

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark dress with white polka dots. She is standing in a grassy field with trees in the background. She is holding a dark-colored electric guitar. The lighting is soft, suggesting a sunny day with some shadows.

# LEYLA McCALLA

## VARI-COLORED SONGS

a tribute to langston hughes



A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark dress with white polka dots. She is standing in a grassy field with trees in the background. She is holding a dark-colored electric guitar. The lighting is soft, suggesting a wooded area with sunlight filtering through the trees.

# LEYLA McCALLA

## VARI-COLORED SONGS

a tribute to langston hughes



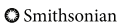


**LEYLA McCALLA**  
**VARI-COLORED SONGS**



1. **Heart of Gold** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:00
2. **When I Can See the Valley** (L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:10
3. **Mèsi Bondye** (Arrangement: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:26
4. **Girl** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:51
5. **Kamèn sa w fè?** (Words and arrangement: Ago Fixé–Additional arrangement: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:22
6. **Too Blue** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:28
7. **Manman Mwen** (Arrangement: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:19
8. **Song for a Dark Girl** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:49
9. **As I Grew Older / Dreamer** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:50
10. **Love Again Blues** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:39
11. **Rose Marie** (Arrangement: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 2:58
12. **Latibonit** (Arrangement: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:49
13. **Search** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:20
14. **Lonely House** (Words: L. Hughes/Copyright © 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes–Music: K. Weill/Chappell & Co., ASCAP–Hampshire House Publishing, ASCAP) 3:27
15. **Changing Tide** (L. McCalla/MAKALA Music, ASCAP) 3:04

*Langston Hughes' poems used by permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.*



*This recording is part of the **African American Legacy** series  
co-produced with the Smithsonian National Museum of  
African American History and Culture*

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# Finding Langston Hughes

Leyla McCalla

I've always had the feeling that the classical music career track wasn't for me. The idea that, as a first-generation Haitian American, I would compete to play music in environments that championed a Western European perspective never sat well with me. After graduating from college, living in Brooklyn, NY, I found myself juggling a life of bartending, freelance cello gigs, and involvement with a number of projects exploring improvisation and arranging. I started to examine my musical motives more deeply. One question persisted: What do I really want to do with music?

My father had gifted me a book of Langston Hughes' poetry when I was 16 years old. *The Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* felt like an ally, and I knew that I would hold these poems close to me for the rest of my life. I continued to question my musical path for years, and then one day at a flea market in Brooklyn, I came across the anthology *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. There was no way to know at the time, but this collection would set into motion my next steps, and offer some resolve to the introspection about my music and intention.

One afternoon, I opened the book to a poem called "Vari-Colored Song." This poem asked me to pick up my guitar and imagine what the words might sound like in a melody. I remember the feeling of excitement and discovery as I tried out this setting-poem-to-music on other poems. Though this felt like a novel discovery, I later learned musicians have always been drawn to Hughes' poetry, and Hughes himself was drawn to music. In addition to the accolades he received for his writing, Hughes became known as the inventor of jazz poetry, notably collaborating with the great Charles Mingus on an album called *Weary Blues*, released in 1958.

The musicality of Hughes' work shifted my perspective on how I could and should be making music. I started to hear melodies and harmonies to certain poems and felt that adding music to these poems gave them new life. I also felt that the socio-political power and heartbreaking humanity of Hughes' words had only increased over time. A sense of urgency in setting the poems to music overtook my imagination. I formed The Langston Hughes



Project, a small collective of musicians and friends, to help me experiment with fleshing out musical ideas.

This burgeoning collection of songs helped shift what I saw in myself musically and pushed me to explore my physical voice. I had always shied away from identifying as a singer—mostly out of fear and the feeling of vulnerability that always surfaced—but I felt a new and deep sense of purpose singing Hughes' words.

Meanwhile, I became hungry for more information about Hughes' life. I read both of his autobiographies, and through them I saw a Langston Hughes jaded by the sudden fall of the Harlem Renaissance, finding himself journeying beyond the borders of the United States. *I Wonder as I Wander* begins in Haiti, the country of my ancestral origin. Though steeped in aspects of Haitian culture through my upbringing and early life travels to Haiti, it wasn't until I moved to New Orleans in 2010 that I started to grasp the impact of Haitian culture in the United States. Ned Sublette's book, *The World That Made New Orleans*, beautifully delineates how the Haitian revolution, fomented by a series of successful slave rebellions, led to the creation of the first Black independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. Mass emigration from what was then the island of Saint-Domingue to the territory of Louisiana doubled the territory's population. It also led to the Louisiana Purchase, when Napoleon Bonaparte was forced to sell the territory of Louisiana—which comprised a third of the size of what is now the United States—to the then burgeoning nation. The thought of an independent Black nation created a sense of fear and insecurity in the colonial powers of the time and created a cycle of violence that continues its attempts to uphold the status quo and maintain a concentration of power among the wealthy and elite. This is surely something that touched Langston Hughes and resulted in a powerful expansion of his perspective of the Black world.

The collision of Hughes' inspiration and my deepening knowledge of Haitian history helped me feel that I was in the right place in New Orleans, a city that has nurtured my creativity and deepened my perspective on blackness, politics, and social dynamics for the last ten years.

Shortly after settling in New Orleans, I found an album called *Haitian Folk Songs*, released on Folkways in 1953 by Frantz Casséus and Lolita Cuevas. I was amazed that I had

never heard this music before, and I felt that I needed to hear more. Had Langston Hughes heard these songs in Cap-Haïtien in the 1930s? We'll never know for sure, but the thought certainly kept my mind turning.

These traditional Haitian songs offer us the opportunity to tap into the nuances of Haitian-Kreyòl and to deepen our understanding of Haitian culture. Similarly, Hughes' work aimed to legitimize Black vernacular by celebrating its nuances and expressions, taking it from the fringes of society to the heart of academia and the literary expression of Black culture.

The confluence of all of these artistic influences gave me the idea to pair my Hughes compositions with Haitian folk songs and my own original words. While these elements are seemingly disparate, I also came to embrace that, in fact, placing them side by side wasn't a "stretch." All of these songs are manifestos of my life experiences as a Black, Haitian American woman and the daughter of Haitian immigrants, and an homage to the humanity and creative spirit of Langston Hughes—an influence that continues to guide my creative work.

Fast forward from the original release of this album in 2014, and I have released several albums, traveled the world singing these songs, and given birth to three beautiful children. My understanding of my own humanity has expanded and so has my vision and sense of urgency as an artist. I will always champion marginalized people and share stories that I feel need to be told and remembered. I am deeply committed to using music to remind us of our collective humanity, our need for love, our sense of belonging and comfort. Armed with that self knowledge and spiritual groundedness, we can demand what we need not only to survive, but to thrive.

Re-releasing these songs at such an uncertain time in our global history brings to mind all that has come before us. The wisdom and truth that Langston Hughes continues to provide us through his prolific output inspires us to celebrate the assumedly mundane and stigmatized parts of our society. The future has always been uncertain, and it has always been up to us to push for the changes that we want to see in the world. Let these words and poems serve as a guiding light to a more just, more light-filled, and more humane world.



# The Wisdom and Truth of Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

Jean-Pierre Bruneau

This tribute album sheds a light on a prolific American poet, novelist, playwright, columnist, and social activist, best known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance—a literary and artistic movement that fostered a new Black cultural identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Hughes’ African American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would also influence foreign Black writers such as Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, and helped to inspire the “négritude” movement in France and in the French colonies. Hughes created jazz poetry; one of his favorite pastimes was sitting in the clubs listening to blues and jazz and writing poetry. A new rhythm emerged in his writing, as in this poem, “The Weary Blues,” published in 1923:

(...) With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man’s soul.

O Blues! (...)

If Langston Hughes’ poetry deeply influenced Leyla McCalla during her youth, it’s worth noting that Hughes, a world traveler (he visited several African countries and also Italy, France, Russia, and Spain), spent about three months in Haiti in the early 1930s. Taking copious notes and gaining access to aspects of Haitian culture usually closed to foreigners, he had come back outraged at the nation’s poverty but profoundly interested in the rich political and cultural heritage of the world’s “first Black Republic.” As he wrote in his autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956):

(...) Haiti, land of blue sea and green hills (...) Nights full of stars, throbbing with Congo drums. At the capital lovely ladies ambergold, mulatto politicians, warehouses full of champagne, banks full of money. A surge of black peasants who live on the land, and the foam of the cultured elite in Port-au-Prince who live on the peasants. (...)

Having briefly met Jacques Roumain, Haiti's best novelist, Hughes later translated his *Masters of the Dew*. He and fellow writer Arna Bontemps from Louisiana also initiated a classic children's novel, *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti*. Later, Hughes wrote the play *The Emperor of Haiti*, and during the 1950s the libretto for *Troubled Island*, an opera about the Haitian revolution.

Hughes, like many Black writers and artists of his time, was drawn to the promise of communism as an alternative to a segregated America. When asked why he never joined the Communist Party, he wrote, "It was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept." In 1953, he was called before the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations led by Joseph McCarthy. Following his testimony, Hughes distanced himself from communism.

One Black writer observed of Hughes, "Langston set a tone, a standard of brotherhood and friendship and cooperation, for all of us to follow. You never got from him, 'I am the Negro writer,' but only 'I am a Negro writer.' He never stopped thinking about the rest of us."

**Jean-Pierre Bruneau** is a French filmmaker and journalist based in Paris. His two acclaimed documentaries, *Dedans le Sud de la Louisiana* and *Louisiana Blues*, celebrate and explore the richness of the musical culture of Southwest Louisiana.

Langston Hughes photos  
by Rowland Scherman



## Track Notes

### 1. Heart of Gold

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, cello, vocals; Tom Pryor, pedal  
steel; Joseph DeJarnette, bass

If I had a heart of gold  
As some folks I know  
I'd up and sell my heart of gold  
And head north with the dough

But I don't have a heart of gold  
My heart's not even lead  
It's made of plain old Georgia clay  
And that's why, my heart is red

I wonder why red clay's so red  
And Georgia skies so blue  
I wonder why it's yes to me  
But yes sir, sir, to you

I wonder why the sky's so blue  
And why the clay's so red  
Why down south is always down  
And never up instead.

### 2. When I Can See the Valley

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, cello, vocals

Well I'm praying  
Because I'm scared  
That my time  
Is coming soon  
And I pray  
Because I fear  
That I've got too much to lose

When your savior  
Came a knocking  
Were you ready  
To be free

And would you ask her  
Up in Heaven  
To save a place for me

I'm not asking for salvation  
But I am afraid to fly  
We all want to  
Go to heaven  
But no one wants to die

And I'm choosing to be faithful  
To have something to hold onto

But when I can see the valley  
I'll begin my search for you

### 3. Mèsi Bondye

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, cello, vocals;  
Tom Pryor, pedal steel

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade kouman lamizè fini pou nou

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade tout sa lanati pote pou nou (x2)

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade kouman lamizè fini pou nou

Lapli tonbe, mayi pouse  
Tout timoun ki grangou prale manje

Annou danse Kongo  
Annou danse Petwo

Papa Bondye di nan syèl la mizè fini  
Papa Bondye di nan syèl la mizè fini pou nou

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade tout sa lanati pote pou nou

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade kouman lamizè fini pou nou (x2)

Mèsi Bondye  
Gade tout sa lanati pote pou nou

Lapli tonbe, mayi pouse  
Tout timoun ki grangou prale manje

Annou danse Kongo  
Annou danse Petwo

Papa Bondye di nan syèl la mizè fini  
Papa Bondye di nan syèl la mizè fini pou nou

Mizè nou fini (x4)

Thank you, Lord  
See how our misery has ended

Thank you, Lord  
See all that nature has brought us

The rain is falling, the corn is growing  
All the hungry children will eat

Let's dance Congo  
Let's dance Petro

Our Father in heaven says the misery is over  
Our Father in heaven says the misery is over  
for us.



#### 4. Girl

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, cello, tenor banjo, vocals;  
Tom Pryor, pedal steel

She lived in sinful happiness  
And she died in pain  
She danced in sunshine  
And laughed in rain

She went one summer morning  
Where the flowers spread the plain  
She told everybody  
She'd be coming back again

Folks built her a coffin  
And they hid her deep in the earth

Seems like she said,  
"My body brings new birth"

She went one summer morning  
Where the flowers spread the plain  
She told everybody  
She'd be coming back again

For sure there grew flowers  
And tall young trees  
Sturdy tweeds and grasses  
To sway in the breeze

And sure she lived in growing things with  
no pain  
That dance in sunshine and laugh in rain.





## 5. Kamèn sa w fê?

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, vocals

Based on lyrics and arrangement by  
Ago Fixé from the Alan Lomax recording  
of Ago's Bal Band, December 25, 1937,  
Port-au-Prince. Lyrics transcribed by  
Gage Averill and Louis Carl Saint Jean  
and reprinted from *Alan Lomax in  
Haiti: 1936–1937*, courtesy of The  
Association for Cultural Equity and  
Harte Recordings.

Ou fèk gentan leve  
Ou konprann ou pare  
Ou konprann ou fè la maryaj  
Ala yon fanm ki deraye!

Ale w kite sou ray  
Ou al kore sou teras  
Ou konprann ou fè la maryaj  
Ala yon fanm ki deraye!

Jennonm nan di  
Li revoke  
Li pa t voye w Kwadebouke  
Ala w ale w men yon kote  
Kekeleke fè ou lote.

You've only just grown up  
You understand you're ready  
You understand you've married  
Look at a woman who's off track!

So you go off [the rails]  
You embrace on the porch  
You understand that you've married  
Look at a woman who's talking nonsense!

The young man says  
He's breaking up  
He did not send you to Croix-des-Bouquets  
So you take yourself back to where  
Love had turned your head.

## 6. Too Blue

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, vocals; Luke  
Winslow King, guitar; Cassidy Holden, bass

I've got the sad and old weary blues  
I don't know where to go  
I don't know where to turn  
Nobody cares about you when you sink  
so low

What shall I do  
What shall I say  
Shall I take a gun and just put myself away?

I wonder if one bullet would do  
As hard as my head is  
It would probably take two

But I ain't got neither bullet nor gun  
And I'm too blue, to look for one.



## 7. Manman Mwen

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, vocals;  
Rhiannon Giddens, shaker, vocals

Chorus:

Manman m voye m nan dlo

[Pou] m al kenbe kribich... ooooooooo

Mwen di, chè manman

Se ti fi mwen ye

Mwen pa sa kenbe kribich

[repeat Chorus]

Alò mwen di l bèl,

Bèl bèl ti gason

Mwen di, chè mesye

Fè m kado de ti kribich

Bondye va remèt ou sa

[Chorus]

Yo di mwen mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Devine m ap devine

Yo di mwen mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

Devine m ap devine

Ki moun ki mete m nan sa?

Manman mwen, manman mwen

Sa pa janm fèt konsa

Manman mwen, manman mwen

Se ou ki mete m nan sa

Manman mwen, manman mwen

Sa k fè sa rive la

Manman mwen, manman mwen

Chorus:

Mother sent me to the river

To get crawfish... ohhhh

I said, "Dear mother,

I'm just a little girl.

I can't catch crawfish."

And so I told him he was handsome

A real handsome boy

I said, "Dear sir,

Give me a pair of crawfish.

God will return [your kindness]."

[Chorus]

They said "Mmmmmmmmmmm,"

I keep guessing

They said "Mmmmmmmmm,"

I keep guessing

Who got me into this?

My mother, my mother

It shouldn't have happened this way

My mother, my mother

You're the one who got me into this

My mother, my mother

Why did it get to this?

My mother, my mother

## 8. Song for a Dark Girl

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, guitar, vocals

Way down south in Dixie,  
Break the heart of me,  
They hung my black young lover,  
To a crossroads tree.

Way down south in Dixie,  
Bruised body high in the air,  
I asked the white Lord Jesus,  
What was the use of prayer.

Way down south in Dixie,  
Break the heart of me,  
Love is a naked shadow,  
On a gnarled and naked tree.



## 9. As I Grew Older / Dreamer

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Yah Supreme, spoken word;  
Leyla McCalla, cello; Liz Hanley, violin

I take my dreams  
And make of them a bronze vase,  
And a wide round fountain  
With a beautiful statue in its center,  
And I ask you:  
Do you understand my dreams?  
Sometimes you say you do  
And sometimes you say you don't.  
Either way  
It doesn't matter.  
I continue to dream.  
  
It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun —  
My dream.

And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose slowly, slowly  
Dimming,  
Hiding,  
The light of my dream  
Rose until it touched the sky —

The wall.

Shadow.  
I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.  
  
My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!

## 10. Love Again Blues

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, guitar, vocals; Luke Winslow-  
King, guitar; Cassidy Holden, bass; Matt  
Rhody, fiddle

My life ain't nothin' but a lot of God knows  
what  
My life ain't nothin' but a lot of God knows  
what  
Just one thing after another  
Added to the troubles I've got



When I had you I thought I had me an  
angel child  
When I had you I thought I had an angel  
child  
You turned out to be the devil  
You mighty nigh drove me wild  
  
Tell me, Tell me what makes love such an  
ache and a pain  
Tell me what makes love such an ache and  
a pain  
Well it takes you and it breaks you  
But you got to love again.

## 11. Rose Marie

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, vocals;  
Rhianon Giddens, shaker, vocals;  
Hubby Jenkins, guitar

Pa gen manman  
Pa gen papa woh!  
Li san zanmi  
Li san fanmi woh!

[repeat]

Rose-Marie se ou ki mennen Dodo sou  
Pòtay  
Chèche mwayen pou viv avè l o  
Wi manman  
Mizisyen se dra blan wo o

[repeat all of the above]



Abiye w  
Abiye w

[He] doesn't have a mother  
[He] doesn't have a father!  
He has no friends  
He has no family

[repeat]

Rose-Marie, you brought Dodo to Portail  
Find a way to live with him  
Yeah, Mama  
Musicians are an open book (they keep  
no secrets).

[repeat all of the above]

Get dressed  
Get dressed

## 12. Latibonit

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, cello, vocals; Hubby Jenkins,  
bones; Cassidy Holden, bass; Don Vappie,  
tenor banjo

Latibonit o

Yo voye pale mwen

Yo di m solèy malad

Chorus:

Solèy malad li kouche

Latibonit o

Yo voye pale mwen

Yo di m solèy malad

Lè m te rive

Mwen jwenn solèy kouche

Lè m te rive

Mwen jwenn solèy kouche

Sa fè m lapèn o

Pou m antere solèy

Se regretan sa

Pou m antere solèy

[Chorus]

Lè m te rive

Mwen jwenn solèy mouri

Lè m te rive

Mwen jwenn solèy mouri

Sa fè m lapèn o

Pou m antere solèy

Se regretan sa

Pou m antere solèy

Sa fè mwen mal o

Pou m antere solèy

Se malere sa

Pou m antere solèy

Artibonite oh

They sent me word

The sun\* is ill

Chorus:

The sun is ill, it's lying still

Artibonite oh

They sent me word

The sun is ill

When I arrived

I found the sun lying still

When I arrived

I found the sun lying still



It saddened me  
To have to bury the sun  
It's a pity  
To have to bury the sun

[Chorus]

When I arrived  
I found that the sun had died  
When I arrived  
I found that the sun had died

It saddened me  
To have to bury the sun  
It's a pity  
To have to bury the sun

It hurt me  
To have to bury the sun  
It's sad

To have to bury the sun.  
To have to bury the sun.

*\*I was told by my dad that this song is about a bad harvest in the Artibonite valley. Some say it is actually about a woman named Sole who is dying. As it is an old folk song, there are likely many interpretations.*

### 13. Search

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, guitar, vocals;  
Rhiannon Giddens, vocals

All life is but the climbing of a hill  
To seek the sun that ranges far beyond  
Confused with stars and lesser lights anon  
And planets where the darkness reigneth still.

All life is but the seeking for that sun  
That never lets one living atom die,  
That flames beyond the circles of the eye,  
Where never and forever are as one.

And seeking always, through this human span,  
That spreads its drift of years beneath the sky,  
Confused with living, goeth simple man,  
Unknowing and unknown into the Why.

The Why that flings itself beyond the sun,  
And back in space to where,  
Time was begun.



## 14. Lonely House

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, cello, vocals

At night when everything is quiet  
This old house seems to breathe a sigh  
Sometimes I hear a neighbor snoring  
Sometimes I hear a baby cry

Sometimes I hear a staircase creaking  
Sometimes a distant telephone  
And then the quiet settles down again  
The house and I are all alone.

Lonely house,  
Lonely me,  
Funny with so many neighbors,  
How lonely it can be.

Lonely street, lonely town.  
Funny, you can be so lonely,  
With all these folks around.

I guess, there must be something,  
I can't comprehend.  
Sparrows have companions,  
Even stray dogs find a friend.  
That night for me is not romantic,  
Unhook the stars and bring them down,  
I'm lonely, in this lonely house,  
In this lonely town.

## 15. Changing Tide

© 2013 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Leyla McCalla, tenor banjo, vocals; Tom Pryor,  
pedal steel

Changing tide, river rise,  
The water's high  
Leave it all behind  
Let it float by  
The flood can't wash away these roots that  
grow for you.  
Fear won't blind me from the truth I can  
see through.

Rushing wave, levee break,  
Submerged again,  
Too deep to forsake,  
What we began.  
My heart it sinks reflecting on your muddy  
banks.  
Overwhelmed, accepting how much work  
it takes.  
The river will flow, release these waters to  
the sea.  
Time will tell and wash your river over me.







## Credits

Produced by Leyla McCalla and Joseph Dejarnette  
Recorded by Joseph Dejarnette at Studio 808a, Floyd, VA, and Earl Scioneaux at Piety Studios, New Orleans, LA  
Mixed by Joseph Dejarnette  
Mastered by Bruce Barielle  
Photos by Timothy Duffy;  
Haiti photos by Leyla McCalla  
Annotated by Leyla McCalla and Jean-Pierre Bruneau  
Smithsonian Folkways executive producers: Huib Schippers and John Smith  
Production manager: Mary Monseur  
Production assistant: Kate Harrington  
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Cecille Chen, director of business affairs and royalties; Logan Clark, executive assistant; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Beshou Gedamu, marketing specialist; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Madison Hart, royalty assistant; Fred Knittel, marketing specialist; Seth Langer, licensing and marketing assistant; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Mary Monseur, production manager; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Huib Schippers, emeritus curator and director; Sayem Sharif, director of financial operations; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, marketing manager; Brian Zimmerman, sales representative and fulfillment.

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## About Smithsonian Folkways

**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.**

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AFRICAN  
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**LEGACY**  
RECORDINGS

# LEYLA McCALLA

## VARI-COLORED SONGS

1. Heart of Gold 3:00 2. When I Can See the Valley 2:10 3. Mèsi Bondye 2:26  
4. Girl 2:51 5. Kamèn sa w fè? 2:22 6. Too Blue 2:28 7. Manman Mwen 3:19  
8. Song for a Dark Girl 2:49 9. As I Grew Older / Dreamer 3:50  
10. Love Again Blues 2:39 11. Rose Marie 2:58 12. Latibonit 3:49 13. Search 3:20  
14. Lonely House 3:27 15. Changing Tide 3:04

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Leyla McCalla's **Vari-Colored Songs** is a celebration of the complexity of Black culture and identity, and a tribute to the legacy of poet and thinker Langston Hughes. A songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, McCalla sets Hughes' poems to her own spare yet profound compositions. She juxtaposes these with arrangements of folk songs from Haiti, the first independent Black nation and the homeland of her parents, tapping into the nuances of Black experience. McCalla's music elegantly weaves Haitian influences together with American folk music, just as Hughes incorporated Black vernacular into his remarkable poetry, and the way the Haitian Kreyòl is a beacon for the survival of African identity through the brutal legacy of colonialism. This is music of reclamation, imbued with a quiet power that grapples with the immense weight of history.

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