

Just SOul You Know

My musings on mostly music, society, and culture

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Ndegeocello Sings Simone!

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I confess I've been a fan of bassist/singer/songwriter [Meshell Ndegeocello](#) since she dropped her first album *Plantation Lullabies* in the early 90s. I've watched her perform in L.A. several times and once in Atlanta in 2007, which was memorable I must say. However, even more memorable than that was when I saw her years earlier live at the Virgin Mega store in Hollywood. Ndegeocello played a small in-store set then signed copies of her second released *Peace Beyond Passion* (96). I clearly remember asking her, as she signed the cover of my freshly bought CD, "Where'd you get that funk from?" like the *P-Funk* lyric. She smiled and said, "Yes, right there!" Wow! I just had a brief moment with Meshell Ndegeocello, whoa!

Over the years I've enjoyed the limitless range of Ndegeocello's music. As a serious soul music lover, I've especially relished in her exploration of the many nuances of soul. Ndegeocello and her music easily moved beyond the essentialist theory of the black artist. She approached several other genres of music in her own unique way.

So, when I heard she was in the process of recording an album of [Nina Simone](#) songs I was excitedly perplexed (this is a good thing). What would it sound like? Would it be funky with heavy bass lines? Or would the songs be reconfigured in emotion filled ballads with spoken word-like delivery? (You know how she does).

Nina Simone and Meshell Ndegeocello, on the one



— Art by Giorgio Casu ([click here](#))

foremost, Ndegeocello's voice is perfect for the songs she sings while her musical approach is spot on. She organically moves away—though not far—from the musical intention of Simone certainly due to the contemporary climate of the times. Ndegeocello finds a laid back groove for each song that departs from what NPR calls the “urgent” tone of Simone. Her small group of musicians recorded the album with an obvious audible post soul aesthetic that is undeniably Ndegeocello. She invited vocalist/musicians such as [Cody ChesnuTT](#), [Toshi Reagon](#), [Sinead O'Connor](#), and [Lizz Wright](#) to join her on this tribute to Simone. Collectively they sing with heartfelt respect for Simone whom Ndegeocello calls “royalty.”

This tribute album is a way to remember the indescribable force that was Nina Simone. Ndegeocello stated in a recent interview she hopes, “[to get more people interested in her, check out her catalog and sort of revive it, and also use her story and learn from her story.](#)” After hearing the album it is clear to me that Ndegeocello was the perfect person to put forth this stellar tribute. Yes, Ndegeocello sings Simone! In the end, I have to agree with Dr. Tillet when she suggests, Ndegeocello “[has always been Simone's heir apparent.](#)”

hand, are quite unique in their own right who together share some similarities. Scholar [Salamishah Tillet](#) suggests, “[Ndegeocello, like Simone, has dared to cross musical boundaries, express bold politics and be a steadfast presence as an African American woman instrumentalist in a male-dominated music scene.](#)” Also their similarities continue in terms of their fitting into socially comfortable places in America. On the other hand, they are opposites in terms of the musical **RESPONSE** to their perspective eras; Simone confronted racial inequality amid social and civil unrest while Ndegeocello struggled in a post civil rights climate with her personal sexuality within rigid cultural mores. A struggle afforded her by the work of Simone, in all seriousness.

Ndegeocello's new album, *Pour Une Âme Souveraine* (For A Sovereign Soul) was released in October and is a wonderfully crafted tribute to Simone. First and



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