

# THE WALL OF SONG PROJECT: FEELING GOOD

Social Change



Mel Day

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The Wall of Song Project is an interdisciplinary, collaborative art project exploring the combined power and expressive intersectional possibilities of art, sport, and the rituals of collective singing for women's

sport and positive social change.

Since 2019, San Jose State University's (SJSU) Institute for the Study of Sport, Society and Social Change (ISSSSC) and The Wall of Song Project (WOS) have been inviting athletes, fans, students and community supporters to sing FEELING GOOD—the song made famous by Nina Simone—as an anthem of solidarity and a call to action for women's sport, mental and physical wellbeing, and a more equitable, racially just community.

This ongoing collaborative art, film, performance, and sports stadium singing project of FEELING GOOD acknowledges, celebrates, and builds upon the deep legacy of Black athlete activism at SJSU. Through it, we explore the ways in which art and collective singing rituals can, despite our social realities, embolden our voices to support women's sport and work towards a more inclusive community—particularly for Black and Indigenous women, girls, and non-binary athletes of color, who live at the intersection of racial injustice and gender inequity.

The Wall of Song project is participatory and interactive. The first step invites athletes, fans, students, and community supporters to sing “Feeling Good” online at <https://wallofsongproject.com/...> It only takes a few minutes and you don't need to be able to sing—it's not a solo!

This footage is gathered into a growing video installation and played as a participatory performance at sport and art events. Following these events, fans are invited to add their voices online and the live singing is added to the growing video chorus to further inspire future singing and calls-to-action.

What is the purpose of the project?

WHY SHARE OUR VOICES FOR WOMEN'S SPORT?

We've noticed that we don't sing much in public for women's sport. While there has been some progress since the enactment of Title IX, we continue to see disparities in access, pay equity, working conditions, leadership and coaching

opportunities, sports coverage (and the often invisible work of athlete activists in women's sports). We also have noticed the well-documented ways in which collective singing can help to cultivate joint perspectives, charge our courage, and touch each other at a distance (as we have especially seen during this time of physical distancing.)

#### WHY SING "FEELING GOOD" RIGHT NOW?

Nina Simone sang about "a bold world, a new world" in 1965. The invitation is to be emboldened by Simone's courageous and radical example in the midst of our own need for a more equitable and racially just kind of future.

#### SONG AS A BRIDGE TO EMBODIED ACTION:

This collaborative art and civic singing platform is designed to build inclusive community by drawing upon the ways in which song can help connect, amplify, and embolden our voices to work towards positive social change. We are developing calls-to-action with our collaborators, including an invitation to donate to The Institute for the Study of Sport, Society, and Social Change programs and services—particularly as it pertains to the equity of women and girls in sport.

Hundreds have added their voices to the growing video chorus online via the interactive singing platform at [wallofsongproject.com](http://wallofsongproject.com) and/or as part of a generative cycle of participatory half-time performances, gallery installations, public events, and calls-to-action.

Affinity partners are an integral part of all our events and are involved in either directly supporting, organizing, participating, and/or co-hosting our events.

Notable highlights to date include:

- Partnerships with 18 campus, community, and cultural affinity groups as part of National Girls & Women in Sports Day (NGWSD) events powered by the Women's Sports Foundation, including The San José Museum of Art, San Jose

Jazz, SJSU PRIDE Center & Gender Equity Center and MOSAIC Cross-Cultural Center, among others.

- Creation of key performance materials including a growing video chorus as a Jumbotron video and virtual multi-channel gallery video installation featuring professional soprano soloist Danielle Marie, as well as an introductory video and highlight reel from our inaugural half-time event (2.24.20)
- Collaborations with SJSU Spartan Marching Band, SJSU Choirs (including 100 Choir members hidden in the stands), three student soloists, one SJSU Deaf Sign Language Interpreter, and five Affinity Group Action Tables as part of our inaugural half-time event (2.24.20)
- Our recent NGWSD '21 event featured an exclusive interview with Grammy-Award-winning jazz vocalist Ledisi and other notable scholars and student-athlete activists which can be viewed as part of event Action Toolkit here: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/6...>
- Participation in two of our ISSSSC co-organizer's "Sports Conversations for Change" and other related events.
- An Action Toolkit, FAQ, and calls-to-action, developed in coordination with ISSSSC project co-organizer and affinity partners.
- SJSU Artistic Excellence Project Grant and two Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity Awards

What were the enablers that proved successful in your project?

Our challenge in building a “Wall of Song” for women’s sport is rooted in our ability to encourage participants to sing and raise their voices together—whether or not they can hold a tune—and in our ability to engage participants further in the movement of equity and inclusivity, after the singing is over.

We encourage participants to share their voices by guiding them in a specially arranged call and response version of the song, in concert with soloists, choirs, and hundreds of other participants. We host pop-up singing stations, interactive

participatory events cross-fertilizing audiences across art, music, sport, and athlete activism. We utilize a mutually generative cycle of events over time to help grow participation and build a “Wall of Song” for women’s sport and positive social change. We continually iterate on song as embodied action and fold in learnings in the next cycle of events.

Our strength and challenges lie in the interdisciplinary nature of our project at the intersection of art, sport, music, and athlete activism. Continued coordination and cross-fertilization of these fields, skill-sets, and audiences are critical to the ongoing growth of the project.

One of the main challenges from an artistic perspective is that the “materials” of the event (context, location, co-hosts, etc.) evolve every cycle and are often finalized with our collaborators in the months preceding the event. This can sometimes make for short creative lead times and funding windows.

Another key challenge is sustaining our project so that we can continue our work in future cycles. We work with a specialized team of creative technologists and freelancers, many of whom have lost their jobs in the pandemic. We are an art-based organization and funding opportunities for ongoing projects are quite limited, small-dollar, and typically require 1-3 years lead time. Funds involving art, sport, performance, and music are also limited in nature. We are working to overcome this by additionally partnering with key affinity group sponsors.











**What impact did your project have?**

Now in our 3rd-year cycle, we are poised to scale up our events, amplify our growing video chorus and network of affinity partners and participants. We anticipate this 3rd cycle to feature the video chorus as a “distributed performance” and Action Toolkit with multiple affinity partners in different locations as part of the 50th Anniversary of Title IX.

## What were the outcomes for women?

The desired outcome and deep goal are to build singing ritual(s) that grow fan and civic engagement in women's sport and embolden a democratic and intersectional art, sport, and choral community to support issues that pertain to women's sport and positive social change over time.

### Related Links

-  <https://www.facebook.com/wallofsongproject>
-  <https://wallofsongproject.com/>
-  <https://www.sjsu.edu/wordstoaction/about/index.php>
-  <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DeRmEnegVYe708ZGnemA...>
-  <https://vimeo.com/393531253>
-  <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/522003825>
-  <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/522003825>
-  <https://spark.adobe.com/page/6t6ERE513WRES/>
-  <https://wallofsongproject.com/partners/>
-  <https://vimeo.com/393531253>