

Arts and Culture

In this section you will learn about three music icons: Portia White, Measha Brueggergosman, and Oscar Peterson, who have made a lasting mark on Canadian music.

Here is a list of activities you will work on:

- KWL Chart
- Reading
- Listening / Video

Look at the KWL chart below. What do you already know about black musicians in Canada? Write what you already know in the "K" column. What do you want to know about Portia White, Measha Brueggergosman and Oscar Peterson? Write down what you want to know in the "W" column of the chart.

KWL chart

K	W	L
What I know about Portia White, Measha Brueggergosman, and Oscar Peterson	What I want to know about Portia White, Measha Brueggergosman, and Oscar Peterson	What I learned about Portia White, Measha Brueggergosman, and Oscar Peterson

--	--	--

READING



Portia White (1911-1968)

Portia White broke through the colour barrier to become the first black Canadian operatic concert singer to win international acclaim.

Portia White was born in 1911, in Nova Scotia, and was the third of 13 children born to William A. White, whose parents had been in Virginia, and Izie Dora White, who was descended from Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia. Portia began singing in the church choir at age six. By the age of eight, she was singing the soprano parts from the opera Lucia de Lammermoor, and was so determined to become a professional singer that she walked 10 miles a week for music lessons.

She started her teacher training at Dalhousie University in 1929, and after graduating, became a schoolteacher in Black Nova Scotian communities, such as Africville and Lucasville.

Along with her teaching career, Portia White's performance career began with her formal debut at age 30, where critics described her voice as "a coloured and beautifully shaded contralto...It is a natural voice, a gift from heaven".

She went on to tour North America, South America and Europe during the 1950s and 1960s. One of her performances was for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in 1964. Her final public performance took place at the World Baptist Federation in Ottawa, in 1967.

In 1995, Portia White was named a "person of national historic significance" by the Government of Canada. A millennial stamp bearing her image was issued in 1999.



Oscar Peterson (1925-2007)

Born in 1925, in Montréal to Caribbean parents, Oscar Peterson was one of Canada's most honoured musicians and was regarded as one of the greatest jazz pianists of all time.

The youngest of four children, he began studying the piano and trumpet at age five. His father, a self-taught amateur organist, led the family band in concerts at community halls and churches, insisted that all the Peterson children learn the piano and a brass instrument. Oscar began studying the trumpet at age five, but focused solely on piano at age eight, after a battle with tuberculosis, a disease of the lungs.

He attended the Conservatoire de Musique du Québec in Montréal. As a student he entered a contest held by radio personality Ken Sobel, and won first prize. As part of the prize he began his own weekly radio show called "Fifteen Minutes' Piano Rambling".

He emerged as a celebrity in Montréal's music scene in the early 1940s. His dazzling style earned him the nicknames "The Brown Bomber of Boogie-Woogie" and "Master of Swing".

Peterson was also a composer. His best known composition was *Canadiana Suite*, an eight part work which is composed of jazz themes inspired by regions of Canada including "Wheatland" (The Prairies), "Hogtown Blues" (Toronto), and "Land of the Misty Giants" (the Rocky Mountains). Peterson described it as "the Musical portrait of the Canada I love". *Canadiana Suite* was nominated for a Grammy Award as best jazz composition of 1965.

His lasting legacy has been noted by him being inducted into the Canada Walk of Fame in 2013.



Measha Brueggergosman - (1977-Present)

Have you ever wondered what it was like to sing in front of thousands of people? The famous Canadian opera singer Measha Brueggergosman can tell you a little bit about it. Born in Fredericton New Brunswick, as Measha Gosman, she began singing in the choir at her Baptist church to which her father was a deacon. She went on to study voice and piano at the age of seven.

As a teenager Ms. Gosman spent her summers on scholarship at the Boston Conservatory, and later went on to earn her Bachelor of Music degree at the

University of Toronto. She then travelled to Germany for five years to earn her Master's degree at the Robert Schumann Hochschule.

Ms. Gosman married her high school sweetheart Marcus Bruegger. When they married, they combined their last names to make Brueggergosman, and she is known by that name today.

Brueggergosman has appeared throughout Canada, where she has performed with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Montréal Symphony Orchestra, and Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra. She has also appeared internationally, in countries such as the United States and Germany.

Brueggergosman has had an interest in exploring her ancestry and learning about how her ancestors came to live in Canada. In 2015 she starred in the documentary titled *Songs of Freedom*, which following her learning about her African ancestry, leading up to a concert of African-American spirituals. This documentary was broadcast on Vision TV, in February 2015 to celebrate Black History Month. Here is a short clip from the movie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qI4n2lWYyag>

Listening/ Video

Information from the videos and audios will also be included in the quiz.

Watch the following videos. What strikes you about them?

1. "D'Oreste, d'Ajace" from Idomeneo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU1SE-zJT_I

Measha Brueggergosman performs with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra

2. "Night and Dreams"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vqwls2dMTyw>

Measha Brueggergosman performs a song from her album

3. **"Wade in the Water"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2m5wrkFOiY>

Measha Brueggergosman performs an African American Spiritual

4. **Oscar's Boogie**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0cnme-ntig>

5. **Canadiana Suite, "Wheatland"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C1VZHrFH2k>

References

This is for more information. You do not have to study the references.

<http://blackhistorycanada.ca/arts.php?themeid=22&id=3>

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/oscar-peterson/>

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/portia-white-emc/>