

# LISETTE



Jean-Jacques  
Rousseau

Camille  
Nickerson

Ludovic  
Lamothe

Duvivier de la  
Makantiere

Clara  
Gottschalk Peterson

Join us on this cinematic journey through history where we discover the personal, political, and cultural significance of a Haitian folk song and the musicians that kept it alive.

A Film by Dr. Jean Bernard Cerin and Brandi Berry

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# My Lisette

A Digital Humanities Project

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## Deliverables:

1. A 30 minute short documentary entitled “My Lisette”
  - a. Three 1-hour on camera interviews
  - b. Five 5-minute performances
    - There are 11 performers; each performer will be filmed individually so the sound can be mixed by a sound editor. I will take that audio along with the videos and create a film for each performance.
  - c. 2-hours of On location b-roll (Howard, Philadelphia)
  - d. Archive footage, photographs and art used a b-roll
  - e. I will film seven hours of original footage and download two hours of archive footage
2. Five music videos of “Lisette quitté la plaine” by the following composers
  - a. Duvivier de la Mahautiere arr. Cerin: voice and lute
    - Two performers; 2 recordings; 10 minutes of footage
  - b. Jean Jacques Rousseau arr. Debra Nagy : voice, cello, baroque oboe
    - Three performers ; Three recordings ; 15 minutes of footage
  - c. Clara Gottschalk: voice and piano
    - Two performers; 2 recordings; 10 minutes of footage
  - d. Camille Nickerson: voice and piano
    - Two performers; 2 recordings; 10 minutes of footage
  - e. Ludovic Lamothe: voice and piano
    - Two performers; 2 recordings; 10 minutes of footage
3. A website to archive these resources
  - a. Create a branding plan for the website and potential social media platforms
  - b. Choose and pay for a website builder
    - I use Wix.com and pay 165.00 (profberry.com)
  - c. Claim your domain name
  - d. Gather your content
    - The major pieces will be created during the completion of the documentary. Additional content will be needed to make the website an engaging space beyond the screening of the documentary. It will also build on the call to action within the film by providing instructions and resources on how to research and create content.
  - e. Design your website elements
    - Keep the aesthetic of the film in mind so the website and press packet can all compliment each other.
  - f. Launch the website
    - Create graphics for social media platforms and email blast
4. Press Packet
  - a. Synopsis; Long, medium and short
  - b. Cast and Crew Bio
  - c. Ten FAQs
  - d. Publicity Stills
  - e. Reviews and Third Party Endorsements
  - f. Electronic Press Kit
    - set of videos and photos, interviews with the principal cast and crew, duplicated and distributed to appropriate people.

## Abstract:

“Lisette quitté la plaine” is a song text written in colonial St. Domingue around 1757 (St. Mery, Mahautiere) that made its way to France (Rousseau) and the United States where it became a popular Creole folk song (Gottschalk, Nickerson). The text was rediscovered in modern day Haiti and set to music yet again. (Lamothe) Contrary to typical slave narratives of its

time, this song humanizes the plight of an enslaved man whose beloved has been sent away. (Dauphin) In this project, Dr. Jean Cerin and myself will co-create five music video versions of this song that were written between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century by musicians in St. Domingue (colonial Haiti), France, the United States, and modern Haiti. We will then co-create a 30 minute documentary that provides a complete history of the song's origin and dissemination to explain how both Haiti and Louisiana came to claim this song as their own. This documentary will tell an intimate story about how Dr. Cerin and the black artists that came before him such as Camille Nickerson and Ludovic Lamothe along with allies like Clara Gottschalk and Jean Jacques Rousseau used our resources to center black narratives within a classical music cannon that often excludes those stories.

#### Background:

Telling a good story is a powerful tool. My documentary research and production centers around child abuse survivors. My preferred format is short documentary. I make short documentaries so the works can be screened in one setting and be accompanied by a panel of experts for a talk back. My films serve as educational healing tools. There is nothing more amazing then having someone tell me, "That's my story too. Until now I thought I was alone." To research child abuse at length is an emotional undertaking and interviewing someone that needs to go to painful places requires trust and guidance on my part. My award-winning film *This Woman's Work* features one person, and through a mixture of on camera interviews, voiceovers, b-roll, photos, and animation I show the story of her sexual abuse. The film ends in triumph with a message about "no more oppression." My most recent film, "Neglect" is currently submitted to several festivals. It also features one person, and with on camera interviews, voiceovers, and time lapse photography I give the viewer a glimpse into the life a man that survived being abused by a Schizophrenic mother.

In both films the goal is presenting the main story but also incorporating a secondary story that everyone can relate too. Heavy topics also requires a balance of emotions, so the audience is not overwhelmed. All good films require a well-executed tension and release pacing so the story can unfold while keeping the viewer engaged. For me, the storytelling building blocks begin during the preproduction and research phase and those elements are finalized during postproduction. Postproduction/editing is my specialty. Every minute of a film requires one hour of editing. It is a detailed and instinctual job that requires a strong understanding of software along with pace, storytelling, visual expression, and patience.

#### Goals:

I am applying for this Mellon Grant to design archival and educational resources for the song "Lisette quitté la plaine". These resources include:

1. Five musical variations (songs) of "Lisette quitté la plaine"
2. Five video variations of the musicians performing "Lisette quitté la plaine"
3. Multiple on camera interviews with scholars about "Lisette quitté la plaine" and associated subtopics (Haitian history, Creole culture, classical music, etc)
4. One short documentary about "Lisette quitté la plaine" and subtopics
5. One website that includes all the archival materials that have been created
6. Screening at film festivals
7. Press packet for film festivals

The production of these materials will:

1. Add to my tenure portfolio and aid me in receiving promotion and tenure at Lincoln University. This will be demonstrated by the short documentary being screened at film festivals and awarded loreals.
2. The reach and engagement analytics from the website will provide data that shows how our audience is using the materials.

3. After the film has completed its film festival circuit it will be available on the website for additional engagement and can be promoted for educational use in the classroom. A comment section will be added so we can gather additional data about the film and its effectiveness in the classroom.

#### Methodology:

I see the song “Lisette quitté la plaine” as the main character and to gain a true understanding of their persona I will participate in as much research as I can alongside Dr. Cerin. Knowing the history of the song and seeing Dr. Cerin as he engages with this information is key to envisioning the documentary’s final look. I will also watch multiple documentaries about Haiti, music and first-person narratives. I see the film unfolding through Dr. Cerin’s journey and revealing information to us in a detective POV style. Seeing his reaction as he discovers new information or seeing students react as he explains simple musical concepts will humanize the process in a way that can inspire everyone to believe that they can do this as well. The documentary *My Octopus Teacher* or *Miss Representation* is the feel I am going for. Dr. Cerin should be firmly rooted in the film to create a personal bridge between the viewer and the material. The film will be informative with a call to action at the end. That call will be to look into your own past.

Filmmaking is very similar to scholarly research. We begin with a thesis statement (Title and tagline), we do a lit review (watch a lot of films), and we create a plan. During the preproduction process we put a lot of time and energy into making sure everything will go smoothly during production. Due to COVID location scouting maybe minimal. If musicians need to film themselves at home, I will meet with them via Zoom to discuss the color pallet, proper lighting and serve as a director if needs. Proper permission will be obtained for archival footage, music, and on camera interviews. Schedules will be created, and equipment will be purchased. I will design a look book and pitch deck. The look book (super fancy PowerPoint) will create a visual representation of the film’s color pallet, camera angles and other aesthetics so we can maximize the nonverbal communication of the film. This can take anywhere from 5-10 hours of research and design for the first draft, but like all research it will evolve over time. The pitch deck will incorporate elements of the look book and the grant proposal to flush out the idea fully as if we were asking a streaming service to add our film to their library. This notion is not too far off since I work with an organization with close ties to Netflix. Upon completion of the project Dr. Cerin and I can determine if the short film is enough or do, we want to pitch a feature length to The Gotham (<https://thegotham.org/>). Either way, if The Gotham saw potential in our work, we could explore making the film available to a larger audience.

As the film’s producer it is my job to see that all of this is well researched, organized, executed to guarantee that *My Lisette* will have the best chance of success. Immediately after each filming session I will look and listen to the footage to make sure we have what we need. If a second session needs to be scheduled Dr. Cerin and I will determine what date is best. This process will take ten and a half hours. Each filming session is an hour and with pausing for notes, rewatching adds 30 minutes to each clip. I will look a second time in greater detail when I edit the footage together. Editing a film requires about one hour for each minute. This film will take approximately 30 hours to editing. As the producer-editor I will be responsible for creating a cohesive look across all platforms. The look book and pitch deck will provide a guide for the website design. As I am editing the film my student assistant along with Dr. Cerin’s team can begin collaborating on the press packet and website framework. As I complete deliverables, they can be approved by Dr. Cerin and uploaded to the site.

#### Pedagogical Goals:

Upon completion of *My Lisette* I will add a new project to Com 207 Media Technology and Com 416 TV Productions. Students will replicate on a smaller scale what we have accomplished. They will research a folk song, and through found footage and an on-camera interview they will create a short video. Com 207 will be an introductory project that focuses on the basics of storytelling with a variety of artistic mediums. Com 416 will be an advanced project that will require audio production. Both projects will teach students the similarities between planning out a film and conducting traditional research and emphasize the importance of recovering the past.



## Alignment with the Lincoln University Mission & Vision:

This project aligns with Lincoln University's mission of global engagement and citizenship, particularly as they pertain to Pan African studies. Lincoln University has long championed black art and history. This project will be a major contribution to scholarship of Haitian and Louisiana Creole musical heritage. It will highlight the close historical relationship between Haiti and Louisiana. The thrust of the documentary champions the efforts of people who felt socially responsible to share their culture and narrative which closely aligns with the university mission to cultivate social responsibility. Finally, the robust interdisciplinary scope and methodology of this project embody the liberal arts ideals that we teach here at Lincoln University.

## Selection & Supervision of Assistant:

I will be selecting Danny Davis as my research assistant. Danny is a junior in the Mass Communications Department. He has a 3.98 GPA. He loves film and is currently taking French. He is also on the Strategic Track which means he has a strong understanding of PR and Marketing. This will help a great deal when we begin creating deliverables for the film festival. Danny has edited video projects for me in class and well as designed a website.

## Travel:

I reside in Lancaster, PA. Based on the needs of the film I will be traveling to:

1. Philadelphia, PA
2. Washington D.C.
3. Lincoln University

## Work Plan:

### April & May 2021: Pre-production planning and research

1. Hire musicians, distribute scores, schedule recording sessions.
2. Design/plan the structure and primary imagery of the documentary
3. Identify and schedule the primary interviews
4. Any preliminary online research that won't require travel or exorbitant costs.
  - a. A comprehensive literature review to identify all sources that mention "Lisette quitté la plaine."
  - b. In depth research on each of the composers who set the work.
  - c. Special focus on Camille Nickerson who did extensive research on Creole folk music and taught at Howard University.
  - d. Search French popular ballad archives from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to identify source material for the Louisiana melody of "Lisette quitté la plaine." This melody has characteristics of 18<sup>th</sup> century French music. I have yet to read a source that has identified the melody, however.
  - e. Research the history of "Que ne suis-je la fougere, " the popular French tune that was first used in St. Domingue.
  - f. Research other authors who discuss decolonizing classical music and the use of music to represent identity.
  - g. History of Haiti, Louisiana and France: colonialism, slavery, the movement of people between the 3 places.
  - h. Performance practice in Haiti, Louisiana and France

## June

1. Complete all preliminary research that I wasn't able to finish before June
2. Cerin, Berry and student will rehearse with musicians & record all videos both on site at Lincoln University and remotely where the musicians live.



3. Cerin & Berry will conduct remote interviews
  - a. Claude Dauphin in Montreal
  - b. Lauren Eldridge in MO
  - c. Louise Toppin in MI
  - d. Etc.
4. Cerin will travel to music libraries in Philadelphia
5. Cerin & Berry will complete the documentary Script
6. Cerin and student will begin work on website
7. Student will collect archival footage and imagery from Philadelphia, Haiti & Louisiana & France and imagery associated with the actual song.

#### July

1. Shoot footage at Howard University
2. Shoot footage at Lincoln University and Philadelphia
3. Complete website
4. Project goes into editing by July 20th

#### August

1. Make final edits
2. Launch website and present documentary at International Florence Price Festival final week of August 2021.

#### 2021-2022 School Year

Present this documentary on campus.

Make proposals to present this documentary at Film festivals, academic conferences, and other universities.

Continue to guest lecture on the subject matter.

Make final report in May 2022.

#### Budget:

\$7500 Salary

#### Summative Assessment:

By the end of August 2021, I will have completed the deliverables that have been listed. If Dr. Cerin requires anything more based on the success of the film or website I am happy to be a resource to him. This strong collaboration will push me to try new techniques and my outsider perspective will bring a new interpretation of the material. For me, every part of this film will add to my tenure portfolio, but it will be visually represented by the film festivals we place at and the reach and engagement achieved on the website.