

Jazz Freedom, Freedom Jazz

I saw you perform.
I heard your music.
I felt your joy.
I watched you revel in your freedom
Playing Jazz on your Viola?
No rules. No constraints. No confinement.
Freedom, unbridled passion
Becoming one with your instrument
Coordinating motion, vibrating strings
Using the Key to choose your notes
Hearing your choice and knowing it fits
Selecting rhythm from your inner vibe
Anticipation - changes, bridge, changes
Making you're unique music yours and yours alone
Never to be heard the same way again.
Jazz...Freedom...Freedom...Jazz
Welcome back into my life.

By Raymond W. Lucas



Melanie
Bohemian Caverns - June 2007

Behind the Image – “Melanie”

As I watched my cousin, Melanie, perform at the Bohemian Caverns in Washington DC, back in June of 2007, my mind had difficulty processing all that I was feeling. I had to sort through my pure joy of seeing my cousin, a relative who I have reconnected with after more than 45 years; the excitement of experiencing her incredible talent, and the anger from years of missed opportunity to know Melanie.

The source of controversy that drove a virtual wedge between our families, originated around the turn of the 20th century. And, this wedge was SKIN COLOR. You see, my grandmother had dark skin and my grandfather and his side of the family was very light. And, as the story goes, when my grandfather brought my grandmother home to Fremont OH from Macon MO, his younger sister, **Linnie** said to him, “Why did you bring HER home? Daddy didn’t even keep a BLACK CHICKEN in the back yard!” These painful words caused an unspoken separation and alienation between our families based on a very warped sense of worth with respect to different Shades of Blackness.



Josephine Allen Wallace
1885-1966 Grandmother



Felix Whetsel Wallace
1874-1941 Grandfather

This “color sickness” in the Black community is believed, by some, to have been fueled by a man named Willie Lynch who’s alleged famous speech in 1712 on the banks of the James River was purposefully designed to teach slave owners how to keep their property in check through the exploitation of differences. Although the legitimacy of this speech is in question by scholars, references in the speech that encourage slave owners to turn slaves against themselves so owners can maintain control, seems like a page from a Slave Owners Investment Protection Guide Book. When slaves were fighting among themselves, they were not causing trouble for “Massa!”

This shameful skin tone prejudiced behavior amongst my people continues to be a serious issue in Black communities. I still hear Black teens commenting on the prize of a “light skinned” girlfriend with “good hair!” This disgusting mentality continues to split the black community by the various “Shades of Blackness,” and often goes unspoken. Director Spike Lee took this issue on directly in his film **School Daze** when he spoofed the “Wannabes” against the “Jiggaboos” on a mythical college campus that was as real as you can get. The “light skinned Wannabes” with flowing hair were supposedly, a prize as opposed to the “nappy headed, dark skinned Jiggaboos.” And, **Jiggaboo** is not a term that I suggest you use freely. Casual use of it cost Don Imus his job! The unspoken message that a Black child picks up from this nonsense is that the closer your color and hair are to the “White-Anglo” standard, the **better** you are. This, I believe, is one of the biggest **Cons** of modern times.



Aunt Linnie holding Melanie, while I get my cheeks pinched by Charlotte, in Fremont OH 1963

I was always amused in the summer months as I watched white people bake in the sun, basting themselves with suntan lotion to darken their skin to make them feel more beautiful. I often wondered how dark their skin would have to get before they would lose their “White Privilege.” How does a Black child interpret this madness without questioning their own value, based on the shade of their skin?

I worked with a white guy that was very comfortable comparing his suntanned arm to mine and bragging how his was darker. I just told him to get a copy of the movie “Watermelon Man,” where a white man mysteriously woke up as a Black man. I was certain that this would offer him a different perspective in a Black man’s shoes. I don’t know if he ever saw the movie, but he never compared his arm to mine again.

Feeling the **Freedom** of Melanie’s improvisations reminded me of the hope that I have, not only for the reconciliation of my family around this subtle, “dark” secret, but for all African Americans who continue to possess this divisive, color affliction.

I have always loved Jazz, but I didn’t really know why until now...Jazz is Freedom...Freedom is Jazz.