**Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry: African American Trailblazers Navigating German National Identity in Music**

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## Introduction

The Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts is housed on the top floor of the Van Pelt Dietrich Library Center at the University of Pennsylvania, overlooking the entirety of West Philadelphia from its perch on Walnut Street. In the early morning hours on July 10th, 2023, I walked a half mile to the Center from the studio apartment I had rented in University City, my dress clothes already sticking to my skin on what would become a sweltering hot and humid East Coast summer day.

I signed in at the front desk, attached my visitor's badge to my lapel, and proceeded to the elevator and hit the button for the top floor. Though I always prefer stairs – even if I have to climb fifteen flights – I was cautioned against them as the receptionist worried I might get lost in the maze of books and never return. Once I was out of the elevator, I walked down the hallway to the opposite side of the building and saw a walled in, glass reception area labeled "Kislak." I pulled the door open to a woman not much older than myself, who greeted me warmly and directed me to put my photo ID in a small box on the front table and showed me to the lockers where I could put my belongings. Most personal items are strictly prohibited in an archive, with the exception of phones, laptop computers, pencils, and paper.

I took a deep breath and walked into the reading room. I was guided to a large cart full of the boxes I had requested from the Marian Anderson Papers. I had no idea the boxes included so much material, and I was going to have to be selective when it came to the material I processed during my two eight hour days at the collection.

About halfway through my first day, I asked the librarian to pull the box labeled "Marian Anderson Awards" off of the cart. I flipped through the folders, meticulously labeled with the name of each contestant who had entered the annual vocal competition facilitated by Anderson's

older sister, Alyse. I stopped in my tracks when I saw the folder titled “Grace Ann Melzia Bumbry” and hastily pulled it out of the box. I opened the yellow manila envelope, discolored with age, to find a brief, typewritten note from Alyse to Miss Bumbry. I put it aside to reveal an envelope and its accompanying letter – in Grace Bumbry’s hand. Bumbry passed away in May 2023, and none of her possessions have been made available to the public, so being able to see her handwriting with my own eyes was a tremendous delight. Here these two women were: Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry, connected in correspondence as they were connected in life. Both were trailblazers. By singing art song in Europe in 1930, Anderson made it possible for Bumbry to sing opera there 30 years later. Anderson turned the door handle and cracked the door open ever so slightly for African American women classical singers, and Bumbry and all the others that followed have kicked it open, following the footsteps of the women who have come before them.

This thesis is the story of two Black women who performed in Germany and Austria in the interwar and postwar period, captivating European audiences that held the classical music tradition as a deeply rooted component of their white identity.

**Abstract**

In November 2022, while studying abroad in a music conservatory program in Vienna, Austria, I had an American historical musicology professor tell me there were no Black composers or performing artists living and working in Vienna during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, displaying a concerning lack of musicological knowledge about the history of Black performing artists in Central Europe. My professor’s statement, which resonates with racist ideology still widespread throughout Germany and Austria, inspired this project, which analyzes newspaper reviews and press coverage of select performances by

African American classical singers Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry in Germany and Austria to see how inter and post-war racial ideology impacted their careers.

I focus on the Austro-German critical reception of two of Anderson's performances: her 1930 *Liederabend* at the *Bachsaal* in Berlin, and her 1935 performance in the *Mozarteum* at the Salzburg Festival. I focus on Bumbry's role as Venus in Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* at the 1961 Bayreuth Opera Festival.

Studying perception through the press provides a unique perspective of public opinion. As classical music is a historically white-dominated space, the way that a Black person presents themselves in that space is a critical component of public perception from white audiences. However, this perception is generally in conflict with how the Black person has constructed themselves. Anderson and Bumbry's identities as Black women provided an additional opportunity for the white Austro-German press to objectify them and their bodies on stage. Both women were vocalists – Anderson a contralto and Bumbry a mezzo-soprano. The human voice is the one instrument of the performing arts that is both internal and embodied; it cannot be separated from the body because it comes from the body and is a direct reflection of the artist's physical being.

When the artist is not playing themselves, does the relationship between their voice and their body change? I study Anderson exclusively as a performer of art song (German: *Lieder*) and Bumbry as a performer of opera. Anderson was always performing as herself, but Bumbry was cast as Venus, the Roman goddess of love, in Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. She was required to portray a sexualized and exoticized version of Venus. Bumbry's casting generated vastly different reactions among the German public in the leadup to her performance than Anderson's evening song recitals.  In "German Lied and the Songs of Black Volk," historian Kira

Thurman writes that opera's emphasis on characters increases its susceptibility to typecasting, but *Liederabend* (evening song recitals) contained raceless characters that the Austro-German public was more receptive to having Black people perform.[1] The differences in performance convention between *Lieder* and opera account for this difference.

To a budding historical musicologist, the study of Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry provides fruitful primary source material. Anderson was an excellent archivist of herself, and her collection, the Marian Anderson Papers, is housed at the University of Pennsylvania. While visiting Philadelphia, I was able to interact with copies of recital programs, photographs, newspaper reviews, Anderson's written work, her correspondence with Bumbry, and reflections on her life and legacy written by family and friends after her death in 1997. Grace Bumbry passed away weeks after I started this project, but she left behind substantive newspaper and magazine interviews. I had the great pleasure of speaking with Bumbry's longtime collaborative pianist, and other close friends and confidants. Anderson and Bumbry were just two of the many Black American classical singers who ventured to Europe in the twentieth century when Jim Crow stifled their performance opportunities at home. Though I focus on Anderson and Bumbry, I feel strongly that all of their stories need telling.

**Use of Language to Define Nations**

Throughout this thesis, "Germany" or "the German nation" are used as broad terms to denote both Austria and Germany. Austria was not annexed to Germany until 1938 and Marian Anderson's performances took place in 1930 and 1935, when Germany and Austria existed as independent states. Grace Bumbry's performance took place in 1961, long after Nazi Germany's defeat established Austria and Germany as two independent nations again. The two nations are

[1] Kira Thurman, "The German Lied and the Songs of Black Volk," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 2 (2014): 568. https://doi.org.//10.1525/jams.2014.67.2.543

grouped together because racist stereotypes and tropes present in the imaginations of both nations are incredibly similar despite their historical differences in racial composition. Austria has an extensive history of multiculturalism due to its position in the Habsburg Empire, but Germany has been a white-dominated nation in all iterations of its existence. Regardless, the perceptions that white Austro-German audiences had of Black performers at the time reflects a pattern of behavior among white audiences that can be seen in the rest of Central Europe, throughout Western Europe, and in the United States during this time period.

**What is German?**

The concept of German exceptionalism in music is intimately tied to the identity of the German nation. Potter suggests that "the real question that concerned music critics and musicologists transcended musical style and ran up against the deeply rooted historical difficulties of defining the German nation."[2] In an 1854 commentary titled "What is German?" composer Richard Wagner put German music and the German nation in dialogue, asserting that the German tradition was unprecedented because "Germans have the ability to unlock the meaning of all foreign intellectual products, musical and intellectual, and render them universal."[3] However, just thirteen years after drafting the original essay, Wagner walked back his statement in a postscript, confessing that he had no idea what this essence of Germanness was, stating "I consider myself incapable of answering the question 'what is German.'"[4]

Wagner is unable to define the German nation because the area of present-day Germany has a lengthy history of being ruled by multi-national, muti-ethnic empires with numerous cultures and diasporic communities, each of which have their own values, belief systems, languages, and structures. At its largest, the Roman Empire encompassed the present-day nations

[2] Ibid. 232.
[3] Ibid. 203.
[4] Ibid. 203.

of Belgium, Netherlands, Czechia, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, and Poland. When Napoleon defeated the Holy Roman Empire and unified the German nation for the first time in 1805, the question of what could even be considered and what had ever been considered "German" arose for the first time.

The myth of the German nation and German national identity parallels the difficulties in defining Americanism. The United States is a nation built by enslaved Black people on stolen Indigenous land for white European Christians that have a desire for capital, property and self-improvement, with no common or reconcilable history. The framers of the United States government attempted to create commonalities and define Americanism through founding documents, which provide ideological frameworks for the ideal American. Similarly, Adolf Hitler believed that the German nation would achieve stability if defined ideologically, and music was a significant component of that ideological national identity.[5]

When the Nazi Party took power in 1933, among their concerns was that the German public's exposure to Black and Jewish jazz was leading to a decline in the practice and performance of classical music that helped to hold the patchwork of the seemingly undefinable German nation together. Adolph Hitler considered centralization and uniformity to be two of the Nazi party's most important ideals to be achieved through the arts. After Hitler took power in 1933, he appointed Joseph Goebbels as Propaganda Minister, and Goebbels effectively utilized art to further anti-semitic and anti Black sentiments. Goebbels' *Entartete Kunst* exhibit was designed to advance commentary against democracy, Bolshevism, Jews, and Blackness (through the influence of jazz).[6] The definition of Germanness in music became heavily racialized.

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[5] Pamela Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 11.
[6] Ibid. 31.

National Socialist cultural official and musicologist Joseph Müller-Blattau wrote in 1938 that musical Germanness is "a given set of racial proclivities and the ubiquitous drive to preserve folk song, culminating in the triumph of music for the Volk facilitated by the Nazi racial state."[7] Ernst Bücken wrote that German composers triumphed over surrounding cultures and claimed superiority in music despite using borrowed models. Therefore, the foreign influence that was so valued in early models of German composition came to be regarded as a threat during the Nazi regime. To justify racial prejudice, German scholars and politicians turned to defining Germanness based on exclusion. Müller-Blattau demonstrates how German music was central to the project of cleansing Germanness of foreign elements.

**Racialization in German National Identity**

Germany has a history of discriminatory policies on the basis of gender, race, and ethnicity dating to the sixteenth century, and its discriminatory policies against Afro-Europeans are no exception. The first significant population of Afro-Germans were the children of white women and Black French soldiers stationed in the Rhineland during the interwar period as an occupation force.[8] These children faced further discrimination because they were born out of wedlock, as interracial marriage was all but illegal. In *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich*, Tina M. Campt states that "the German body politic is predicated on the assumption and maintenance of certain fundamental social boundaries of racial purity whose vulnerability often becomes apparent as a vehicle, conduit, or site of entry for potential pollution/contamination."[9] In the postwar Rhineland, the German woman's body became the conduit for what the German public viewed as a contaminant.

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[7] Ibid. 211.
[8] Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory of the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 28.
[9] Ibid. 41.

The constructs of anti-Black racism and misogyny contributed to a mass newspaper campaign that began in the early 1920s, in which the German public raised their concerns about the newest Rhineland children. A Leipzig newspaper from May 1921 stated that "the prestige of German culture is in danger."[10] According to the *Fränkische Kurier Nürnberg*: "One need not wonder if, in a few years, there will be more half-breeds than whites walking around; if sacred German motherhood has become a myth and the German woman a Black whore."[11] This display of blatant racism and misogyny was an indicator of what harmful laws were to come.

As these Rhineland children came of age and reached sexual maturity, the German government struggled to address their desire for the maintenance of racial purity. They could not deport the children, as their mothers' status as Germans gave them German citizenship by birthright. As an alternative, the German government conducted a forced, undocumented, and nonconsensual sterilization campaign. Of the estimated 600-800 Afro-German children that were born between 1919-1929, 365 were sterilized on racial grounds between 1934-1935.[12]

As a teenager, Afro-German Hans Hauck spent the two years prior to his sterilization as a voluntary member of Hitler Youth.[13] He considered his participation in the organization as a natural part of his cultural landscape and an essential part of his survival during the Third Reich. Hitler Youth gave him the training required to serve in the German Army as a railroad technician. When Hauck was drafted into the army, he attempted suicide because he had no way of proving the 100% white ancestry required for German citizenship under the 1935 Law for Protection of Blood and Honor.[14] He served three years of active duty (1942-1945) before

[10] Ibid. 53.
[11] Ibid. 60.
[12] Ibid. 70.
[13] Ibid. 97.
[14] Ibid. 116.

becoming a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. Hauck described that the Fatherland only treated him as an equal when they saw his value as a soldier.[15]

Afro-Germans of this time period were never accepted as members of German society. This failure of integration is not due to their numbers, but rather, the racialized definition of German nationality. In a survey described in *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, Germany, and the Modern World*, the participants, all of whom identified as Afro-German, answered the following three questions: "1) do I see myself as German? 2) Do I feel like a stranger in Germany? and 3) do I often have the feeling that strangers look at me critically?" To the first question, 26% of participants did not feel German, 17% felt very much German, and 63% had feelings between the two extremes. To the second question, 91% of participants answered affirmatively, and to the third question, 98% of participants had a positive response, and 78% had a very strong positive response.[16] The results from this study demonstrate that the identities of Blackness and Germanness are nearly mutually exclusive; the phrase "Black German" serves as a contradiction in the minds of the nation's predominantly white population.

**Race: Denial or Obsession?**

In May 2001, Gerald Asamoah, the child of Ghanaian emigrants to Germany, attracted significant media attention when he was selected for the prestigious German national soccer team. He was hailed as the first "real African" to be selected for the team, but was never referred to as a "German," only a "German passport holder."[17] His status as a Black man was not disputed by the German press, but his status as a "German" was denied because he had no German

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[15] Ibid. 121.
[16] Waltraud Nicole Watson,"Afro-Germans in Germany: A Private Perspective," in *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World*, ed. David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay (Columbia: Camden House, 1998), 237.
[17] Fatima El-Tayeb, "DANGEROUS LIAISONS: RACE, NATION, AND GERMAN IDENTITY," in *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000*, ed. by Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 27.

ancestry, despite his German citizenship. There had been two Black players on the German national team prior to Asamoah: Erwin Kostedde and Jimmy Hartwig, the mixed-race children of white German mothers and African American fathers. When Kostedde and Hartwig played in the 1970s, the press afforded them little attention, and noted their "dark skin," but never identified them as Black, which is how they referred to Asamoah.[18] As a Black man born in a foreign land, Asamoah could be placed by the German public in an immigrant category. However, Kostedde and Hartwig were born on German soil, categorizing them as Afro-Germans.

Black Germans are never granted both parts of their identity by a white German population that has rendered their Blackness invisible or claimed that their Blackness is illegitimate because they are not as Black as those who have immigrated from the country of Africa.[19] To claim that an Afro-German is not as Black as an African is a justification for the racist and exclusionary German population to acknowledge the Germanness, and not the Blackness, of Afro-Germans. As Fatima El-Tayeb states in *Dangerous Liasons: Race, Nation, and German Identity*, "if their Blackness is recognized, their Germanness is not and if they are allowed to be German, they are not so Black, after all."[20] This acknowledgement is a matter of convenience, as Kostedde and Hartwig hold prominent positions in society as members of the German national soccer team and contribute greatly to Germanness as participants in the nation's most popular sport.

As seen in the national soccer team example, Kostedde and Hartwig received little media attention as Black German players in the 1970s, whereas Asamoah's selection to the team in 2001 as the first "real Black" player made international news. Therefore, the German public's relationship to race oscillates between denial and obsession, with the public in complete denial of

[18] Ibid. 28.
[19] Ibid. 28.
[20] Ibid. 29.

the existence of Black Germans while simultaneously overwhelming Black people born outside of the European continent with attention.

The press coverage of athletes on the German national soccer team suggests that the opinions of the German public regarding Black foreign performers are far more nuanced and complex than vehement rejection. However, the Germans' fascination with "exotic" Africans and African culture leads to an interest and attraction that co-exists with a tendency to see Black people as inferior and foreign. In a 1935 newspaper headline, Marian Anderson was referred to as "the exotic nightingale."[21] Grace Bumbry was costumed as an overtly sexualized, exoticized version of Venus. These descriptions of Black people are representative of a racist pattern of behavior that began hundreds of years ago with European ethnographic shows.

Colonial exhibitions began touring the European continent in the early nineteenth century.[22] In these performances, Africa is constructed as a timeless pre-colonial continent in which people exist in a "primal," non-human state, and these exoticized elements are capitalized for popular entertainment. These performances continue in modern day. As recently as 2004, Leipzig Zoo staged an African music event on "jungle night," an evening of multicultural events that had been a tradition at the zoo since 1994.[23] A troupe of Ghanaian musicians in traditional dress were asked to drum at the entrance to attract visitors and during their cultural presentation. In 2005, the Augsburg Zoo hosted an "African Village" event, with the zoo director claiming it was the perfect place to "convey the atmosphere of the exotic."[24] One Black performer stated that she found it easier to live among animals than humans, indicating that performers of African

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[21] Author Unknown, "Die exotische Nachtigall in Salzburg," August 28, 1935, Box 225, Folder 09571, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
[22] Florian Carl, "The Representation and Performance of African Music in German Popular Culture," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 43 (2011): 198.
[23] Ibid. 207.
[24] Ibid. 208.

descent living and working in Germany had and continue to have subhuman status in the minds of white Germans.[25]

Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry performed in Black bodies, as Black women, and were exoticized as a result. Their status as foreigners contributes to the vast difference in treatment between these African American international touring artists and their Afro-German contemporaries. The same pattern of behavior comes to light in the football example. According to the German press, Erwin Kostedde and Jimmy Hartwig's Blackness was invisible, but Gerald Asamoah's Blackness was all that could be seen. This concept is applicable to performing artists as well. Afro-German performing artists from the interwar period have been erased from the historical record, yet Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry have been enshrined by domestic and international press as two of the greatest African American vocalists of all time. This contradiction of treatment, which leads to a specifically racialized view of foreign performers, influences how Blackness is projected by Anderson and Bumbry and subsequently how they are perceived by white German audiences.

**Thesis**

The foreign influence that was so eagerly integrated into the compositions of German musicians of the seventeenth century came to be regarded as a threat when Anderson was performing in the interwar period and Bumbry in the postwar period, both flourishing on German stages as foreigners. Despite Anderson and Bumbry's performances being understood by the German public in a very racialized way, they were not perceived by the press as true threats to German musical supremacy, the very thing that has held an incomprehensible German nation together. The public perception of these performers indicates that Potter's generalization of foreign influence as a threat should perhaps be considered simultaneously with the German

[25] Ibid. 210.

nation's paradoxical relationship with race as both a disaffirmation and an obsession, as seen in the work of Fatima El-Tayeb.

## Anderson and Bumbry's Engagements in Europe

The following section uses foreign newspaper reviews to analyze Austro-German public perception of Marian Andesron and Grace Bumbry's performances. My investigation will be limited to press directly related to two of Anderson's performances: her 1930 *Liederabend* at the Bachsaal in Berlin, and her 1935 performance in the Mozarteum at the Salzburg Festival; and one of Bumbry's performances: her role at the 1961 Bayreuth Opera Festival with her performance of Venus in Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. An analysis of Anderson and Bumbry's reception reveals that the public pretended these performers' Blackness did not exist while simultaneously considering their Blackness as the most captivating or threatening aspect of their artistry. Therefore, the public viewed Anderson and Bumbry's Blackness as the most important and least important aspect of their performances, reflecting the duality of the white German population's views on race as a denial and an obsession.

## Bachsaal, 1930

Anderson first ventured to Europe in August 1929 and stayed in London to study with Raimund von Zur Mühlen. Von Zur Mühlen was the first person to make *Liederabend*, an evening of German song, a stand alone performance entity. Anderson felt as though von Zur Mühlen had "represented the answer to her most urgent artistic problems," but he fell ill after two lessons and was unable to mentor Anderson further.[26] Her nearly year-long stay in England was far from noteworthy, as she reflected in her autobiography *My Lord, What a Morning*.

> When I returned to the United States I had no big achievements to show for my absence of about a year. If I had done something noteworthy such as singing for the king and queen, that might have made a difference. But a recital at Wigmore Hall? That was just

[26] Marian Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 127.

> another appearance by an American aspirant. To people who wanted to know what had been accomplished abroad there was not a great deal to tell. Nor was there much that could be done for my career as an aftermath of England. I felt I had gained a little, but it could not be translated into practical uses such as more concerts or higher fees at home.[27]

Before long, Anderson was yearning to return to Europe. The stagnancy she experienced with respect to her career during her time in London had not improved upon her return to the states. She set off for Germany this time, with the sole purpose of mastering German *Lieder*.[28] She made her central European debut at Berlin's Bachsaal on October 10, 1930, and later described the crowd's increasing sense of enthusiasm as the concert progressed.

> We [Anderson and her collaborative pianist, Michael Rauscheisen] started with a group of songs by Beethoven. I had the feeling that there was no reaction after the first song. After the second there was a show of interest. By the end of the group the audience seemed to be genuinely responsive…We returned to the stage, and I sang a Schubert group. I had been just a shade uncomfortable with the Beethoven songs because I had not sung them in public before, but I felt much more at ease with the Schubert, which I had been doing for years. The applause was encouraging.[29]

She received two curtain calls, and many audience members came backstage after the performance asking for autographs.

When she looked in the papers the next day, she was shocked to see that there was no mention of the concert, and immediately became discouraged. Her nerves were quelled a week later "when the first notices began to appear, first in the daily newspaper and then in the weekly periodical. Most of the reviews were complimentary, only two were not, but I had not expected unanimity."[30]

The reviews, as Anderson suggested, were overwhelmingly positive. The *Berliner Morgenpost* noted that "this remarkable woman even sings German songs with a natural

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[27] Ibid.129.
[28] Ibid. 136.
[29] Ibid. 138.
[30] Ibid. 139.

superiority in her mastery of style, her diction is skillfully accentuated and her musicality is impressive."[31] The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* also wrote of her command of the *Lieder*, stating that "All these German songs, especially those by Beethoven, she sings with profound understanding, inspired and thoroughly musical as one does not hear them but quite rarely."[32] The *Allegmeine Musikzeitung* spoke more generally, "the whole manner of her interpretation is at all times artistic, she avoids exaggerations, she knows how to develop a song and she shows warmth without sentimentality."[33] These are just three of many reviews that indicate it came as a surprise to white journalists that Anderson could sing white music successfully, even though she had received extensive formal training and was more than qualified to deliver beautiful performances with the consistency and integrity of any professional artist.

Even though Anderson received much acclaim when she performed, the quality of her voice was perceived by white German audiences in a specifically racialized way. A *Vossische Zeitung* review from October 11, 1930 describes her voice as having a "dark, blue-black quality."[34] Every human voice has a unique timbral quality, and each artist's musical choices contribute to their individuality. As a contralto, Anderson's vocal range was similar to that of an operatic tenor. Undoubtedly the audience was drawn to her extremely rare voice type.

However, as Nina Sun-Eidsheim writes, "the performance of art song requires adherence to strict conventions in pronunciation, timbre, and stylistic range determined by the era of the piece, its geography, the conceptualization of the composer, and the broader classical style."[35] There is a very finite range of what is considered acceptable in performance. Additionally, there

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[31] Ibid. 149.
[32] Ibid. 149.
[33] Ibid. 149.
[34] Author Unknown, Title Unknown, *Vossische Zeitung*, October 11, 1930, box 225, folder 09554, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
[35] Nina Sun Eidsheim, "PHANTOM GENEALOGY Sonic Blackness and the American Operatic Timbre," In *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 69.

are no more biological changes in vocal musculature between individuals of the same race than between individuals of different races. “Therefore, the Black body is not intrinsically different from the white body and the distinction of the ‘Black’ voice must lie in phantom genealogy, beyond the sound itself.”[36] The quality of Anderson’s voice is being projected by what white audience members see rather than what is actually being heard. Therefore, this “blue-black” and “dark” quality of the voice is likely a nod to Anderson’s dark complexion, as it is improbable for white singers to be characterized as having a “dark” voice.

**Salzburg Festival, 1935**

Anderson was initially denied a performance at the 1935 Salzburg Festival, simply because no Black person had performed at the festival before and white performers were the presumed default by the predominantly white Austrian audience. The last Black performer in Salzburg, African American baritone Aubrey Pankey, was met with heavy criticism and run out of town by residents in May 1932.[37] When Anderson’s team inquired about the festival, Salzburg authority William Stein stated that “there can be no question of Marian Anderson (singing at the festival) since earlier experiences firmly speak against it.”[38] Concert manager Helmer Erwall fought back, arguing that “when every summer singers of different nationalities appear in Salzburg, and when Marian Anderson is known throughout the world as one of the finest and most distinguished *Lieder* singers and interpreters of Schubert, Mahler, Brahms, and others, all the more must we be given a reason why permission has not been granted, I wonder whether it is perhaps her dark complexion?”[39] By emphasizing Anderson’s mastery of *Lieder*, Erwall appeals

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[36] Ibid. 69.
[37] Kirsten Butler, “How Marian Anderson Became the Voice of the Century,” PBS, 29 January 2021, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/voice-freedom-marian-anderson-voice-century/.
[38] Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2021), 174.
[39] Kira Thurman, *Singing Like Germans: Black Musicians in the Land of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2021), 175.

to her ability to serve German musical supremacy and the German nation, just as Kostedde, Hartwig, and Asamoah did in their positions on the German national soccer team. Erwall never received a response to his letter, but his appeal was compelling enough that Anderson was granted a recital in the Mozarteum building.

American patron of the arts Gertrude Moulton was in attendance, and she was so impressed with Anderson's masterful performance of Schubert, Handel, Brahms, Mahler, and Sibelius that she scheduled another recital for the following afternoon, inviting the Archbishop of Salzburg, conductor Arturo Toscanini, and German soprano Lotte Lehmann. After the concert, Toscanini proclaimed to fellow audience members that "what I heard today one is privileged to hear only once in one hundred years."[40] The festival immediately booked her for two performances the following summer.

The most provocative headline following Anderson's performance at the Mozarteum came from *Das Echo*: "Die Negersängerin mit der weißen Seele," "the Black singer with the white soul."[41] The German public expected *Lieder* to be performed by an artist that was seen as exemplifying Germanness and German culture – not a Black woman. Anderson's mastery of *Lieder* indicated to Austro-Germans that one's Germanness could be mastered through training regardless of the performer's skin color, making Anderson a rightful "heir" of the tradition. When Anderson performed in Vienna in November 1935, a few months after her debut at the Salzburg festival, the *Neues Wiener Journal* wrote that she was "a foreigner no longer…not a Black but rather an artistic sensation," indicating that Blackness and mastery of artistry were mutually exclusive, and that Anderson could not possibly be considered a foreigner if she had

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[40] Barbara Klaw,"'A VOICE ONE HEARS ONCE IN A HUNDRED YEARS:' An Interview with Marian Anderson," *American Heritage* 28, no. 2 (Feb. 1977): 50.

[41] Author Unknown, "Die Negersängerin mit der weißen Seele," *Die Tat,* December 1935, box 225, folder 09577, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

that degree of mastery of German music. Kira Thurman's statement establishes the connection between *Das Echo*'s headline and the centrality of purity in German national identity:

> By insisting that [Roland] Hayes and Anderson's souls were white, listeners were able to accept them into the world of cultivated German music and make them honorary members of German culture.[42]

The Austrian press felt that they had to make Black performers whiter, as if classical music was cleansing the Black body. Anderson would have vehemently rejected this sentiment. Her artistic and vocal integrity coupled with her ability to communicate with her audience regardless of their background made her an international sensation. She was proud of her race, and never strove for assimilation – only equality. Anderson was no more German than she was Italian, French, Russian, or English, all of which were languages that she sang in on a regular basis. The music did not change her identity, which was fundamentally African American. *Das Echo*'s headline takes on another layer of meaning when considering the conflict between Black subjectivity and white perception.

W.E.B. Du Bois first described the concept of double consciousness in his sociological work *The Souls of Black Folk.* Double consciousness is most simply described as the internalized conflict that African Americans feel between their true selves and their societally perceived selves. Du Bois explains that when we live in a white-centered world, white people have the power to define themselves and others. Therefore, white people are able to project their constructions onto Black people and see their own projections reflected back at them.[43] However, the Black person has to contend with these projections, even when incompatible with the way they experience the world and themselves, as a component of their self-formation.

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[42] Ibid. 849.
[43] José Itzigsohn and Karida L. Brown, "Double Consciousness: The Phenomenology of Racialized Subjectivity," in *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line* (NYU Press, 2020), 28.

Black people have to learn to reconcile the duality of their existence – the Black world and their Black subjectivity that is constructed within themselves and the white world that encompasses everything else around them.[44] This duality is the inherent conflict present in double consciousness. *Die Tat*'s headline "the Black singer with the white soul" is demonstrative of white journalists trying to reconcile their aesthetic sense with their racist beliefs. Though Anderson was projecting her Black body and soul, she was being perceived as a white soul by white journalists.

This conflict between projection and perception must be recognized because the narrative that is historically prominent originates from white perception. Anderson did not seek freedom from her Blackness, she was a proud Black woman. What she desired was the pursuit of freedom from being Black in a white world. James DePreist, former conductor of the Oregon Symphony, wrote after his Aunt Marian's death, "her celebrity in the struggle for African-American equal rights has taken center stage far too often for my personal taste. It has not enabled people to focus on the music-making as much as they should."[45] DePreist's statement explains how white audiences perceived Anderson in the role of a civil rights advocate against her internalized desire to be an artist.

Marian Anderson's performances in Berlin and Salzburg generated a variety of racialized responses. Anderson's "dark" voice was exoticized as abnormal and attractive, and her Black soul was marketed as white, affirming the Austro-German public's simultaneous erasure of and obsession with Blackness.

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[44] Ibid. 29.

[45] Joseph Mermelstein, "Two Marian Andersons, Both Real," *The New York Times*. February 23, 1997, Box 232, Folder 09770, Marian Anderson Papers. Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Venus in *Tannhäuser***

In 1961, at the age of 24, Grace Bumbry was cast as Venus in *Tannhäuser* at the Bayreuth Opera Festival in Germany. Bumbry was the first Black person cast at Bayreuth, an opera house created specifically for performances of operas by Richard Wagner (1813-83).[46] The composer's grandson, Weiland Wagner, was the president of the festival and responsible for Bumbry's casting. Adolph Hitler had been a devotee of the openly anti-Semitic Richard Wagner and a regular visitor to the Bayreuth festival, which he described as a cornerstone of German culture. Wieland Wagner spent the postwar period trying to repair his grandfather's legacy and counteract his closeness to anti-semitism and German nationalism by promoting the festival (and West Germany) as a democratic, racially accepting society.[47]

In Wagner's attempt to distance himself from Nazism and demonstrate that Bayreuth was not racist by hiring Bumbry, he perpetuated racist stereotypes and tropes.[48] The production team created an erotic goddess based on historical myths about Black female sexuality. "The Black Venus" is a term that was originally used to describe Khoikhoi woman Sara Baartman, who was enslaved and brought to 19th century Europe to have her nude Black body forcibly put on display for onlookers at museums and exhibits.[49] Therefore, casting a Black woman as an erotic goddess is a nod to Baartman's forced exhibition in Europe. This represents the Black woman as a sexual figure and demonstrates how racialization and sexualization combine to have intersectional impact.

Wagner's casting of Bumbry was met with great criticism from the German public. When defending his decision at a 1961 press conference, Wagner said that "the new production

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[46] Kira Thurman, "Black Venus, White Bayreuth: Race, Sexuality, and the Depoliticization of Wagner in Postwar West Germany," *German Studies Review* 35, no. 1 (Oct. 2012): 607.
[47] Ibid. 609.
[48] Ibid. 602.
[49] Ibid. 614-615.

represents Venus as a symbolic figure, draped in gold cloth and wearing gold make-up. Her skin color will not be recognizable."[50] Wagner's statement "her skin color will not be recognizable" suggests that the German public saw the presentation of Bumbry's Blackness as unacceptable, even though she was to be portrayed in an exoticized manner. The German musical tradition at Bayreuth was so dependent on whiteness that her appearance had to be altered to reflect that of a white woman. Bumbry's Blackness was simultaneously exoticized and rendered invisible, a reflection of the duality of German treatment of race as both a disaffirmation and an obsession.

Over 200 letters of protest were filed to the opera house prior to Bumbry's debut, with the writers proclaiming that Bumbry's Black body was "a betrayal of Bayreuth," telling Wieland Wagner that "your grandfather would be rolling in his grave."[51] The *Deutscher Anzeiger* stated that anti-Bumbry protestors are the "not-so-anonymous defenders of our white 'noble race.'"[52] The public had a different reaction after the performance, which received over thirty minutes of applause and forty-seven curtain calls. The German press sang Bumbry's praises, speaking about her fire, passion, beauty, greatness, and ease in performance.[53]

Anderson in Salzburg and Bumbry at Bayreuth were met with racially-rooted resistance and criticism prior to their performances and critical acclaim after their performances. These antithetical reactions are possibly due to the simultaneous subjectification and objectification of Black artists. When Bumbry first arrived in Bayreuth to be typecast and costumed within a Black body, she was an object. She was acted upon by the German public and the production's crew, who created a highly sexualized and racialized Venus for Bumbry to play. When Bumbry stepped on stage the evening of opening night and opened her mouth to sing, she became a subject, and

[50] Ibid. 615.
[51] Ibid. 608.
[52] Ibid. 619.
[53] Ibid. 616.

assumed power and agency in acting upon the German public for the first time. Even though Bumbry's Black body did not belong, the sound produced by her body did – indicating that the quality of the performance, and what the artist could do for Germanness and German culture, was equally as important and in some cases more important to the Austro-German public than the skin color of the person performing.

Bumbry handled the conflict of subject duality by turning inward. She knew that she had the proper training to sing the role, and she had confidence and trust within herself as a proud Black artist. She chose to perform, simply stating that "I knew I had to get up there and show them what I'm about. When we were in high school, our teachers—and my parents, of course—taught us that you are no different than anybody else. You are not better than anybody, and you are not lesser than anybody. You have to do your best all the time."[54] While she was standing on stage during bows, she thought to herself: "Oh my God, this will never end. This is fantastic. This is fabulous. I guess that'll show them."[55]

## Conclusions

Throughout their performance careers in Germany and Austria, Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry were viewed as symbolic, racialized representations of the African American race. The Blackness projected by Anderson and Bumbry was the focus of German audiences. White audiences fixated on Marian Anderson's "white soul" to avoid addressing her Blackness altogether, while Grace Bumbry's skin had to be painted over so that its darkness was not recognizable in order to appease white audiences in Bayreuth. These performances and the public's reaction to them are representative of the German nation's paradoxical relationship with

[54] Amanda Woytus,"Opera superstar Grace Bumbry reflects on her start at Sumner High School, Kennedy Center Honors, and meeting two presidents," *St. Louis Magazine*, April 21, 2021, https://www.stlmag.com/culture/music/grace-bumbry/.
[55]Woytus, "Opera superstar."

race, oscillating between denial and obsession. Regardless, Anderson and Bumbry were never white enough in the minds of German audiences because the Austro-German population perceived classical music within a white frame, and saw Anderson and Bumbry's presence within that space as non-absolute.

Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry wished to let their art speak for itself. As Anderson wrote in a memoir titled *The Creative Arts*, "Great art is universal, not because it can hurdle the barriers of language and bring the thoughts of one man to another but because it springs from a mysterious spiritual component and can be apprehended by another receptive human being who opens his heart to it."[56] This soulful connection that Anderson speaks of and her awareness and ability to access it during performance made her and Bumbry into the exceptional artists that they were.

Marian Anderson and Grace Bumbry were trailblazers. They performed on stages no other Black artist had performed on before, opening doors for the generations of Black singers that came after them. To Anderson and Bumbry, classical music was a great art that they spent their entire career mastering. The contradiction presented by German audiences of race as both a disaffirmation and an obsession was something that Anderson and Bumbry transcended because they were strong people and incandescent artists. Therefore, they were able to perform as their authentic selves – as Black women with Black souls – without conflict.

[56] Marian Anderson, "The Creative Arts," in *Towards Lasting Peace*, Box 138, Folder 07600, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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