

Mahogany L. Browne & Sean Mason

CHROME VALLEY
Track by Track

This album is a collaborative effort built on trust and individual expression—from the composition to the production process. Mahogany trusted me to fully immerse myself in her words and compose music that actively reflected my response. I, in turn, trusted the studio personnel to immerse themselves in the composition, allowing their individual gifts to shine through clearly and effortlessly—all while maintaining sonic integrity and nuance, rooted in the spirit of the blues.

My task was to honor every word Mahogany wrote, ensuring each word was sung. The composition process felt like assembling a musical puzzle, reorganizing words into lyrics and song forms without knowing the final picture. Upon completion, I was filled with gratitude, not only because the puzzle was complete but because the “image” revealed itself, and I stood in awe of its beauty.

This album is a testament to true freedom—rooted in patience and understanding, encouraging and embracing individuality, and fostering collectivism on the backbone of community, a generational legacy. Lastly, this



album artwork

album is grounded in deep reverence for the Black woman, the noble subject of this work. With humility, gratitude, and grace, I attempted to interpret Mahogany's beautiful words to create an album masterpiece of compositional elegance, storytelling, and production quality that will be transformative and stand the test of time—because we truly are THAT people, beautiful people; we are beautiful.

Of each of the recited spoken word tracks, Mahogany L. Browne wrote:

1. Homer, Louisiana (Prelude)

This poem is my origin story. It reveals the underbelly of racism most Black Americans have survived. Each section is interchangeable because memories passed down from generation to generation challenge linear (re)memory. This poem is like river water; these memories return me to the source of my making.

2. Redbone Dances

"It sound like a blues song"

When I first read that line, I felt chills running down my body, and my assignment was clear: I must use harmony, melody, rhythm, and form to explore the depths of love, the love between two bodies. I quickly recognized the love embedded in the story, and I wanted to create an environment that supported and highlighted it. I aimed for the music to carefully caress the story, each measure simultaneously peeling off dead skin while nourishing the rest. This song captures the essence and nuanced complexity of love between two bodies — it never resolves, concluding by drifting off into the blue sky.

"Oh, how that sunrise got a name"

3. The Blk(est) Night 1993

This is an ekphrastic poem written in response to a picture I found taken of me during my junior year of high school. I thought deeply about the pain reflected in my gaze. There was anger and mistrust of faith and fairness. This is also an intergenerational nod to the Harlem Renaissance pillar, James Weldon Johnson's poem The Creation.

4. Best Time III

"Me too"

The question I wrestled with as I composed this song was: How do you compose music that amplifies a personal experience while also allowing room for others who share that experience to feel connected? This song was an approach of empathy and understanding; my goal was to listen and allow the words to guide my composition. The musical style was clear from the beginning: I aimed to interpret the blues in a way that nods to past shared experiences yet remains firmly in the present, amplifying those experiences still happening now. Thus, I resorted to the blues.

"The steam-crusted walls"

5. Kerosene Litany

What's the difference between June Jordan's critique of police brutality in America and Audre Lorde's critique of the oppression of women in the 21st century? This is the question Kerosene Litany ponders before revealing the cyclical nature of humanity. And how one breaches silence during a pandemic, traversing food deserts, and scaling the healthcare industry of the USA.

6. Trivia

"What is luck to a Black body?"

They say that framing things as a question invites the listener to adopt a more interactive mode of engagement, and that's precisely what Mahogany achieved with this masterpiece. My job was to enhance that inquiry through sonic irony.

Sonic irony involves juxtaposing singing about a serious topic with a trivial, Jeopardy-esque musical backdrop. It means contrasting a chromatic reality with a diatonic landscape. It means composing a catchy melody for a disturbing reality...

The hope is that the person singing it in the shower will eventually stop and think about the lyrics: “What is a bullet?” “What is a new and improved lynching?” “What is luck to a black body?” — perhaps this approach will work this time...

7. Working Title

“The name of this poem is”

This poem elicited the most visceral reaction from me out of all the poems upon first reading. It became my mission to arrange lyrics that reflected the original word order and compose music that captured that initial visceral reaction I experienced. I began composing immediately, wanting to honor the initial ideas that naturally emerged. I wrote with a sense of urgency, uncertain if that initial feeling would return.

In the studio, I encouraged everyone to be as vulnerable as possible.

Even after listening over 100 times, I still get full-body chills from this song.

“It ain’t got no name”

8. A Chorus Of Hands

This excerpt is part of a collection investigating the violence often celebrated when considering men as romantic partners. This poem attempts to balance the weight of a protector and lover, though the narrator, a child of an abusive father, is uncertain about how to separate the two safely. What kind of love doesn’t hurt?

9. If We Praise (We Are Beautiful)

“We are beautiful”

I keenly noticed the line “we are beautiful” after discovering that it was tucked right near the end of the poem. I felt it was the perfect way to introduce the conclusion of the album, recognizing and celebrating our beauty. So, I decided that it should be the overarching theme of the song and the album.

Throughout all our experiences, joys, and sorrows, we are still beautiful, and that beauty is worth recognizing and celebrating. THAT’S what “praise” means, if we praise...

10. Crowned

There is something to be learned from women who crown themselves. This poem relies on the backbone of the narrator and her insistence to divide the silence into pieces. My grandmother taught me regality can be a learned virtue. This is what her grandmother taught her. Therefore, this poem is a heirloom of self-love, self-respect, and defiance of anything attempting to stifle our birth-given right to bloom.

For more information, please contact
Krista Williams, Christopher Emond or Carla Sacks at Sacks & Co., 212.741.1000.,
krista@sacksco.com. christopher.emond@sacksco.com or carla@sacksco.com.