



From the Benjamin Franklin Bridge to the White House, Melanie R. Hill is taking her turn in the spotlight.

Since then, music has been a way of life for Hill, a Virginia native who moved to Philadelphia in 2012 to pursue a doctorate in English language and literature at the University of Pennsylvania. But “it was always music that stayed at the core,” she says.

Her commitment to her craft has more than paid off: Hill’s résumé of concerts on local and national stages is impressive. At only 19, she had her first major turn in the spotlight, performing the national anthem at a Los Angeles Lakers game. She then went on to victory at Amateur Night at New York City’s Apollo Theatre, winning over its famously difficult crowd, followed by two first-place finishes on TV’s *Showtime at the Apollo*. And last year she opened for John Legend at the 12th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Lecture in Social Justice at Penn’s Irvine Auditorium.

Her most memorable achievements, however, are two performances at an even more hallowed hall. “Playing at the White House was the pinnacle,” Hill says of her June 2011 recitals. “Someone who worked there came to me and said, ‘Thank you so much for what you’re doing; our house needs this music.’ To know that I had a hand in calming the minds of the people who work in the White House was a blessing.”

Although she has toured throughout the US, what Hill appreciates most is how her adopted hometown has embraced her music. “The Philadelphia audience has been absolutely wonderful,” says the musician, who is planning a local concert in April and often performs at neighborhood churches. “People say how much my music has inspired them, and that’s how I know I was created to impact lives musically. But I never would have imagined that God would take my talent to such levels.”

In her downtime, when she’s alone with her instrument, Hill retreats to the spot in Philly that holds the most meaning for her: “I love the Benjamin Franklin Bridge. Music is a bridge that connects one person’s mind to another’s—the relationship between the artist and the audience. That’s why the Race Street Pier is one of my favorite spots in Philadelphia.”

Location is key for Hill, especially as she gears up to begin work on her next album. “I really want to choose the right studio to record in,” she says. “Everything needs to be in place for this album to be explosive.” **PS**

INSIGHT

Favorite musicians: Fred Hammond, Stevie Wonder, and John Legend, to name just a few.

Guilty pleasures: Barnes & Noble and Cold Stone Creamery’s Cake Batter ice cream.

On my nightstand: *Sonata Mulattica* by Rita Dove

No Strings Attached

WHEN SHE’S NOT CAPTIVATING AUDIENCES NATIONWIDE, SEASONED VIOLINIST MELANIE R. HILL CALLS PHILADELPHIA HOME. BY ALEXANDRA LESHNER

At 4 years old, a few dolls and a vivid imagination are enough to keep most girls entertained. But for Melanie R. Hill, watching her older sister in a private violin lesson inspired her to reach for playthings of a different nature. “You wonder what [a person] could really contemplate at 4, but music has always attracted my attention,” she says. “So when I noticed my sister playing violin, I told myself, I want to do that.”