

About Beyond Ferguson:

On August 9th, 2014 an unarmed Black teenager, Michael Brown, was fatally shot by the White police officer Darren Wilson. The shooting came less than a month after the widely reported and graphic police choking of Eric Garner and was part of a streak of stories about unarmed minorities being killed by police or civilians across the country (e.g. Jordan Davis, Renisha McBride, Jonathan Ferrell, Trayvon Martin, Ricardo Diaz-Zeferino, Rekia Boyd et al). Consequently, the events in Ferguson felt both familiar and tragic. It was tragic that Michael Brown needlessly lost his life weeks before starting college, and it was tragic that Darren Wilson had to go into hiding after receiving death threats.

Ferguson also felt divisive. Various witnesses gave conflicting accounts that made it impossible to know anything with certainty except that both men could have made better choices that day. The Justice Department concluded that Brown had stolen cigars moments earlier, initiating the encounter with Wilson. They also concluded that Wilson potentially showed poor judgment in his contact with Brown and that Ferguson's then majority-white government and police intentionally targeted Black residents for petty offenses to increase fines, used racial epithets toward Black residents, and sent racist emails. Ultimately, they did not exonerate Wilson, but concluded that he could not be prosecuted as long as the government could not disprove his saying that he felt threatened.

It has been almost a year since the events in Ferguson unfolded and I originally felt called to write this piece for guitar ensemble students in nearby St. Louis. I had performed an outreach concert at Brown's high school mere months before his death and felt compelled to respond. Since then, police shootings and abuses of unarmed people of color have been recorded far beyond Ferguson (e.g. Tamir Rice, Samuel DuBose, Walter Scott, Dajerria Becton, John Crawford III, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Levar Jones, Antonio Zambrano-Montes et al).

Writing a piece about such a timely and sensitive topic is certain not to please everyone, but the piece neither seeks to vilify all police, nor glorify unlawful or vulgar conduct. Rather, it attempts to give a historical context for the outcry to these shootings through a 1903 Du Bois reading, and through a musical collage of Negro spiritual, jazz, hip hop, and African influences. Accordingly, *Beyond Ferguson* begins with a melody from one of Michael Brown's raps, to give him a chance to speak directly and metaphorically for the dozens of unarmed citizens who have been killed by police in the past two years. And the music comes to an inconclusive end, waiting to be resolved.

-Thomas Flippin, New York City, August 2015

Introducing the piece to the audience:

Prior to performance, effort should be made to explain the national context of this piece in an unbiased way (possibly reading portions of the previous page). Performers should explain that Michael Brown was an imperfect teenager, but he loved to make music in his spare time and used the melody in (mms.3-4) for one of his amateur rap songs. Demonstrate that melody and then discuss how its pitches (C-Bb-G) can be truncated, transposed, stacked, and arpeggiated throughout the piece as part of the composition process (e.g. briefly play Section B to show how the piece evolves from Michael Brown's original idea and is transformed).

Performance Notes:

The A section is an Invocation. The opening two measures can be looped for as long as the performers want to establish a mood and rhythmic heartbeat of the piece. When guitar 2 is ready, s/he begins in mm.3-4 by warmly introducing Michael Brown's melody.

The B section is a Dance. It takes Brown's melody and arpeggiates it with a truncated plantation slave Juba rhythm in Guitar 1. There is an option here that after Guitar 1 has looped this section solo a few times, a dramatic reader (guitarist or actor) can slowly stand up and read aloud the 1st paragraph of the following quote in a dynamic and theatrical fashion. Then they can slowly sit and another reader can stand and read the 2nd paragraph. Then they sit and Guitar 2 begins section C when ready:

“Being a problem is a strange experience...It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others....shut out from their world by a vast veil. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness- An American, a Negro... (PAUSE)

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife....He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face....This then is the end of his striving. -W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903”

While the quote is being read, a guitarist (electric or classical or another improvising instrument) can respond to the reading with improvisation. If there is not a skilled improviser, these improvised notes should be sustained and occur on occasional downbeats of the looped measures (pluck every 4 beats or 8 beats, but don't be predictable). This enables a real-time response to the spoken words with a corresponding amount of dissonance to what is being said and felt. Effective notes could be: D and Eb on string 4, B natural and C on string 5, F# and G on string 6. If the improviser is skilled, they are encouraged to be “ugly” and play striking dissonances, distortion, and noise (scratched strings, strumming above the nut, hitting the guitar etc).

The End: As the piece fades out players have the option to let their last notes sustain until silent and then slowly raise their hands in the air as though doing a benediction or a gesture of support for the non-violent “Hands Up Don't Shoot” protests. Guitar 1 can loop their penultimate measure for as long as feels appropriate to wind the piece down, while the other player sits motionless with their hand(s) raised.

Beyond Ferguson: Based on a Melody by Michael Brown by Thomas Flippin

Three days after the assassination of President Kennedy, Leonard Bernstein delivered remarks in Madison Square Garden to a memorial audience of 18,000. Speaking on behalf of all musicians, he famously declared, “This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.”¹ Many musicians have since heeded this call, creating award-winning works about 9/11, the civil rights era, Hurricane Katrina, and many more significant events in our national conscience.²

Sadly, most of these works do not feature the classical guitar, and our instrument is not widely known for being integral in national artistic conversations about war, race, class, and American society at large. Of course, there are exceptions and beautifully profound works that we cherish in our repertoire. But if we are honest, our instrument simply is not relevant to many people’s lives or even to their conceptions of high art.³ How can the guitar be used to speak to people that otherwise do not hear it? How can our instrument point towards something other than technical virtuosity?

On August 9, 2014, violence erupted in the small St. Louis suburb of Ferguson when the black St. Louis teenager, Michael Brown, was killed by the white police officer Darren Wilson. Depending on which evidence one chooses to discredit, it is possible for well-meaning people to attribute blame to either man’s actions that day. Because of the multitude of conflicting witness accounts and violations in police protocols during evidence collection,⁴ it is impossible to know for certain which account to believe. One thing we can know is that it is a tragedy that an unarmed, college-bound teenager lost his life needlessly, and it is a tragedy that a public servant had to go into hiding because of death threats leveled against him and his family.

Another thing we know is that Michael Brown loved music. He had created an array of original songs by arranging pre-made melodies with drum loops that he would then rhyme over. When I initially felt called to write a piece about Ferguson, I knew that I wanted to start with Michael’s own music as a means of aurally representing him and letting him speak for himself. The problem was that most of his lyrics were explicit, so it was important to present his music in a way that did



Above: Thomas Flippin

not glorify that aspect of his personal expression but rather reflected his life and interests. After sifting through his songs I selected an eight-note melody from one of his raps and used its intervallic content to construct melodic and harmonic textures throughout the piece.

Beyond Ferguson was conceived for an artist residency in St. Louis as a means for beginner and intermediate students of all races and classes to come together as a community and move beyond this traumatic event. It was inspired by the following quote from W.E.B. Du Bois, which can be read to the audience either before the performance or during, while the B section is being looped.

¹ Leonard Bernstein, “Tribute to John F. Kennedy” (speech, New York City, Nov. 25, 1963), www.leonardbernstein.com/response_to_violence.htm.

² See John Adams, *On the Transmigration of Souls*, Nonesuch 79816-2, 2003; Wadada Leo Smith, *Ten Freedom Summers*, Cuneiform Records, RUNE 350/351/352/353, 2012; Ted Hearne, *Katrina Ballads*, New Amsterdam Records, 2010.

³ At least the past twenty winners of the Pulitzer Prize for music have not used the classical guitar in the winning compositions. The Pulitzer Prizes, <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat/Music>.

⁴ Jerry Markon and Tom Hamburger, “Unorthodox Police Procedures Emerge in Grand Jury Documents,” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 25, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/seemingly-unorthodox-police-procedures-emerge-in-grand-jury-documents/2014/11/25/48152574-74e0-11e4-bd1b-03009bd3e984_story.html

“Being a problem is a strange experience ... It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others ... shut out from their world by a vast veil. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro ... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife ... He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face ... This, then, is the end of his striving.”⁵

Beyond Ferguson score follows on pages 20-23.

Here are some performance notes for the piece:

- The opening two measures are symbolic of Brown’s heartbeat. That pulse is constant until the piece concludes. Brown’s melody first appears in guitar 2 in mm. 3-4.
- Starting in section B, guitar 1 is essential, with a constant *p-i-m* arpeggio on the first three strings in a rhythm that is inspired by traditional plantation slave music like the juba.
- Section F is a fleeting change of mood as we imagine what life could have been like had those two men made different choices that day.
- Section I brings back a melody that occurred in Section C in a more dissonant harmonization than our initial encounter with it and escalates to a higher register and climax.
- Section J begins winding the music down with increasing diminutions of Brown’s melody in guitar 3. Guitar 2 is descending as if Michael’s body is falling and then begins ascending as Brown’s soul escapes him. Gradually each player plays his or her last note as Brown’s life fades away, and the music stops abruptly, awaiting resolution.

Thomas Flippin is a guitarist and composer based in New York City. He graduated from the Yale School of Music and has performed across the United States. His ensemble Duo Noire premiered a more advanced arrangement of *Beyond Ferguson* for two guitars at the 10th Street Art Gallery in St. Louis this past February.

⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 8-9.



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For William Ash
Beyond Ferguson

Thomas Flippin

A Moderato & Ritmico (♩ = c. 120)
tranquillo

Classical Guitar 1
Classical Guitar 2
Classical Guitar 3
Classical Guitar 4

III
VIII
IX
X
XI

mp
mf
f

Cl. Gtr. 1
Cl. Gtr. 2
Cl. Gtr. 3
Cl. Gtr. 4

I
II
IX

mf
f
f

Cl. Gtr. 1
Cl. Gtr. 2
Cl. Gtr. 3
Cl. Gtr. 4

I
IV
VIII

mf
f

rit.

C-7

A♭Maj7

C-7

A♭Maj7

B

C

Cl. Gtr. 1: *p* *i* *m* *ritmico* *mp*

Cl. Gtr. 2: VI 1^o

Cl. Gtr. 3: VI

Cl. Gtr. 4: V VI

C-7

A m7

A♭Maj7

C-7

A♭Maj7

Gsub2

D

E

Cl. Gtr. 1: *mf*

Cl. Gtr. 2: VI 1^o *f*

Cl. Gtr. 3: *f*

Cl. Gtr. 4: *f*

Cl. Gtr. 2: Divisi IX XII

tranquillo

F

Cl. Gtr. 1: *mp*

Cl. Gtr. 2: VIII ②

Cl. Gtr. 3: *mp*

Cl. Gtr. 4: *mp* divisi

Cl. Gtr. 2: ② ①

G

Cl. Gtr. 1
f
Cl. Gtr. 2
mf
Cl. Gtr. 3
mf
Cl. Gtr. 4
mf

VI VI VI V

III VII IX V

II
divisi

H

Cl. Gtr. 1
f
Cl. Gtr. 2
f
Cl. Gtr. 3
f
Cl. Gtr. 4
f

B-7 G maj7 C7 C-7 AbMaj7 Bmaj5

divisi VIII XII IX VI IX XIII X
I III II I III

I **J**

Cl. Gtr. 1
mf
Cl. Gtr. 2
mf
Cl. Gtr. 3
ff
Cl. Gtr. 4
f

C-7 A sus Bbsus C sus C sus Bbsus2 C-7

VIII VIII IX III I III I III

For William Ash

Beyond Ferguson

Thomas Flippin

A Moderato & Ritmico (♩ = c. 120)
tranquillo

5 *f*

9 *f*

13 *rit.*

B **C**

p *i* *m*

ritmico mp

D **E**

mf

F *tranquillo*

mp

29

② ①

2

Beyond Ferguson

G

Musical notation for measures 1-36. Includes guitar chords VI and VI, and dynamics *f* and *mp*. A circled '3' indicates a triplet.

37

Musical notation for measures 37-47. Includes guitar chords VI, V, and VI, and dynamics *mf*, *p*, *m*, and *i*.

H

Guitar chord diagrams for B-7, Gmaj7, C7, C-7, AbMaj7, and Bmaj5.

Musical notation for measures 48-51. Includes dynamics *f* and *mf*.

I

Guitar chord diagrams for C-7, A sus, Bbsus, C sus, C sus, and BbSus2.

Musical notation for measures 52-55. Includes dynamics *mf* and a 3/4 time signature change.

Guitar chord diagrams for C-7, B+, and C-7.

Musical notation for measures 56-60. Includes dynamics *mf*.

52

Musical notation for measures 61-65. Includes dynamics *rit.*

56

Musical notation for measures 66-70. Includes dynamics *molto rit...* and the instruction "Hands up..."

H *divisi* VIII XII IX VI IX XIII X

f ③

I VIII IX **J** III I

② *m* *i*

50

f

52

II

④ *rit.*

56

Hands up... *molto rit...*

rit.

For William Ash

Beyond Ferguson

Thomas Flippin

Moderato & Ritmico (♩ = c. 120)

A VIII 4

B **C** **D** **E**

F I

G

H I II **J** I I p i m III II

50 *rit.*

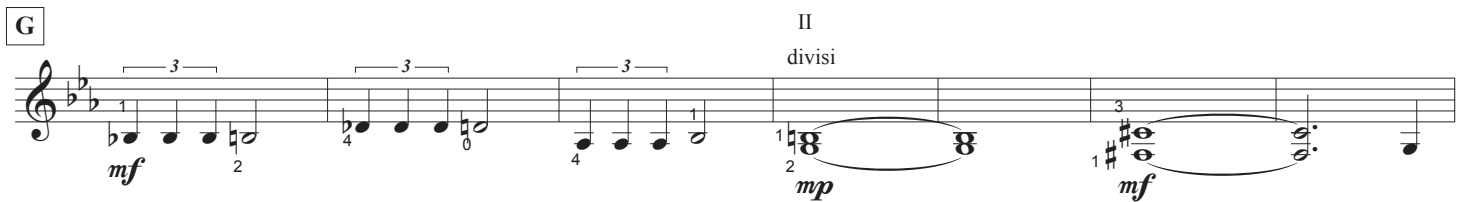
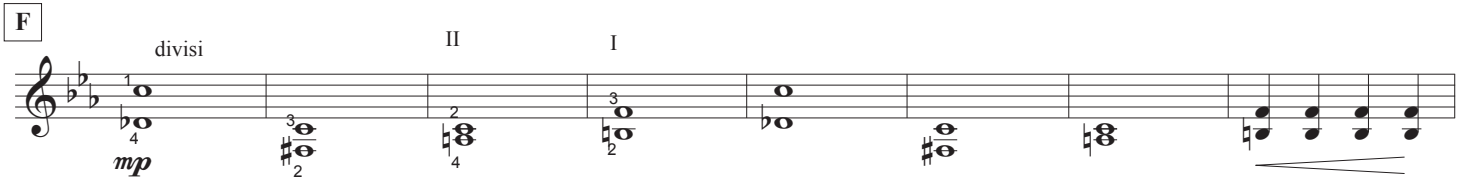
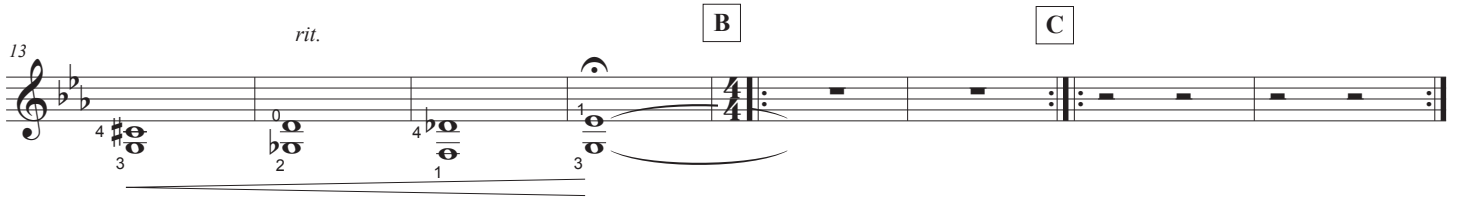
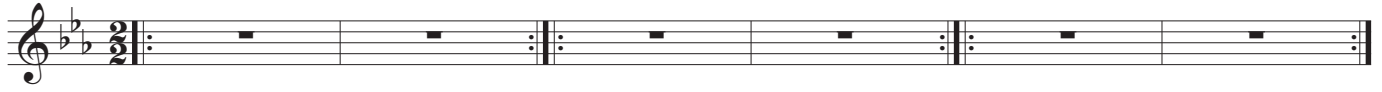
58 *molto rit...* Hands up...

For William Ash

Beyond Ferguson

Thomas Flippin

A Moderato & Ritmico (♩ = c. 120)



Beyond Ferguson

50

mf

55

rit.

*molto rit...
Hands up...*