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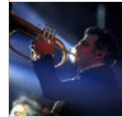
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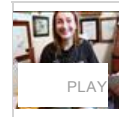
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# In Fort Greene, a New Erykah

Singer Erykah Badu Joins the Brooklyn Philharmonic for a Two-Night Program

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA



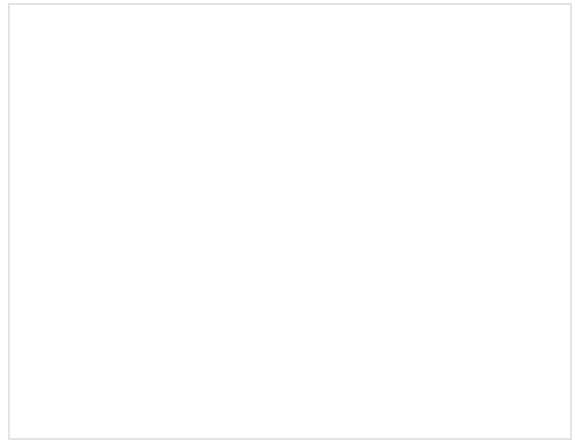
Andrew Kelly for The Wall Street Journal

Erykah Badu rehearses with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

Erykah Badu might be alone in the universe for her ability to wear sweatpants and cowboy boots in a way that makes sense—as they did on Wednesday, especially with a black lace shirt and a big blue derby hat.

The Grammy-winning singer is not alone, however, when it comes to appreciating her music and its standing in the story of soul and R&B. That standing will be celebrated this weekend when Ms. Badu joins the Brooklyn Philharmonic for "You're Causing Quite a Disturbance," a two-night program at the Brooklyn Academy of Music to introduce new orchestral renditions of songs from her 2008 album, "New Amerykah Part One (4th World War)."

Led by Brooklyn Phil director Alan Pierson, the program, on Saturday and Sunday, will feature arrangements by composer Ted Hearne and vocals by Ms. Badu, whose sultry alto has forged links between contemporary hip-hop soul and the historical likes of Billie Holiday. At a rehearsal on Wednesday, Ms. Badu, who lives part of the year in BAM's neighborhood of Fort Greene, situated herself in versions of her own songs



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that she was hearing for the first time.

"Y'all can laugh," she assured the orchestra as she bantered between songs. Upon hearing a horn line written into a newly arranged version of "Me," she stopped the orchestra to marvel: "In the record, that was a mistake—it was a glitch. Awesome!"

After rehearsal, Ms. Badu, who is 42, spoke with The Wall Street Journal about singing with an orchestra, identifying as a part-time Brooklynite and growing more excited as she evolves.



Enlarge Image

Andrew Kelly for The Wall Street Journal

Erykah Badu at the DiMenna Center in Manhattan this week.

### How does it feel to work with the Brooklyn Philharmonic?

It's a composer's dream to intertwine with an orchestra. I'm from the world of hip-hop, first and foremost, where we are sampling sounds as we go. To be able to have those sounds breathing and alive, it makes you and them become one living, breathing organism. You can do what you do digitally with real people. It's amazing.

### How did the process work?

We had an initial conversation, Alan and I, at my house. He flew to Dallas and we looked at paintings and movies that we felt would become what we could see. The paintings come from the album itself, "New Amerykah Part One (4th World War)," by the artist Emek. I met him years ago, and he became my visual husband. For music I would do, he would paint a wonderful piece. A while ago, all we had was album covers—we didn't have videos and all that. We had album covers to tell the whole story of this artist or this album or this period.

### Which movies did you watch?

"The Holy Mountain." Alejandro Jodorowsky is my favorite documentor, director and medium. He also is a card reader [and author of books like "Psychomagic: The Transformative Power of Shamanic Psychotherapy"]. He is a very intelligent, soul-minded thinker who seems to be going on a path that I would like to follow: evolution as elimination, eliminating things from life as it goes, to float or to move forward.

### Has this show changed the way you think about your voice, in terms of phrasing and delivery?

I don't have perfect pitch, and I don't read music, but when I got here I didn't feel like I had to do any of that. I recognize that my voice is an instrument, and the sheet music is in my heart. It's great for me because it gives me a different experience with my own breath. Singing for me is therapy. It's my sermon; it's my ministry. I always use the platform to focus on purging, and it's great that an audience has that experience with me.

### Does what you purge change night to night, or do you find yourself revisiting the same emotions?

I think we revisit the same things over and over again when it comes to obstacles. But how we behave, react and relate is different as you evolve. You would think that whatever it is that made us cares about us enough to help us. I write to music; music is what makes the words come out.

### As a part-time Brooklynite, does it feel significant to sing at BAM?

It's a very prestigious place to perform as an artist. We don't generally get a chance to have a platform like BAM, so dedicated to the fine-tuning of art. It's giving me an opportunity to really pay attention to details in my voice.

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## How much time do you spend in Brooklyn?

I'm in Brooklyn when I need to write, but I spend most of my time in Dallas. I'm five generations there. I got my apartment [in Brooklyn] when I was 25 years old, so whenever I come here, part of me is 25. There's an elimination of things I've accumulated from 25 to 42. I leave them at the airport.

## To repurpose a question you asked rapper Kendrick Lamar: "What are you trying to achieve as a musician, if anything at all?"

It changes. At first I was trying to be recognized, be seen, by people who were my peers. I was trying to get Questlove's attention, D'Angelo's, OutKast's—people I looked up to. Three or four years later, I felt like I was responsible for something in my culture because so many people related to it, depended on it, and created as a result of it. Then what I tried to achieve was different: I wanted to make sure that I was purely honest. Then it changed a little bit more, as times get harder. I have three kids now. It changed to wanting not to compromise my art and to make money at the same time.

## Have you figured out your wardrobe for BAM?

I know nothing about that. I didn't even know if you can cuss in front of strings, so I don't know what I'm going to wear.

## Corrections & Amplifications

In an earlier version of this article, a photo caption incorrectly said Ms. Badu was photographed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. She was rehearsing at the DiMenna Center in Manhattan.

*A version of this article appeared June 7, 2013, on page A24 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: In Fort Greene, a New Erykah.*

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