

*The Best Cuisine: Music of Carlos Simon* explores themes that connect us through personal stories that are at times joyful, provocative, and deeply moving. We were honored to share this creative journey with Carlos Simon and Carl DuPont. We invite you to read some commentary from Carlos below about the works featured on the album.

*Between Worlds* is inspired by the visual art of Bill Traylor, who was born a slave in Alabama in 1853 and died in 1949. He lived long enough to see the United States go through many social and political changes. He was an eyewitness to the Civil War, Emancipation Proclamation, Jim Crow segregation, and even the Great Migration. As a self-taught artist, his work reflects two separate worlds: rural and urban, Black and white, and old and new.

I imagine the solo piece as a musical study, if you will—showing Traylor’s life between two disparate worlds.

*Lickety-Split* is a piece that's dedicated to my grandfather, who was a preacher but also owned a paving company in Rocky Mount, Virginia. In the summers, I would go visit him and work with him. He would always be very bossy but very whimsical. He would say, "Go shovel that dirt, lickety-split!" He would use that phrase, or "Go do this, lickety-split." He used this phrase lickety-split to show us his whimsical nature, but also to show that he was in charge. And so, this piece is inspired by his jovial character and is dedicated to him.

*be still and know* was inspired by an interview with Oprah Winfrey:  
“I have felt the presence of God my whole life. Even when I didn't have a name for it, I could feel the voice bigger than myself speaking to me, and all of us have that same voice. Be still and know it. You can acknowledge it or not. You can worship it or not. You can praise it, you can ignore it or you can know it. Know it. It's always there speaking to you and waiting for you to hear it in every move, in every decision.” -*Oprah Winfrey, May 25, 2011*



### *Nightfall*

Art songs have long been an interest of mine. The vocal works of Maurice Ravel, Richard Strauss, and Arnold Schoenberg have always seemed to ignite my passion for composing music. So when I perused the poetry of a dear friend of mine, Courtney Ware, and discovered “Nightfall,” the urge to set the text to music immediately came. However, the music did not naturally come.

With its naturalistic metaphors and dark themes, I strove to create an lugubrious, ominous atmosphere through warm but gloomy textures. A recurring motif appears in the piano accompaniment to represent the overarching theme of hopelessness. Overall, the music thickens in density as the piece transpires to create the progression of darkness. As the saying goes: “It is darkest just before day break.”

### *Dead Fires*

“If this is peace, this dead and leaden thing, / Then better far the hateful fret, the sting.”

These words were written in 1922 at a time when African Americans were making progress in a severely hostile American society. Slavery had been abolished for over fifty years, the first of thousands of African Americans would begin pouring into industrial cities to find work, and the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 set the tone for progress. Additionally, prominent writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington began to change the consciousness of Black America through their works and spark a great fire of free thought.

However, without a source of energy, all fires smother to ashes. This fire burning inside of civil rights activists needed passion and dedication to thrive. Without this, the internal fires diminish and begin to burn out. Jessie Fauset was trying to tell her readers and fellow activists that this fire needed to be reignited.

I have composed a monotonous, thick and heavy character to represent the responsibility that Fauset must have felt having seen complacency in her community. With the piano accompaniment in its lower, darker register, the unsettling vocal line moves in a lugubrious, syncopated fashion. Is the fire dead or is it a flickering flame?

### *The Best Cuisine*

One of the hobbies that I (and a lot of other people) developed during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic was cooking. I decided to set to music some of the recipes (created by my friend and colleague Carl DuPont) that I tried and mastered during this difficult time. With each recipe, I chose to use a different musical style. While musical style is not directly related to the cuisine, I wanted to use different genres to represent how truly different each recipe was for me to cook.