,

Figure 2: Bars 11 and 12 of 'White Boys'.

These factors, along with those already highlighted in 'Black Boys', appear to indicate that the music is influenced by the performer, rather than the subject of the song.

The insertion of the nonsense syllables can be traced back to the 'clanka-lanka' technique: 'instrumentally derived sounds such as "doo-wop" [and] "ooh-waa"' which provide a rhythmic accompaniment to support the lead singer (Floyd 1995: 175).

However, Warwick – referring to these sounds as 'vocables' – posits an alternative reading, suggesting that their use can be 'identified as a form of girlspeak, a code that signifies while refusing conventional language' (Warwick 2007: 41), a form of *écriture féminine*. Drawing on the work of Cixous, Warwick links these feminine sounds to the maternal body thereby asserting that this kind of 'girlspeak' allows girls to share experiences in 'ways that patriarchal authority cannot control' (42). Thus, both the musical material and the lyrics assert that a feminine language is being used; the music relates directly to the body and experiences of the singer, and the lyrics, whilst objectifying the male form, also utilize a feminine code to do so. Moreover, this 'feminine code' is not merely constructed on the sole basis of normative notions of

gender but appears to consider other power relations, particularly race, in constructing this musical language. Both songs celebrate the female voice and – more importantly – the Black female voice.

The Black voice sounds ‘against the grain of metropolitan voice culture’ (Olwage 2004: 209) and in the case of ‘Black Boys/White Boys’ we hear both contrasted alongside each other. It could be argued that regardless of melody and harmony, the strongest marker of difference between the two songs is actually the timbre of the female voices reproducing the material. Olwage discusses the black voice as shout, particularly in pronunciation of the vowel sound of ‘ah’ given its essential volume which is largely due to the openness of the mouth in forming the sound and its ‘natural place of production’ (2004 215): the chest register. Comparing this to the ‘preferred’ head register of the European, metropolitan sound, he proposes that the ‘shout’ in the Black voice occurs largely as a result of the chest register being utilized so heavily in Black choral singing. This is heard very clearly on the 2009 cast recording of this song in *Hair*, particularly upon utterance of the word ‘white’, which employs the ‘ah’ vowel as its fundamental sound and is further embellished with melismas and ad-libs which occur most frequently on the word ‘crazy’; undoubtedly the performer’s own interpretation given that it deviates from its original statement in the score (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Bar 32 of ‘White Boys’.

As Olwage argues that the corporeality of the voice is both ‘classed and racialized’ (214), I would argue here that it is also gendered; these songs not only

celebrate the female voice and female subjectivity, but also celebrate the Black female voice as an additional marker of corporeality. The grain of the Black voice has not been erased in the process of establishing the feminine code. The strategy employed in these scenes in *Hair* appears to be one that highlights how gender is culturally constructed.

Whilst the visual aspects of this performance draw attention to the body as being sculpted and coerced by (patriarchal) culture, the vocals allow the subjective female voice to determine and define the content, thus destabilizing and disrupting normative expectations of what it means to be a 'girl'.

Abie Baby

Whilst 'White Boys/Black Boys' appears to communicate a close identification of the female voice with the body, there are other moments in *Hair* where the female voice appears to further undermine social conventions, and in doing so, establishes both cultural and vocal authority. In her 2007 article, *Listening to Gender*, Judith Peraino implores us to listen to the register and timbre of a voice, consider the performance and interpretation of the words, and recognize that the female voice 'resists being covered' in the same way as the body (Peraino 2007: 63). This act of listening is a vital component of feminist music criticism; it invites the listener to engage in constructing meaning through considering the performative nature of the female voice. Listening to a cast recording, for example, and considering how the grain of the voice itself establishes cultural authority is important feminist work which aims to refute Adorno's claim that the 'female voice requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it', and without that body it merely becomes a sound which is 'needy and incomplete' (Adorno and Levin 1990: 54). The words the female performer sings may not necessarily 'be her own, they may be

culturally predetermined and rehearsed, but the sound of those words bear an indelible stamp' (Peraino 2007: 63). Even if those words already bear markers of cultural authority (which are inherently coded masculine), the performative agency exercised by the female vocalists in their interpretation often serve to confirm the specific identity of the singer or, as Antelyes observes, give 'body to the voice' (in Dunn and Jones 1994: 221).

The second act of *Hair* offers an example of lyrics that are perhaps more culturally predetermined than any other words in American history; 'Abie Baby' features the opening paragraph of the Gettysburg address, delivered by Abraham Lincoln on 19 November 1863. The role of Lincoln is played by a Black female member of the Tribe and the racial and gendered substitution here not only functions as a liminal moment which speaks to the inherent utopian values of *Hair* but also generates very specific resonances when performed in revival productions. In the two bars that accompany the Gettysburg address the only scoring offered is that of the vocal harmony of the male quartet of backing singers who first appeared in the preceding number, 'Yes, I's Finished'. The score indicates the opening and closing lines of the speech and the performer is instructed to deliver this as spoken dialogue. In the original Broadway production the address is delivered in spoken form and whilst the speech is not scripted, the cast recording indicates that a large portion of the address was ad-libbed, with various verbal interjections added by the performer; 'sock it to 'em baby, you're sounding better all the time'. To the listener, as opposed to the spectator, the spoken nature of these lines tends to erase both gender and race, the timbre of the voice reveals little of its origin; it is only the backing group of singers that signifies 'blackness' and masculinity through their doo-wop vocals and harmony, and it is not until the final line of dialogue ('Bang? Bang?

Shit, I'm not dying for no white man') that we are offered a representational sign that the role of Lincoln is being played by an African American. Indeed, on listening to the cast recording alone, without the support of onstage visual signifiers there is little auditory evidence of Lincoln being played by a woman.

'Every acoustic event is likely to be spatio-temporally unique' and to repeat vocal performances identically is impossible (Keskinen 2000: 5), so it is perhaps more necessary to consider how these 'acoustic events' are performed in other – later – contexts. In the 2009, new Broadway cast recording of the show, Saycon Sengbloh's vocal performance of the song 'Abie Baby' offers ways to consider how the material voice 'gives the expressive its impetus and power, giving life to the content and meanings' (Fisher 2010: 88–89). This performance is sung with the addition of numerous melismatic ad-libs, the solo vocal line soars over the texture of the accompanying vocals and works towards the climax of the address, 'all men are created equal' which is sung – not scored – in the highest register of Sengbloh's tessitura. As Dinero argues, in his 2012 article exploring the excesses of the 'big black lady' song, the performative power of the Black voice lies in its capacity to 'blow[s] the score wide open, exceeding [...] the very limits of the written page' (Dinero 2012: 33), that is, the performer has control and agency over the performance of the song. As previously highlighted, this is most certainly the case in 'Abie Baby' given that only the backing singers' melodic lines are scored, whilst the soloist is invited – indeed, expected – to ad-lib the Gettysburg Address: this level of self-agency is most clearly recognized in the revival cast recording. Wilson (1999) notes that the African American voice is to be used as percussively as possible when singing. Referring to the hollers, cries and moans which feature in African music of

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he argues that such sounds also made it easier for the performer to move from singing to speaking effortlessly.^[3] This can be heard clearly in the 2009 revival cast recording. The example below indicates how easily the shift occurs (areas that are spoken are highlighted);

Four score, I said, four score and seven years ago

Our forefathers, and I mean all our forefathers, brought forth on this continent a new nation.

(Sengbloh 2009)

In this context, it would be useful to consider the Black voice as an ‘act of resistance, a refusal of the colonizing efforts to reform the voice’ (Olwage 2004: 210). The very act of vocal pedagogy is to train, to change the voice, and erase difference, nowhere better exemplified than in the training of musical theatre performers and heard quite clearly in the ‘legit’ voice so desired for the Broadway stage; this was certainly a feature of many Broadway productions during the mid-twentieth century.^[4] It is interesting to note that all of the African American characters of the Tribe in the 2009 Broadway cast of *Hair* sound distinctively ‘Black’ when contrasted against the ‘legit’ voices, trained specifically for the Broadway stage. Indeed, in a 2003 interview MacDermot stated that Rado and Ragni specifically wanted a ‘different type of singer’ in their original cast (Kantor 2003); the composer himself wanted pop and soul singers. This in itself is perhaps indicative of the creators of *Hair* rejecting established principles of the stage; a counter-cultural act exacted against Broadway traditions. Although it could be argued that racially linked timbres further perpetuate the stereotyping of black characters, it could be considered that the timbral differences produced by the black voices in all of the cast recordings is a

further rejection of established values; an act of resistance against the legit voice and the performance of whiteness.

Stating that twentieth century African American vocal music is 'highly developed' and 'imaginative', Wilson also recognizes that a great deal of African American popular music works towards a goal where a 'spontaneous response from the audience' is demanded (Wilson 1999: 169). In the original recording of *Hair*, this is somewhat manufactured through the addition of spoken lines mentioned above. In the 2009 cast recording of *Hair*, this goal is prepared for in the musical phrase 'all men are created equal': a somewhat transgressive vocal act where the perfect cadence is delayed for six bars and the vocalist explores the full range of her tessitura, ending in the highest register. When the phrase resolves into 'happy birthday, Abie Baby', this creates a 'moment of collective catharsis [which is] extremely important in reinforcing a sense of cultural solidarity' (1999: 169). The sound created by Saycon Sengbloh in the revival is reminiscent of the female soul singers of the sixties and early seventies, and the connection with such singers, particularly the late Aretha Franklin, has been subliminally suggested to the audience in the roll call at the beginning of the scene.⁵ This moment presents the audience with a black, female archetype. Laurie Stras in her introduction to *She's So Fine; Reflections on whiteness, femininity, adolescence and class in 1960s music* argues that 'the popularity of girl singers allowed young African American women, [...] to be socially visible for the first time, and on a grand scale' (Stras 2011: 8). The style of the vocal performance is inextricably linked to the soul sound produced by many of the popular Black vocalists of the sixties. Aretha Franklin is one of several African American popular vocalists 'noted not only for voices that have highly distinctive

timbres but also for their musical sensitivity and use of timbral nuances in expressively powerful ways at precisely the right moment' (Wilson 1999: 169). The addition of the melismatic vocal ad-libs at this point highlights such timbral nuances and has ensured that the song is firmly rooted in its rhythm and blues origins.

Sengbloh's performance perhaps presents the opportunity to consider the phenomenological aspects of the voice – that is its 'presence, intentionality, and expressiveness [...] denoting representation, agency, selfhood, and discursive power' – in conjunction with feminist thought, which can place this lived experience in its social and cultural context (Fisher 2010: 94). Her rendition celebrates the African American female voice; the manner in which she navigates a complex array of techniques, the grain of the voice and the delayed moment of catharsis conjure subliminal connections between Sengbloh and vocal counterparts in sixties popular music. When read in the context of the scene in the revival production – staged only three months after Barack Obama's inauguration – the African American Voice-As-President can be read as a celebration, but the female voice still speaks of an urgent desire for change. This was perhaps even more evident in the later, 2016 UK revival (initially staged at Hope Mill Theatre, Manchester before transferring to the West End) where, upon arrival, the audience were greeted with the disembodied voice of Mike Pence introducing the then President-Elect, Donald Trump. Set in this context – that of Hillary Clinton's defeat in the Presidential race – 'Abie Baby' acquires additional cultural resonances. Here, performed by Shekinah McFarlane, we are reminded that a female voice has still not been heard in the White House and that Clinton herself has, on several occasions spoken passionately about how vital women's voices are in contemporary society. Ironically, this is not the overriding

message attributed to Clinton and instead – in a manner which echoes Adorno – society seems more fascinated by denigrating the expressive aspects of *her* voice, labelling it ‘too shrill, too deep, too artificial, too enunciated [...] too loud, too irritating and – somewhat inevitably – too female’ (Lambert 2016).

The female voice is tricky, largely because any vocal or linguistic utterance ‘inserts the described phenomenon into a codified meaning system’ (Fisher 2010: 94). That system is one which persistently links the female voice to an absence of cultural authority and the kind of excesses mentioned above. A feminist phonocentric approach can instead place the female voice within meaning systems and challenge them by considering vocality in all its cultural ‘messiness’. This is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the ways in which songs from *Hair* have been performed, re-recorded and reimagined in other contexts, most notably Nina Simone’s rendition of ‘Ain’t Got No/I Got Life’. In this instance, Simone juxtaposes the messages of these songs to transform them into a powerful act of protest. In doing so, her performance combines complex messages which speak of Civil Rights and pride in Black cultural nationalism (perhaps most clearly communicated in the 1969 Harlem Festival performance), both read in the context of a virtuoso musician in the field of jazz; an almost exclusively male-gendered art form. Furthermore, Simone does not disregard the place of female activism in the Civil Rights movement; instead, she changes lyrics to specifically gender them, using these as her ‘point of entry’ (Feldstein 2005: 1363).

The voice can be fixed as the ‘presence of performance’ and given this also involves the body, ‘singing can generate new potentials for how these bodies – their genders, their attached normative expectations, or their resistance to any pre-existing

structures – are understood and experienced through voice’ (Thomaidis 2017: 38). To feminists, the word ‘voice’ means so much more: it has become ‘a metaphor for textual authority, and alludes to the efforts of women to reclaim their own experience’ (Dunn and Jones 1994: 1). In this analysis, I have focussed on both stage productions and sound recordings of *Hair* for very specific purposes; the former, to illuminate the ways in which female members of the Tribe corporeally call attention to the social structures that impose and reinforce restrictive patriarchal notions of gender but challenge this conditioning by using musical language as a means of establishing a feminine code; the latter to ‘amplify the aurality of race and the unspoken power of racialized listening’ (Stoever 2016: 6), identifying how phrasing, timbral nuances, and intonation have been employed to assert agency. *Hair – upon* initial viewing – may indeed be regarded as sexist, but it is only by listening to its multiple voices that its ‘jarringly old-fashioned’ depictions of women can be subsequently challenged, resisted and disrupted.

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1. In a 2003 interview with Michael Kantor, Galt MacDermot – the composer of *Hair* – remarked that the subtitle was, at the time, a ‘tongue in cheek’ gesture but that it ‘had an effect’ (Kantor 2003).

2. It is worth noting that the single was released two years prior to this date, performed by Otis Redding. It did not achieve the success of Franklin’s version, which achieved top spot on the R&B chart, the Billboard Hot 100 chart and the Australian singles chart.

3. Antelyes links the shift from singing to spoken patter to white vaudeville practices, asserting that this form of speech is coded as both white and masculine (in Dunn and Jones 1994: 220).

4. In an online article, Pines (n.d.) particularly highlights *My Fair Lady*, *Camelot* and *The Boyfriend* as excellent examples of the legit sound.

5. Franklin is included in the line-up of historical figures presented to the audience at the start of the hallucination scene which frames the Gettysburg address.

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