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### The changemaker playlist - Music Edition

Gabrielle See

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# The Changemaker Playlist

## *Music Edition*

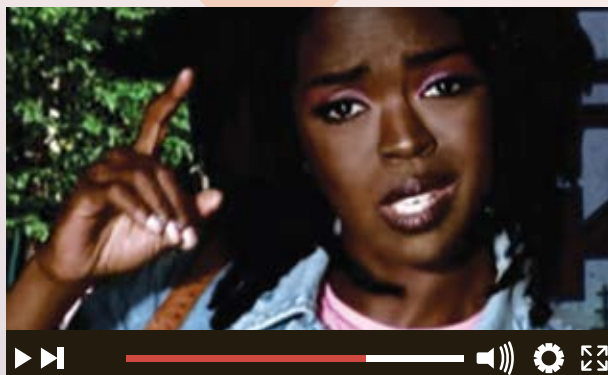
By Gabrielle See

*Music* is meant for the listener's enjoyment and entertainment; however, some songs will go down in history for not just sounding good, but also delivering a powerful message. Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" was released in 1939 when lynching of African Americans still occurred, while Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" came out in 1971 in the midst of the Vietnam War. Songs like these, and others, paved the way for music to become an effective platform for social commentary. Today, the appeal of socially conscious music endures—Gaye's work is said to have influenced that of Aretha Franklin, who in turn inspired Ms. Lauryn Hill, who then influenced Sampa the Great. The list goes on.

In that same spirit, I have compiled a playlist of contemporary songs that bear an impactful message. May their lyrics and tunes inspire changemakers of this century and beyond.

# 1 “Everything Is Everything”

by Ms. Lauryn Hill (1999)



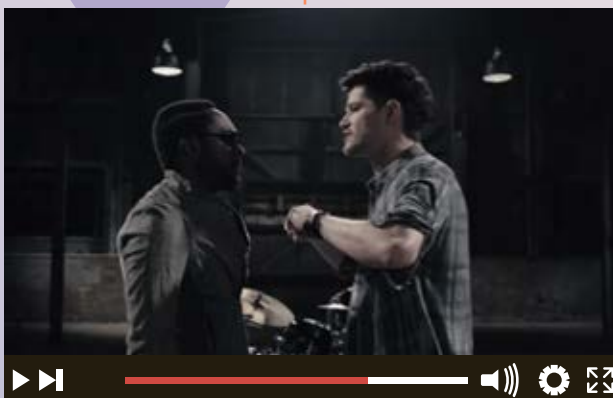
Screengrab of “Everything Is Everything” music video on YouTube.

The song is a spin on the phrase “everything is everything” which, according to *Urban Dictionary*, means “it is what it is”. The idea of accepting things for what they are is common among many young people, who observe various social injustices in the world and their communities, alongside the apathy and corruption of established systems, and therefore feel powerless to change things. On this, Hill sings: “I wrote these words for everyone who struggles in their youth/Who won’t accept deception, instead of what is truth.” While the direct audience she had in mind were the black youth communities in inner-city America, this message of hope transcends racial and geographical boundaries. The lyrics in her refrain are encouraging: “Everything is everything/What is meant to be, will be/After winter, must come spring/Change, it comes eventually.”

# “Hall of Fame” 2

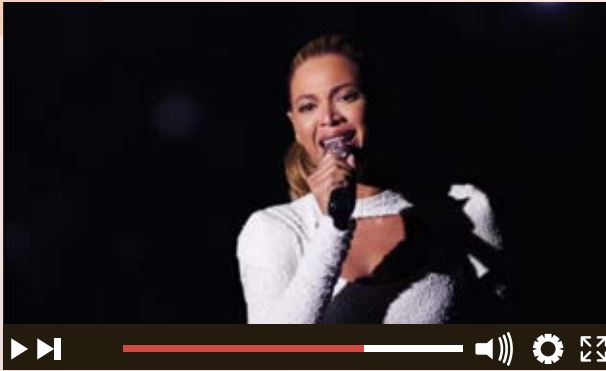
by The Script ft. will.i.am (2012)

How often do you come across a pop song with these many calls to action? “Be students/Be teachers/Be politicians/Be preachers/Be believers/Be leaders/Be astronauts/Be champions/Be truth seekers”? The idea that there are endless pathways to making a positive difference is both uplifting and action-inspiring. The lyrics speak for themselves. Plus, the incredibly catchy beat makes this song earworm material in the best way possible.



Screengrab of “Hall of Fame” music video on YouTube.

### 3 “I Was Here” by Beyoncé (2011)

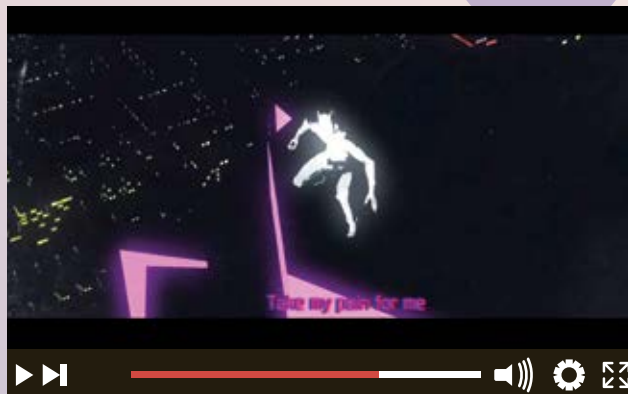


Screengrab of Beyoncé’s official United Nations World Humanitarian Day performance of “I Was Here” on YouTube.

This ballad is so moving and flawlessly delivered, it’s sure to give you chills. If you’re new to Beyoncé’s work, it’s easy to assume this song was written specifically for United Nations World Humanitarian Day, but this is actually a track off her 2011 album, *4*. Here’s a taste of some of the powerful lyrics: “I want to say I lived each day, until I die/And know that I meant something in, somebody’s life/The hearts I have touched, will be the proof that I leave/That I made a difference, and this world will see.”

### “Pray for Me” 4 by The Weeknd and Kendrick Lamar (2018)

“Pray for Me” is the ending track of the epic *Black Panther* soundtrack produced and curated by Kendrick Lamar. Inspired by both the 2018 film and referencing Lamar’s home state of California, this song highlights the universal struggles plaguing people of colour, including oppression, and race and gender inequality. The superhero-esque message of self-empowerment is obvious—“Who need a hero?/ You need a hero, look in the mirror, there go your hero/Who on the front lines at Ground Zero?”—and encourages us to be our own heroes.

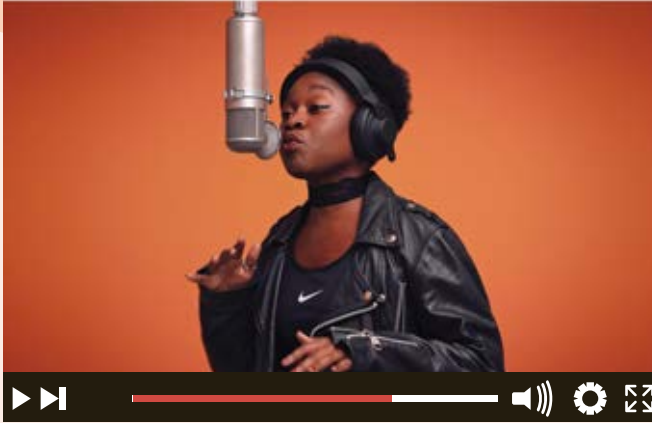


Screengrab of “Pray for Me” lyric video on YouTube.



# 5 *"Rhymes to the East"*

by Sampa the Great (2017)



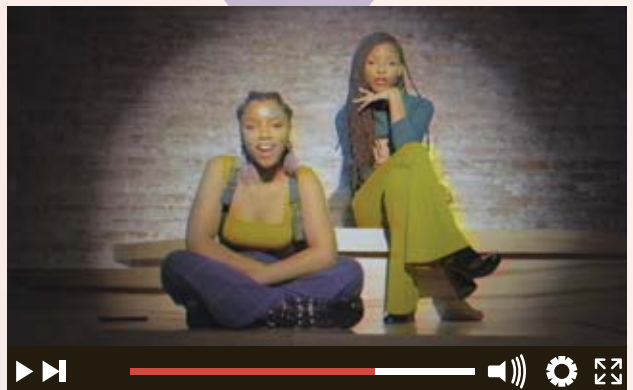
Screengrab of "Rhymes to the East" music video on YouTube.

Sampa the Great's raspy, soulful drawl is reminiscent of Nina Simone, and her lacerating lyrics suggest the influence of Ms. Lauryn Hill. "Rhymes to the East" features intricate, thought-provoking wordplay against a hypnotising beat and gypsy-ish musical lines. Her verses are laden with historical references to Black history, such as the underground railroad used by African-American slaves to escape into free states during the 1800s. But beyond the political commentary, the overarching message is about confronting one's own fears and staying true to oneself. As Sampa sings in the chorus, "I'm not going to fall/Play me small/Lose my soul/Be scared no more."

# *"The Kids Are Alright"* 6

by Chloe x Halle (2018)

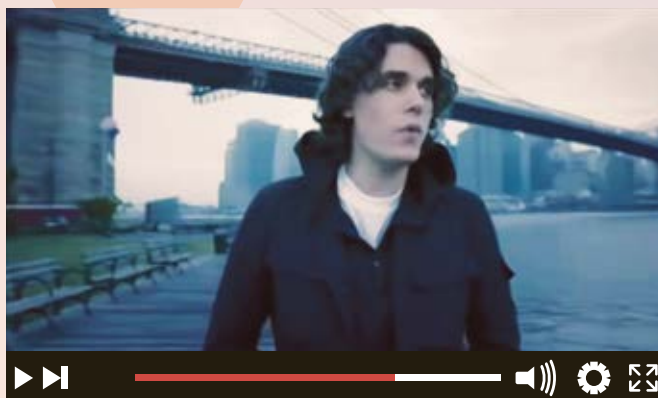
Don't let their ages fool you. Sisters Chloe and Halle Bailey are only 21 and 19, respectively, but have already been signed to a record label, released an album and starred in the American comedy series, *Grown-ish*. The talented R&B duo is living proof not only that the "kids" are alright, but also that they shouldn't be underestimated. Rather: "Everything is new cause we about that innovation/Call it how we see it we a genius generation." Watch this space.



Screengrab of "The Kids Are Alright" music video on YouTube.

# 7 “Waiting On the World to Change”

by John Mayer (2016)



Screengrab of “Waiting On the World to Change” music video on YouTube.

A decade (and more) later, John Mayer’s famous hit remains deeply relevant. Similar to Ms. Lauryn Hill’s “Everything Is Everything”, this song also touches on an individual’s state of inaction because they feel powerless in a broken world. However, while Hill advocates taking action, Mayer appears to adopt a more patient—even passive—stance: “One day our generation/Is going to rule the population/So we keep on waiting/Waiting on the world to change.” Certainly gives us pause for thought.



# 8 “What Do I Know?”

by Ed Sheeran (2017)

This hyper-positive bop may be a touch too naïve and “feel-good” for the more cynical listener. But Sheeran seems to acknowledge this with interjections of “But what do I know?” after every Hallmark-card-worthy offering like “Love can change the world in a moment”. On the other hand, the charm of this number lies in its earnestness and humility—we’ve all heard our share of songs that peddle negativity and gloom, so it’s refreshing to dream up a little positivity. Lyrics like “You know we are made up of love and hate/But both of them are balanced on a razor blade” and “The revolution’s coming, it’s a minute away/I saw people marching in the streets today” certainly allows us that.



Screengrab from “What Do I Know” audio video on YouTube.

# 9 “Yes I Can”

by Tony Dee (2016)



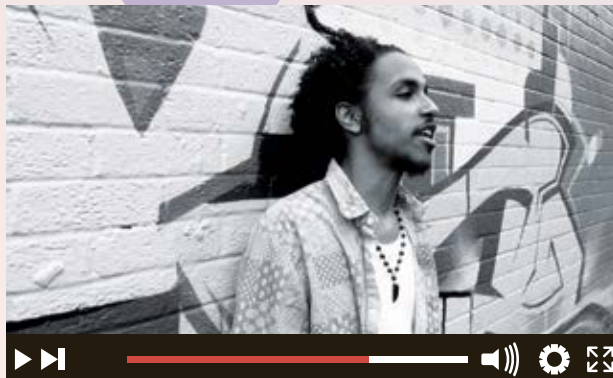
Screengrab from the trailer for the Rio Paralympics 2016 on YouTube.

While watching this music video—a trailer to promote the 2016 Rio Paralympics—I almost forgot that it was part of a marketing campaign for the event. More than proving that people with disabilities can do anything a normal person can (taking calls, eating, brushing teeth), “Yes I Can” is an anthem that celebrates awe-inspiring talent (watch and be wowed). All this against the smooth, Sinatra-esque vocals of Tony Dee, whose stirring and infectious performance had me humming along, “I can do anything, yes I can!”

# 10 “You and Me”

by AKA Keyz

AKA Keyz, a 21-year-old Sudanese rapper, is unapologetically political and activist in his music. Inspired by socially conscious rappers before him such as J. Cole, Kendrick Lamar and Ms. Lauryn Hill, he hopes to make music that inspires young people to push for positive societal, economic and political change. The call for a new generation of changemakers is apparent in the lyrics of “You and Me”: “To anybody hearing this track/Understand that it’s more than a lyric in a rap/I’m tryna uplift your spirits in fact/Together we’ll make a bigger impact.”



Screengrab from “You and Me” music video on YouTube.



**Gabrielle See** is a third-year undergraduate at the Singapore Management University, studying Politics, Law and Economics, with a second major in Economics. In her free time, she enjoys consuming all kinds of content: from podcasts and YouTube videos that analyse pop culture, to late-night talk shows. Gabrielle is interested in putting out impactful and truthful stories through writing, photography or videography. She can be reached at [xmsee.2016@socsc.smu.edu.sg](mailto:xmsee.2016@socsc.smu.edu.sg)