RAISING THE VOLUME
with Marcus Amaker & Charlton Singleton

Raising the Volume
Episode X
A conversation on music and life with The War And Treaty.

Sixth Grade and Up
Mastery of core subjects and 21st century themes is essential for all students in the 21st century. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history and government, and civics. In addition to these subjects, schools must move forward to include not only a focus on mastery of core subjects, but also an understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects.

**Global Awareness**
1. Use 21st century skills to understand and address global issues.
2. Learn from and work collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts.

**Civic Literacy**
1. Participate effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes.
2. Exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship at local, state, national, and global levels.
3. Understand the local and global implications of civic decisions.

**Work Creatively with Others**
1. Develop, implement, and communicate new ideas to others effectively.
2. Be open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives; incorporate group input and feedback into the work.
3. Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work, and understand the real world limits to adopting new ideas.
4. View failure as an opportunity to learn; understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes.
5. Implement innovations.
6. Act on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur.
OVERVIEW

Everyone has a story. It’s our place to take a moment to listen. Once you listen, your eyes open. You can put yourself in someone else’s shoes and try to comprehend their experiences. You may be inspired, you may come away with more knowledge, or you may find a bit of yourself in someone else.

Raising the Volume is a series of Black stories. Stories about Black entrepreneurs, judges, authors, artists, and leaders in our community. Stories that need to be heard. Led by the Gaillard Center’s Artists-in-Residence, Charlton Singleton and Marcus Amaker, Raising the Volume gives a platform to Black community members and opens us all up to honest discussion.

As you introduce this series to your students, follow the bullet points below for discussion. Your students will find that they are challenged to think about uncomfortable things. Those conversations are what will help us change our world. In the words of Judge McFarland, “To break down racial barriers, start where you are.” Let’s start where we are and see what change we can bring to our community.

For each lesson, split your class into small groups for discussion or discuss as a whole. Choose the model that is the most comfortable for your students so they feel free to discuss opinions openly.

Teachers, if you are interested in scheduling a cross-school discussion on Raising the Volume Episode X, please email Sterling deVries at sdevries@gaillardcenter.org. Through cross-school Zoom calls, we can offer students from one school a different perspective on the video with students from a second school. We will schedule class-to-class meetings where whole groups can discuss various topics covered in Episode X.
Raising the Volume

Episode X: A conversation on music and life with The War And Treaty.

(CLICK THE IMAGE TO WATCH EPISODE X)
During the interview Michael and Tanya discuss the genre of their music and state, “That is the thing that we [with this skin color] constantly fight against: the labels. It’s our job; it’s our responsibility to prove wrong and educate.”

Unpack this statement. Michael is referring to labels in the music world, but also outside of music. **What do you believe this statement means?**

In 2019, The War And Treaty were invited to participate in the anniversary ceremony of the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama alongside Representative John Lewis. Michael states, “We were so afraid because this is our giant, John Lewis.”

John Lewis was a leader in civil rights and an American Congressman. **Read about the life of John Lewis here.** Write down three points that explain why Michael refers to Rep. Lewis as “our giant.”

Now that you have read more about Rep. John Lewis, unpack this quote from Michael Trotter, Jr.: “For us standing right there in that bridge, that was his greatest pain; yet, his greatest triumph.” **What does this quote mean? Discuss with your group.**

The War And Treaty believe the time they had with John Lewis on the bridge in Selma outweighs their time on the stage at the Grammy Awards. **Why do you think that is?**
ABOUT THE WAR AND TREATY

Since forming in 2014, The War And Treaty have amassed a following as eclectic as their sound itself, a bluesy but joyful fusion of Southern soul, gospel, country, and rock-and-roll. Known for a live show nearly revival-like in intensity, the husband-and-wife team of Michael Trotter Jr. and Tanya Blount-Trotter endlessly create an exhilarating exchange of energy with their audience, a dynamic they’ve brought to the stage in opening for the legendary Al Green and touring with the likes of Brandi Carlile and Jason Isbell. So when it came time to choose a title for their forthcoming sophomore album, The War And Treaty quickly landed on Hearts Town—the Nashville duo’s adoring nickname for their ardently devoted fanbase.

“Hearts Town is a neighborhood strictly made up of people who all share the same kind of heart: hearts that love, hearts that heal, hearts that don’t see division,” says Michael. “There’s all different types of people within that neighborhood, but they’re still somehow all working together—which is exactly the kind of town we want to live in.”

Their full-length debut for Rounder Records, Hearts Town arrives as the follow-up to 2018’s Healing Tide, a widely acclaimed effort that recently saw The War And Treaty named Emerging Act of the Year by Americana Music Association. Mainly recorded at Blackbird Studio and featuring appearances by such esteemed musicians as Jason Isbell, Jerry Douglas, and Punch Brothers guitarist Chris Eldridge, Hearts Town was produced by Michael and co-produced by Tanya and the duo’s longtime guitarist Max Brown. And while the album unfailingly harnesses the thrilling vitality of their live set, each song spotlights The War And Treaty’s heart-on-sleeve storytelling and poetic simplicity with greater impact than ever before.

True to the unbridled spirit of The War And Treaty, Hearts Town opens on “Yearning,” a powerful introduction to the album’s narrative of loving without limit. Driven by a particularly stunning vocal performance from Michael, the track speaks to the tremendous struggle in overcoming emotional baggage. “Yearning’ is about me and Tanya trying to break free from the drama of past relationships,” says Michael. “When we got together, we both were divorced, so we had to make that decision to wake up every day and say to each other, ‘I’m going to love you,’ instead of just holding onto that old hurt.”

In its tender reflection on life’s most urgent questions, Hearts Town turns to the subject of death on the darkly charged but undeniably hopeful “Beautiful.” Graced with Tanya’s operatic vocal work and a smoldering guitar solo from Isbell, “Beautiful” looks back on the final days of Tanya’s mother, Judith May Blount. “One day I was by her hospital bed and I noticed that her legs and feet were ashy, so I decided to lotion them up,” Michael recalls. “She was a very private lady and ordinarily would never have let me do that, but in that moment she told me all these beautiful stories about her feet and why they looked the way they looked. It made me realize that death can be beautiful in its own way, because now the suffering’s over.”

On “Five More Minutes,” Hearts Town shifts into a much brighter mood, bringing the stomp and swing of
classic soul to a carefree celebration of surrendering to love. “That song’s saying, ‘If I just have five more minutes to love you, it’s going to be the best five minutes of my life,’” Michael explains. Though that lighthearted tone returns on tracks like “Jubilee” (a stripped-back bit of romantic reverie), Hearts Town achieves a pensive complexity on its title track, a sprawling and symphonic piece partly sparked from Michael’s experience as a wounded warrior who served in the Iraqi War. “Writing that song, I was thinking about all the times I was dealing with my PTSD and my depression and thought I was all alone, and how calming it is now just to know that Tanya’s there beside me,” he notes. With its lilting string arrangement and cascading guitar work, “Hearts Town” ultimately transforms that personal story into a universal sentiment, attesting to the extraordinary power in lifting one another up in difficult times.

In songs like “Hearts Town,” Michael and Tanya’s vocal interplay takes on an intimacy that’s often sweetly akin to listening in on a private conversation. But despite the deep sense of communion that infuses their music, the two hail from wildly different backgrounds. Originally from just outside Washington, D.C., Tanya discovered her exceptional vocal skills at a young age and pursued a career in music and acting. Meanwhile, Michael grew up in Cleveland and D.C., spending part of his childhood in homeless shelters and later enlisting in the U.S. Army. While stationed in one of Saddam Hussein’s palaces several years after 9/11, he gained access to a piano and instantly captivated his fellow troops with his formidable vocal presence. Promptly tasked with writing and performing songs in memoriam to his unit’s fallen soldiers, Michael cultivated a distinct songwriting voice that he further developed upon returning home.

Soon after sharing the stage at a music festival, Michael and Tanya began making music together, eventually marrying and forming The War And Treaty. With their debut EP Down to the River arriving in 2017, they released Healing Tide in August 2018 and earned immediate praise from outlets like NPR, later landing on Rolling Stone’s list of the 40 Best Country and Americana Albums of 2018. The following year, The War And Treaty bolstered their reputation as a phenomenal live act by appearing at leading festivals around the country, in addition to inking their deal with Rounder. And at the start of 2020, the duo won over new fans by taking the stage at the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards, performing alongside icons like Cyndi Lauper, John Legend, Gary Clark Jr., and Common in a tribute to Grammy executive producer Ken Ehrlich.

As their fanbase continues to expand exponentially, The War And Treaty feel more and more inspired by the Hearts Town community and its boundless potential for mutual uplift. “This is a place where everything that is broken can be fixed,” says Michael. “It’s a world where racism can be erased and where we don’t live in our selfishness, but instead always empathize with others. A world where we encourage one another and pick each other up, and we feed the hungry and we clothe the naked. Hearts Town is a place where you can come broken and open, regardless of your past, and find love just like we have.”

On the final track to Hearts Town—a slow-building, piano-fueled epic titled “Take Me In”—The War And Treaty drive home their impassioned plea for unity in times of division. “We were seeing so much anger in the world as we were making this album, so we wanted to give people something that told them, ‘Stop looking for the next Dr. King or Malcolm or Mother Teresa, and start looking for the first you,’” says Michael. Along with delivering a potent message of empowerment, “Take Me In” closes out Hearts Town on a beautifully warm and generous note. “Right now a lot of people are feeling so deeply engulfed in pain and surrounded by negativity, and sometimes you just need to hear that you’re good,” says Tanya. “That’s the whole idea behind Hearts Town: no one’s trying to change what you think or how you talk or anything else about you. You’re just fine the way you are.”
ABOUT CHARLTON SINGLETON

A native of Awendaw, SC, Charlton Singleton began his musical studies at the age of three on the piano. He would then go on to study the organ, violin, cello, and the trumpet throughout elementary, middle and high school. In 1994, he received a Bachelor of Arts in Music Performance from South Carolina State University. Since that time, he has taught music at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, as well as being an adjunct faculty member at the College of Charleston. In 2008 he co-founded and became the Artistic Director and Conductor of the Charleston Jazz Orchestra: an 18-piece jazz ensemble of some of the finest professional musicians in the Southeast and the resident big band in Charleston, SC. Mr. Singleton is also the organist and choir director at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Charleston, SC. In November of 2016 he was named the inaugural Artist-in-Residence at the recently renovated Gaillard Center in downtown Charleston. He remained in this position until July 2019; at that point he was named Artist-in-Residence Emeritus. In this position he continues to lead the Summer Youth Jazz Orchestra Camp as well as lead the “Jazz Through the Ages” assembly, which attracts a capacity crowd of students at the Gaillard Center.

As a performer, Charlton leads his own ensembles that vary in size and style. He has performed in France, Great Britain, Scotland, Spain, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Norway, Canada, the Netherlands, as well as many great cities throughout the United States. He is a founding member of a new ensemble called Ranky Tanky. The group is a quintet that interprets the sounds of Gullah from the Southeast Coast of the United States. In 2017 Ranky Tanky reached the top of the Billboard, iTunes, and Amazon Contemporary Jazz charts with their self-titled debut recording. In 2019 they accomplished the same feat with the release of their sophomore effort, “Good Time”, which recently won the 2020 Grammy Award for “Best Regional Roots Music Album”.

In addition to performing, he is in demand as a speaker, clinician, composer, and arranger. He has also shared the stage with and/or worked with some of most talented entertainers in the world, including Bobby McFerrin, Jimmy Heath, Slide Hampton, Houston Person, Darius Rucker, Fred Wesley, and Cyrus Chestnut to name a few. Outside of music and entertainment, he and his wife, MaryJo, are the proud parents of Shalamar and D'Marcus, as well as their pets...Sassy, Jango, Mojo, Kota Bear, Pumpkin, and Ginger.
As lead vocalist for internationally- and critically-acclaimed roots music group, Ranky Tanky, Parler spent weeks at #1 on several Billboard Jazz charts. The group’s eponymous debut album has drawn praise and acclaim from some of the nation’s most discerning and respected music critics. Through Ranky Tanky’s sold out shows, Quiana is using her artistry to bring the cultural and musical heritage of the SC Lowcountry to some of the most prestigious stages in the US and Europe, like Norway’s Moldejazz and New York City’s Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall.
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