



**Scat — Sonia Boyce:  
Sound and Collaboration**

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# Scat — Sonia Boyce: Sound and Collaboration

Curated by Tessa Jackson, Teresa Cisneros and Sonia Hope, Iniva  
(Institute of International Visual Arts)

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**Cover:**  
Still taken from *Oh Adelaide*, 2010  
Courtesy the artist

**Right:**  
*For you, only you*, 2007  
Photograph by Stuart Bunce  
Courtesy the artist

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## Introduction

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*Scat* is a collaboration between Sonia Boyce and Iniva, creating a major solo show of her work to occupy the public spaces in Rivington Place. It focuses upon her long established interest in sound and brings together two immersive video works that are presented together for the first time. *Scat* explores how we experience sound — both collectively and intimately. It can bring history alive, give the present a sense of identity, and have a visceral effect and impact on our sense of time and place. This exhibition with its title's emphasis on dispersal, encourages the visitor to reflect on the significance of sound in different settings.

In *For you, only you* (2007) Sonia Boyce orchestrates a meeting between an early music consort Alamire, under the direction of David Skinner, and contemporary sound artist Mikhail Karikis. *For you, only you* represents Karikis' sound work, which in turn imagines an encounter between his fractured vocalisations and the de-constructed 16th century masterpiece *Tu solus qui facis mirabilia* 'You alone can do wonders' by the Franco-Flemish composer Josquin Desprez. A conversation between Boyce and Karikis in this guide reveals something of the process of collaboration by which the piece was created, and the layers of associations and references that are contained in the re-scoring and presentation (a live performance transformed into film) of this 15 minute work.

*Oh Adelaide* (2010), a collaborative work by Sonia Boyce and sound artist Ain Bailey, incorporates found film footage, downloaded from the internet, of the jazz singer and entertainer Adelaide Hall (1901–1993). Hall's voice is mixed with digitised and condensed recordings taken from music and songs in Boyce's devotional archive. Hall is widely regarded as a pioneer of jazz scat singing: a wordless technique where the voice mimics a musical instrument. She also appears in the earliest surviving post-war BBC television broadcast (1947).

Since 1999, Boyce has been developing, through the involvement of a wide range of participants, an archive of CDs, cassettes, DVDs, vinyl records, magazines and other ephemera relating to black women in the music industry. In Iniva's Education Space elements of *The Devotional Collection* are presented in the context of her *Devotional Wallpaper* (2008–), a work in which Boyce sets out a roll-call of 200 female luminaries, memorialised as a large-scale printed wallpaper. A further installation takes place in Iniva's Stuart Hall Library where items from Boyce's *Devotional* archive are set out among the bookshelves, their juxtaposition playing with the material around them.



*For you, only you*, 2007  
Photograph by Stuart Bunce  
Courtesy the artist

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Sonia Boyce has had a long standing relationship with Iniva. She was one of the many voices that spoke up in the 1980s and early 1990s against the lack of representation in museums and galleries across the UK, of culturally diverse artists and curators, and the marginalisation of 'other' art histories. From these debates the Institute of International Visual Arts was founded in 1994. In 1997 Boyce had an Iniva supported artist residency which triggered her initial interest in sound, and two years later, she collaborated with FACT, Liverpool (the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in a project with the Liverpool Black Sisters. This grew into the *Devotional* series of which *Oh Adelaide* is part.

Sonia Boyce acknowledges that 'being troubled by the past's imagery became a moment of epiphany', believing that 'we don't have to settle for the past as it is presented. The past is not fixed.' By making an archive and using archival material, she proposes 'its future use is beyond the control of the past'. *Scat*, as a collection of works, relies on two of our most powerful senses, seeing and hearing, to re-present history and explore highly complex issues. As with history — created and realised in collaboration, so it is with Boyce's practice — each of her works involves participation, individually and collectively.

**Curators — Tessa Jackson, Teresa Cisneros and Sonia Hope, Iniva**

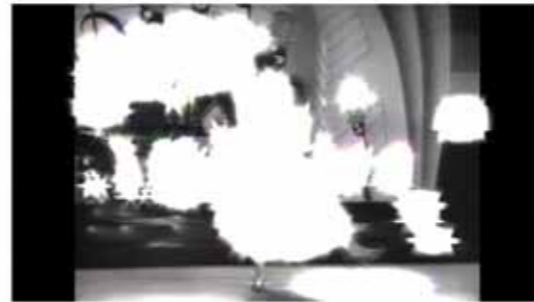
## Sonia Boyce: sound, tension and the sacred

This exhibition includes three major pieces by the artist Sonia Boyce, *For you, only you* (2007), the *Devotional series* (since 1999) and *Oh Adelaide* (2010). What they all have in common is a love of the field of music, sound and the voice, in a context of reverence or even piety or devotion. A definition of the sacred is that which belongs to a separate field and is the object of reverence, the sacred object of authority. This essay proposes reading the works of Sonia Boyce through the relationships between the sacred, the archive, collaboration, authority and finally, of sacrifice.

### Archive

The term “devotional” seems to pose questions about the nature of the object of devotion or even acts as a test to loyalty. The *Devotional series* is the result of ten years of collecting material on black British female musicians and singers, by means of a collective memory built up firstly with a Liverpool community<sup>1</sup>, then developed through the participation of the general public who have taken part in the reassessment of a communal asset. This collection of over 200 names and 1,000 sound pieces consists of items sent and given to the artist since 1999, plus items that she has collected herself. According to French philosopher

Jacques Derrida, the archive is a private area for judgement, where official documents are stored. In the ensuing years, Boyce has transformed the archive material into artworks, with *The Devotional Wallpaper* (since 2008) and *Oh Adelaide*. For the first time in this exhibition *Scat*, she proposes exhibiting pieces from the collection in order to reopen the site of the archive, the place of the law, so that it can be shared. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>, discusses the attempts by Sigmund Freud to reconstruct early and significant memories with his patients, using psychoanalysis and in particular anamnesis (recollections). He thought he could treat his patients’ psychological and traumatic afflictions through this process. In his role as an authority-figure, Freud realised that he could only reconstruct a pale resemblance of these memories. The authoritative-figure gathers together the knowledge available about an object and re-presents it; he constructs narratives and orders them; he is therefore writing a historic canon, a story that becomes the norm and the law (to which one must become *loyal*). Furthermore, the limits of the archive reside both in the subjectivity of the archivist and the very fragmented nature of



<sup>1</sup> Sonia Boyce began the *Devotional* project, whose initial title was the *Motherlode*, as part of the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT) — Collaborations Programme with Liverpool Black Sisters in Liverpool in 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Paris, Galilee, 1995, p132.

the constituent parts of the archive. What the archive is unable to find form for are the unthinkable, the unofficial (the non-validated) — and, as a consequence, through its own mechanism reveals its lapses of memory.

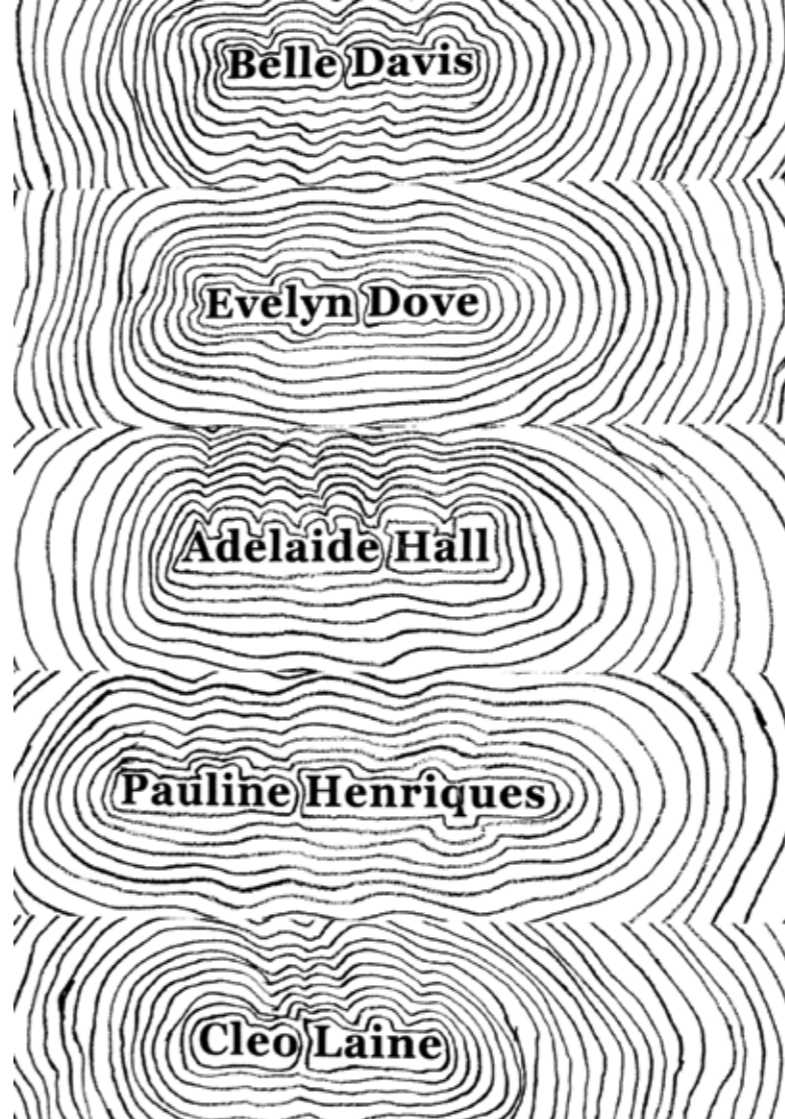
By reworking the archive footage of the “All Black Vaudeville Show” from 1935, the video *Oh Adelaide*, continues this reflection on the dichotomy of the archive as a place of visibility/invisibility. At the climax of the first part to *Oh Adelaide*, the viewer strains to see this film of an early-twentieth century black entertainer. Photographic freeze-frame fixes the moment, and draws our attention to an atmosphere that surrounds and envelops the vanished face of Adelaide Hall within circles of light. This mechanical aspect of photography as the object of mass diffusion sits alongside the machine-gun sound of the soundtrack. Here, we can think of the Antonioni film *Blow Up* (1966) in which the camera is also the weapon, in other words the tool that reveals the murder in Maryon Park. The still of the image therefore reveals both Adelaide’s aura and the disappearance of her body. Although the image and the soundtrack are dealt with separately, they are

connected by a common reflection on archival material. The hiss inherent in vinyl records places the soundtrack within a given time frame and gives it a historical dimension, returning the project to its archival status. The addition of noise, reversal, scraping, friction and confused murmurs is aggressive and violent. Ain Bailey’s soundtrack scratches and rubs; it combines the voice of Adelaide Hall and the whisper of vinyl: thus, the remnants of industrialisation and mass reproduction are contained in the soundtrack and can be read as an equivalent to how a photograph can appear simultaneously as content, memory and object.

The noise, as opposed to the music, is a device that pushes the spectator to the limits, overly present, and recognised as such. It is at the same time the noisy modernity of machines, of the metropolis and futurist musicians, which the artist Luigi Russolo<sup>3</sup> demonstrated at the beginning of the twentieth century. It also marks the life of the body, the rhythm of the heart and the circulation of fluids in the tubular organs. The archive as a subject is thus manipulated, reactivated, even revived through mechanical and digital means.

<sup>3</sup> Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, 1913.

<sup>4</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Grids”, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Paris, Macula, 1993.



*The Devotional Wallpaper*, 2008 ongoing (detail)  
 Unlimited edition digital print  
 Courtesy the artist

In the series dedicated to the memory of past and present black British female singers, the *Devotional Wallpaper* articulates the relationship between drawing, the word, and sound through a reproducible digital print. Names of black British female singers resonate with each other through a system of multiplication of irregular lines around typed letters. The vibrant motif, is repeated and set in a rectangular shape, thus forming a grid, itself inserted into the printed paper, which renders it infinite. Art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss<sup>4</sup> has discussed the familiar trope used in modern art of the grid motif as a proclamation of the autonomy of art and its liberation from the real. Using geometry, the grid is seen as railing against nature. It is also a cruciform object that carries symbolic weight. According to Krauss, the grid resolves the contradiction between the sacred and the profane as a formal structure with physical scientific properties and as a symbol of the sacred. In addition, the grid is a device in the negotiation between seriality as a space for division and resonates between the singular and the multiple. It is a contradictory structure with which to rethink the place of women artists and their individual contributions, in terms of a pluralist and collective history of modern art, her noise, the extent of which must now be heard.

### Collaboration and authority

The different works presented in *Scat* are all the result of a collaborative practice around sound and the history and memory of music. If we summarise the main stages of the history of western art, the artwork has for a long time been this ritual address to God or the story of religion. This was before the Renaissance introduced the idea of 'beauty' and conferred on painting the role of representing the privileged class and their position in the world. In a process of secularising art, modernism tried to define the visual distinctiveness of this relationship and in the process attacked the predominance of the collective over the individual. However, the human experience became the favourite subject within art by the second half of the twentieth century. According to art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, the 1990s expanded a new conceptualisation of art, based on the principles of "relational aesthetics". Art thus becomes an activity that enables individualism to be cast off and reinvested with "the idea of community"<sup>5</sup>. Nicolas Bourriaud draws an aesthetic relationship between the inter-subjective and daily encounters, what art critic Grant H. Kester calls a "dialogical aesthetic"<sup>6</sup>. Although Boyce's process is informed by the aesthetics of social relationships, her work questions the sharing of authority and authorship.

Boyce creates space for organic and improvisational relations (like the artist Rikrit Tiravanija, for example). Thus the collaborative work of Boyce with Mikhail Karikis and David Skinner is not about an intrusion into an existing community to modify or alter it, but the creation and reflection on the interaction of personalities in the constitution of communality<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, Sonia Boyce couples her reflection on collaboration with that of authorship. The *Devotional* series consists of the development of a collective memory around an artistic repertoire. Shared authorship is the nature of the work, which is questioned in *For you, only you*, in its creation and reception by giving the spectator on either side of the camera, the authority of the gaze. In *Oh Adelaide*, Sonia Boyce makes the archival document her own and suggests re-reading it through the gaze of the spectator. Power and possession of the body through the gaze is in fact at the heart of this work. The opening of the curtains onto the scene from a *minstrel show* allows a furtive glimpse of the face of Adelaide Hall, an African-American singer and performer who moved to Britain in the 1930s. Immediately, an incandescent mass fills the central space of the image and deprives

*For you, only you*, 2007, photograph by Stuart Bunce  
Courtesy the artist

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the spectator a view of Adelaide's body, replaced by an "aesthetics of the formless". According to Georges Bataille (*Documents*, 1929), formless-ness is "a term used to declassify, generally requiring each thing to have its form"<sup>8</sup>. As a rebellious act, he renders the object and reality un-nameable, shapeless, de-categorised. The formless, therefore, deviates from the norm and from the law. It dismantles authorship and authority and as such, deprives the viewer and the power of the gaze, its object.

### Authority of the gaze

The relation between the *white* mass, the *black* bodies and decorative figures in *Oh Adelaide* emphasises the relationship between "whiteness"<sup>9</sup> — in other words, white identity — in relation to "blackness". White is not a colour, unlike black, which implies an alleged neutrality, invisibility, of (skin) colour. When it is saturated, white light splits greens and reds around the edges of the whiteness, a spectrum of colour bursts on to the archive, in this arena of friction between black and white. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*

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<sup>8</sup> Georges Bataille in *Documents*, Paris, 1929, p382.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Dyer, *White*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997.

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2001, p62.

<sup>6</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Conversation pieces, community and communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2004

<sup>7</sup> On this subject see the works of the Palo Alto School in California.



(1952),<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon discusses the relationships between the construction of identity, desires and representations, as well as the hybridisation of identity within a colonial context.

However, the luminous white mass that moves across *Oh Adelaide* both obscures and reveals the ankles and heels of Adelaide Hall. The dividing of the body, the body-part, is a recurring motif in the works of Sonia Boyce in which hair, the mouth and the tongue are analysed as areas of the body that crystallises identity. Boyce plays with the codes for representing the ‘woman’ in Hollywood cinema and the construction of the desirous male gaze, a subject widely covered by Laura Mulvey<sup>11</sup>. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey analyses the way in which the construction of female figures in cinema are determined by the patriarchal order to satisfy the voyeuristic impulses of the spectator — who is assumed to be male. The eroticism of the heel in *Oh Adelaide* seems to echo an earlier artwork, the series of four photographs of the inside of the mouth, *Tongues* (1997). This treatment of the body can be compared to the motif of the autonomous organ used by the surrealist poet Georges Bataille, who found his

visual equivalents in the surrealist photographs of Jacques-André Boiffard, investing autonomous body-parts as having independent narrative potential. In fact, he likes to project these organs: the mouth, the eye, the toe, as in the *History of the Eye*<sup>12</sup>, as an erotically charged, yet grotesque entity, constructed via the metamorphoses of the eye.

### Sacrifice

The tensions between the cut-out body forms (eye, heels) and the moving luminous mass in *Oh Adelaide* emphasises the use of collage as noise in the Ain Bailey soundtrack, which echoes the link between the sacred and the absence of form, an argument that Julia Kristeva develops in her book *The Powers of Horror*<sup>13</sup> (1982), linking the sacred to the notion of abjection. The abject is first of all a fear, a terror that includes a feeling of repulsion and fascination. The abject can come from the exterior of the subject and therefore be rejected, or from the interior of the subject, thus creating a sense of disassociation. However, the notion of abjection includes the disappearance of barriers between self and others, but also banishment and repression, doubt about identity and terror. The second meaning of abjection links it to the improper.

In 1995 Sonia Boyce created a series of objects from cut hair, such as *Three Legs of Tights Stuffed with Hair* (1995), commenting: “when I was producing them, I was thinking that they were disgusting”<sup>14</sup>. Cut hair is already likened to decapitation or the loss of part of one’s body. The question of abjection and transgressive bodies<sup>15</sup>, allows us to rethink and rewrite, not only the story of Adelaide Hall, but invariably the status of representations of black females resulting from the era of slavery and continuing throughout colonial history. Here the abject is not just a representation of the body but is the spectre of a historic malaise, a shameful memory that also informs collective memory. De-categorisation and sacrifice induces both a reflection on the eroticised black body but also on the (*effaced*) social body of the black female artist in Britain.

In the scene from the “All Black Vaudeville Show”, there remains a headless body, what Bataille calls the Acephalus body, who plays a piano, that of an African-American male pianist, as well as details of a decorative Art Nouveau stage set, consisting of images of black minstrels. These decorative faces, endowed with a single eye and a hat, are held by the angular trace of musical notes. Then the white

light cuts the heads off these minstrels and obscures the pianist’s head from the rest of his body. The figure of the minstrel began as an errant musician, often playing a stringed instrument in the service of troubadours. Deriving their notoriety from the cakewalk dance then from Ragtime, *minstrel shows*, popular in the nineteenth century, were caricatures and parodies produced by whites to depict black subjects. After the war of succession in the United States white actors took over these spectacles as grotesque and ridiculous figures in blackface. In the 1930s the highly talented Nicholas Brothers achieved great success in music halls and in Hollywood films, and the Savoy Ballroom, which opened in Harlem in 1926, welcomed artists like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie. Adelaide Hall, coming from a musical comedy and popular burlesque background, knew and worked with Duke Ellington, who persuaded her to record *Creole Call Love* and *The Blues I Love* in 1927, that introduced, for the first time a form of singing without words that imitated the sound of musical instruments: namely, jazz scat. The images of minstrels in the archival footage of the “All Black Vaudeville Show”, introduces the spectre of the grotesque, and sits rather uncomfortably with our

<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Face, White Masks*, Paris, Seuil, 1952.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Mulvey, “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*”, in *Screen* 16.3, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Georges Bataille, *History of the Eye* (1928), Paris, 10/18, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, Paris, Seuil, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Sonia Boyce, interview, 10 January 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See *Abject art: Repulsion and desire in American art*, Whitney Museum, 1993.

contemporary sensibilities, now seen as gross caricatures. They call into question the stability, or in this instance, the instability of representation. Decapitated heads become relics of a western history caught between the ideals of universalism and the despair of the consequences of slavery, between the dominance of patriarchy versus egalitarianism, between the construction of values within the eye of the law and secularisation.

Sonia Boyce, encumbered by the presence of grotesque images of black minstrels, seizes, as the user of these items from the public archive, the possibility of her own agency, of working and of displacing the story of the objects that she uses: "I realised that I don't have to live with them. I can change the past in a way"<sup>16</sup>. The artist authorises taking charge of the archive. She writes if not a counter-history, at least a critical story, which sheds light on identity politics, on the role and the nature of this fragmented archive in which certain collective memories are repressed. She emphasises the tensions through a process of declassification of representations and offers a collective reconstruction of the stories.

**Sophie Orlando**, Art Historian



## Sonia Boyce and Mikhail Karikis with Tessa Jackson discussing *For you, only you*

### The Nature of Practice

**TJ:** How do you respectively describe yourselves and your practice?

**SB:** I talk about the fact that I am interested in art as a social practice, and I tend to work either collaboratively, or I invite people to participate in the work. I am interested in improvisation and what happens in group dynamics.

**MK:** I describe myself as having a particular interest in the voice and in sound. The voice is a vehicle to explore notions of politics. I'm interested in it as a medium and tool to explore specific issues. In the past five years these have been about the politics of work, marginalisation, and what the role of sound or the voice might be in relation to forming communal identity.

### Defining the Project

**TJ:** Can you describe how *For you, only you* became defined?

**SB:** The project was defined when we were sitting trying to figure out why we were all in the same room together. We are from different places and there were imagined

differences. David Skinner, the Music Director of Alamire, suggested he give a mini lecture on his interest in early choral and early renaissance music. This gave us a sense of his trajectory, his interests and his past. We needed to introduce ourselves to each other. I appeared to be the anomaly within the room, and I still am the anomaly within the work. David Skinner and Mikhail talked about their influences, but I didn't introduce myself. I was like a backseat driver.

**TJ:** Was it important to move towards a mutual understanding and establish a sense of trust in each other in order to collaborate?

**SB:** Crucial but, having said that, people don't have to cooperate to work together. There is an assumption that to work collaboratively, collectively or together there is trust, but actually a lot of stuff gets done without that and it is not a necessary part of collaborating. There are always a lot of tensions and competing desires, as well as reasons why people want to come together to do something.



**MK:** An important part of the project was managing our impatience; allowing the process to determine what this project was going to be and not forcing a form onto it. The work had to somehow reveal itself to us, and that happened through conversations, relations and with time. In the period that we all worked together there were moments of impatience, where different parties wanted to freeze the project into a specific shape, when it actually still wanted to be quite amorphous.

**SB:** It was about when it felt right. My approach to directing always gets an interesting response. There is an essay in a Tate catalogue called *Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance* for a show which was curated by Adrian George. The text is about the artist as producer and director. It talks of how artists are producing and directing other people in order to make work. There is a kind of assumption that to be a director is to be authorial or to have a certain kind of authority. One of the things that has evolved in my own practice, is that question of seeing what emerges, and of course being unnerved by not knowing where the project is going to go. It's about learning to wait, or to know that at some point it will rise to the surface. This approach has come out of following this process several times and allowing something to happen in a slightly different way.

**MK:** Also allowing others to become authors. Working on this project and with Sonia was a kind of master-class in how to manage those feelings. I've been interested in this kind of relationship between patience, inspiration and artistic production. I looked at the essay *The Gaze of Orpheus* by Maurice Blanchot in which he talks about that moment when Orpheus, the archetype of the artist, looks back and loses everything. He asks: did he look back because he was impatient or was it a moment of inspiration, since song and poetry came out of his loss? What do you sacrifice when you visualise something when it's still unformed?

**SB:** I think it is important for artists to be questioning and asking themselves about emerging into this field as we are doing collaborative productions more and more.

#### The Nature of Collaboration

**TJ:** Sonia, how was *For you, only you* a development in your on-going approach to collaboration?

**SB:** It made me think about how a lot of the collaborative and participatory work I had done before was very much based on a nineteenth century idea of philanthropy, where you are there as an authorial figure to do good for those who are lesser in some way... enabling others. Working on *For you, only you* we all had to up our game; it was

apparent that we all knew what we were doing in our own field so we had to come together and re-negotiate. It was initially difficult for the choir to sing *For you, only you* because of the thirteen beats per bar that Mikhail had included in the score. They had to count these beats whilst they were singing. They found the difference difficult; they were encountering something they were familiar with, but in an unfamiliar way. This is a song that they've sung for many years.

**MK:** In order for us to work together we don't have to cooperate or speak each other's tongue or language. That was an essential realisation: we can create a piece in which they speak/sing in the way they do, and I vocalise in my own way. My only intervention, in relation to what the choir normally do, was to reconfigure the mathematics and structure of a work they knew. I impregnated it with a Balkan rhythm, which is very natural to me, but very unfamiliar to them — it became challenging.

#### The Choice of Composer

**TJ:** Was the choice of the composer Josquin Desprez significant? Was it important that he was radical in his own time? How does the music link to Jazz Scat?

**SB:** The suggestion of Josquin Desprez came from David Skinner. Within Desprez there are lots of silences

and periods where Mikhail could interject. There was space and an opportunity to do something in those supposedly empty spaces. There was also *Tu Solus*. The programme was going to take place in the chapel just after Easter. That particular score seemed to resonate with resurrection. On reflection I understand the complexities within the piece, the Balkan beat, but also there is the jazz scat. I felt heartened and humbled when we were talking and Mikhail mentioned there was the influence of female jazz singers and scat in this piece. I was thinking wow, you brought that in; the elephant in the room to a certain extent. It was the fact it came in through the actual structure of the piece, which I thought was genius personally. The piece is very loaded, it is not an easy piece to unpick.

**MK:** I had been listening to female jazz singers who had been doing extended vocal techniques, and it comes with the politics of that, but also Dada poets use the voice in very interesting sculptural ways, so it is loaded with historical, racial and art references.

**SB:** We've recently been talking about the question of nonsense, and looking at the dictionary definition and at what nonsense constitutes. The question of nonsense is there in the choosing to not make sense, deliberately using vocalisations that are not words, or language proper. Jean

Fisher suggests that it somehow takes us back to a primal state, it reads as an infantile state, but actually I think it's much more complex — it's a form of resistance to a certain extent.

**MK:** John Cage says that syntax is the rule of language and functions like an army, so to choose to break the rules and produce nonsense is a form of demilitarising language. I would go as far as to suggest it is like throwing shit at language — vocal excretion, the abject made aural. We also associate sounds like that with states of ecstasy, madness or possession — becoming who we are (usually) not.

### The Politics of the Work

**TJ:** In what way is the piece political?

**MK:** What does it mean for this piece to be framed through the politics of difference? How is it perceived as a project by Sonia Boyce? And how has the way we see it changed in the context of political changes since 2007?

**SB:** I often talk about the work as being quite utopian. Utopian in the sense that in the beginning of the film, each performer has their space which is separate, but they are in the same space. There is a

shift where they start to sing together, and take on each other's voice to a certain extent. It makes me think about the question of the stranger. How society deals with *the stranger*, those who are different, in its cruellest term: the alien. I'm interested in how we have experienced successive waves of difference, and how that difference has been felt and dealt with. At the end of *For you, only you*, the proposition is that one moves from a stranger to a neighbour. If someone is a stranger, as a guest, you expect them to go home, but if they are a neighbour, they live here, next to you. I think about *For you, only you*, with the utopian idea that we can live with difference and it can be ecstatic. To think about that in the context of where we are now, part of me wants to not suggest that hybridity evens itself out, which is why I prefer the idea of neighbour, rather than we all become the same.

In the intervening few years I have travelled to Europe and in conversation with other Afropeans about postcolonial debates, realise that somewhere like Portugal, the African Portuguese community are still talked about as guests. You go to Germany, and the Middle Eastern, Cypriot and Turkish communities are still talked about as guests. At what point do you stop being a guest when you live there? At what point does the 'you are always estranged from

here' change or shift? Thinking about the work in that context, of how difference is dealt with, it is political.

People always ask me, how I am involved in the piece, how is this my work, as it is classical music and I am not seen in it. It is also a misunderstanding of how I might have a relationship to modernist sound. My argument is that jazz scat is modernist sound. It comes out of modernist experience, and a modernist imperative. But that's rarely spoken about, in terms of the rethinking of popular back music and melody through a modernist language. The question really is 'well Sonia you are black and how could you have done this?', and people have been arguing with me that this work is not about race. By virtue of people asking me 'how are you in this?' somehow they cannot conceive of me not only having orchestrated it, but being a part of it, and being very much entangled in it (as initiator, in its making, and in its very languages). I, like many other people, have heard classical music — I don't have different ears to anybody else.

**MK:** I can't see this piece in a non-political way. Difference is visually subtle because we are talking about different shades of whiteness. But more significantly, difference is heard, and it's more unsettling because it subverts any expectations initially set by my seeming physical similarity

with the choir. This work is not only about racial difference, it speaks of 'difference' in many ways. It doesn't need to be a visible difference. David Skinner is from California, but his difference has never been raised — the reasons it is unquestioned are significant.

**SB:** You would not necessarily know from hearing him speak that he is American. I've been talked of as an African Caribbean artist living within the UK, and Mikhail is talked about as a Greek artist living and working in the UK, and then there's David Skinner as the Director of Music, as if he is somehow devoid of culture and race, and comes from everywhere. The implications of one figure being normalised, and others being addressed in particular ways, is part of the politics of the work.

We spoke briefly recently about your outfit and how in a very subtle way there is also queer aesthetics within the visuals, and I think within the sound.

**MK:** We talked about the queer dimension and how it may come across visually through clothing. What does it signify to wear red pom-poms on my shoes and a silver top? And what does it mean for that person in the film to try to communicate in a

sound that is not confined to language? What is it that he wants to 'say' that language cannot speak of? In the context of scat, why did black scat singers break away from conventional language? Understanding the politics of vocal rebellion is vital.

**SB:** Henry Louis Gates, a cultural theorist in the US has written about what he calls signifying practices. He talks about an African American legacy of saying one thing, but everyone else knowing the code, that it means something else. It's a kind of double speak, and that was a survival strategy. He relates it to the question of slavery and the system of slavery, where if you have an underground resistance movement, you have to be able to signal in some way. This language was built up around survival and also rebellion.

#### Call and Response

**TJ:** I was interested in the form musically of call and response. I wanted to ask you about the importance of that in the psychology of the piece?

**MK:** When I clear my throat once, I clear my throat. When I clear my throat twice, I am asking the audience to be quiet. I clear my throat again and I am using it as a delay technique to remember my words. The fourth time I clear my throat the audience grow suspicious.

By the fifth time the listeners are nervous, uncomfortable or embarrassed. My vocal gesture is singular but the audience's psychological shifts are dramatic. Any vocal sound is a demand for a response. That's how the work initiates a dialogue. It addresses the fact that each voice is alone, and by vocalising *alone* it creates a demand to be heard and to receive a response. The only words I articulate in the piece are *sing to me*. The moment one stands before an audience and opens one's mouth, there is this expectation to hear him/her say or sing something. The phrase *sing to me* subverts this expectation; it confronts the audience with their expectations of me, and becomes my demand of the choir/audience to sing to me. These subvert the relationship between audience, performer, listener and speaker.

**SB:** The question of witnessing, particularly within the African American church, is very familiar with the refrain 'can I get a witness?'. 'Can I get a witness' is a term that is both a request for a response, but also a legal term; one has to go to the state or the courts to try to say 'I was there to bear witness to the following'. The reason why it became such an important refrain was because in the eyes of the law, the black subject had no legal framework. This was also so within the context of the history of lynching,

the history of a racialised history; the question of witnessing took on a very important political call which led to the civil rights movement. So the question of witnessing through the structure of the church, is key even though I am deeply ambivalent about having worked in a church. I remember one of the discussions concerned the invited audience — we wanted to have a group to witness the performance.

**MK:** Indeed they are not just an audience, they are witnessing an encounter of difference with all its politics, dynamics and sensuality.

**TJ:** Was there a discussion as to how the piece was going to be heard?

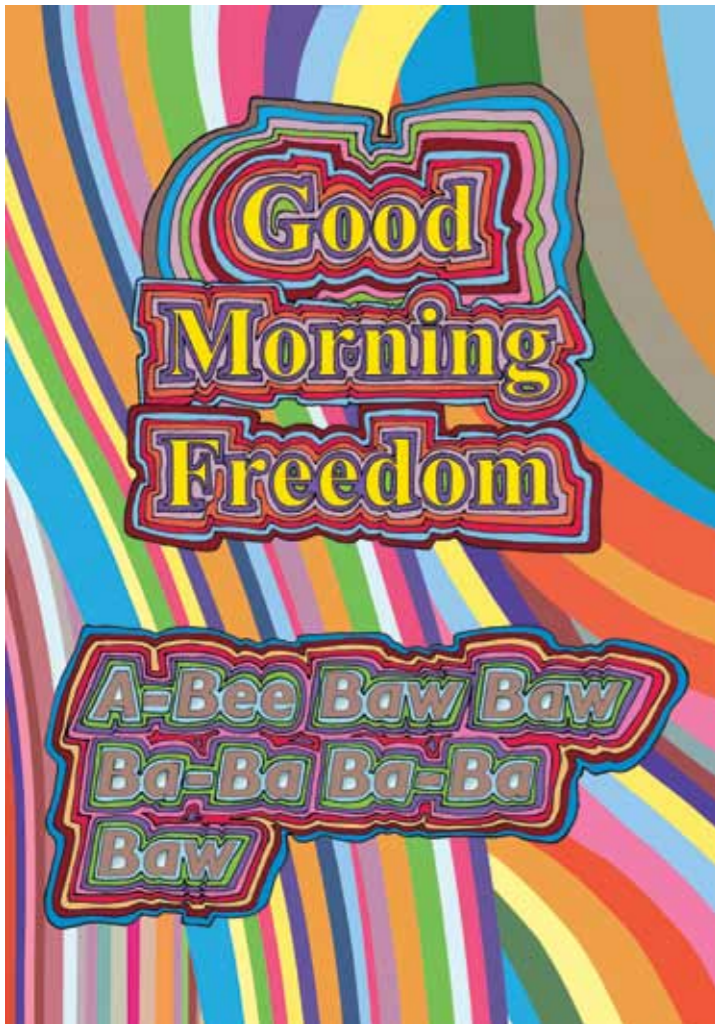
**SB:** In terms of making the film, it seemed obvious that if there were pews, there should be people sitting there, and then we started talking about inviting people to come specifically for the filming. This was an art audience — colleagues, students, other artists. People were enraptured and they loved it, but there was no shock and surprise on the day of filming; it was only when the doors were opened to the general public that the challenging nature of the piece really emerged. People were laughing, thinking what's going on, what's he doing? By the end of it they were dancing,

but really they were not sure how to respond. People were looking to others to see if they were taking it seriously. They then very quickly became completely enraptured. Mikhail was asking me why I called this exhibition *Scat?* He asked if I knew that scat is a term for shit.

**MK:** It also refers to a fetishistic use of excrement in certain sexual practices.

**SB:** I didn't know, but I thought it was amazing, that the title of the show, in trying to talk through the connection between *Oh Adelaide* and *For you, only you*, was this relationship to scat music, jazz scat and the question of scat — this idea of dispersal; you say scat in order to push something away. I thought that these relationships were amazing not necessarily as a planned out thing, but that they emerged out of the unconscious, but are connected.

**17th April 2013**



**Limited Edition Print:**

On the occasion of this exhibition, Sonia Boyce in partnership with Iniva has produced a limited edition print:

*Good Morning Freedom*, 2013

Four colour lithograph on Fabriano 5, 300gsm, 43 x 30cms

Edition of 100, signed and numbered

**£215 incl. VAT**

**Acknowledgements:**

Iniva would like to thank Sonia Boyce for her spirit of involvement, this collaboration has been a delight for everyone involved.

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A copy of this booklet is available in large format print.

The artist in particular wishes to thank Jean Fisher, Eddie Otchere formerly of the National Portrait Gallery and Tessa Jackson, Teresa Cisneros, Sonia Hope and the Iniva team.

***For you, only you***

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**Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts)**

Iniva explores key issues in society and politics, offering a platform for artistic experiment, cultural debate and exchange of ideas. We work with artists, curators, creative producers, writers and the public to explore the diversity and vitality of visual culture.

**Stuart Hall Library**

The Stuart Hall Library provides an extensive bibliography of reference materials and resources relating to this exhibition. The bibliography is available in print as well as through the Library website, and a display of these materials will be available in the Library throughout the exhibition. The Stuart Hall Library is open: Tues to Fri, 10am–1pm, 2–5pm. To make an appointment, phone +44 (0)20 7749 1255 or email: [library@iniva.org](mailto:library@iniva.org). You can also plan your visit by accessing the Library catalogue online at [www.iniva.org](http://www.iniva.org)

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