

Glover's first big break came when he was invited to apply as a writer for a new show, *30 Rock*; a UCB teacher had recommended Glover to the producer, who had also been intrigued by the Derrick Comedy videos. (Glover submitted his *Simpsons* script as part of his application.) Glover got the writing job while still enrolled in college, and he even occasionally appeared on the Emmy-winning show, but during a writers' strike in 2008, he took advantage of the forced break to create a rap mixtape under the pseudonym Childish Gambino.<sup>308</sup> He had taken that name from a [name-generating tool](#) on the website of the hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan. He left *30 Rock* in 2009 to pursue his stand-up comedy career—but within six days, he had been offered a starring role in the NBC series *Community*.<sup>309</sup> Fellow actors on the program encouraged him to keep his music going, which led to another mixtape and then his first **EP**—short for “extended play record,” which is a recording with several tracks but which is not as long as a full album.<sup>310</sup>

Glover's accomplishments continued to grow. He was signed by the label Glassnote Records in 2011, and his first album debuted at Number 11 on the *Billboard 200* list. He performed on comedy specials, issued more and more recordings (several of which earned Grammy nominations), appeared on other TV programs and films, and signed a deal with the cable network FX to create the series *Atlanta*, which premiered in 2016 and ran until 2022.<sup>311</sup> In a remarkable life-twist, he landed the role of Lando Calrissian in *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018), and he was widely regarded as the most charismatic of the characters.<sup>312</sup> In 2023, Lucasfilm hired Glover and his brother Stephen to write for the spin-off *Lando* series that is in development for Disney+.<sup>313</sup>

2018 was also a big year for Glover musically. He won his first Grammy award for “Redbone,” a song from his third album that was also used in *Get Out*, the same 2017 Jordan Peele film that had launched the film-scoring career of Michael Abels, composer of *Global Warming* (Listening Example 8).<sup>314</sup> On May 5, 2018, Glover was both the guest host and the musical guest on the comedy program *Saturday Night Live*, and in his second musical number during the show, he (as “Childish Gambino”) premiered a new song, “[This Is America](#).” The lyrics waver between “happy, carefree choruses and dark, aggressive verses”—text that addresses the Black experience in a world that is willing to disregard chaos and just enjoy “pop culture



*One of Donald Glover's many enterprises is his musical career as “Childish Gambino.”*

trends.”<sup>315</sup>

As he was singing the song, he also launched an official video for the piece online, in which exuberant dancing was peppered with occasional moments of shocking gun violence. A great deal of public discussion ensued; many found the song to be a powerful condemnation of “a nation where entertainment is more important than justice.”<sup>316</sup> Others felt that it was heavy-handed and a “lazy critique of capitalism and America’s gun problem.”<sup>317</sup> Despite the controversy—or perhaps because of it—“This is America” became Gambino’s first Number 1 *Billboard* song.<sup>318</sup> It also made Grammy history by becoming the first rap song to win both “Song of the Year” and “Record of the Year” awards, beating the nominees from all other styles of music.<sup>319</sup>

Glover made still more music that year. He launched a two-track EP titled *Summer Pack* on July 11, 2018, taking fans by surprise because there had been no advance notice. Moreover, the EP featured a contemporary R&B approach, not Gambino’s customary rap/hip-hop style. The first track, “Summertime Magic,” was billed as “the first official single from Gambino’s forthcoming debut album.”<sup>320</sup> Since Gambino had already recorded three albums, the “debut” was a reference to Gambino’s new contract with RCA Records.<sup>321</sup> The subject matter of “Summertime Magic” is lightyears away from “This is America”; it is simply a “happy-go-lucky summer jam” in a calypso-flavored R&B style.<sup>322</sup> However, Glover had a couple of surprises up his sleeve for the second track, “Feels Like Summer” (Listening Example 13).

he has adopted the alias “Childish Gambino,” produced by a name-generator on the Wu-Tang Clan website.

- ◆ During his first professional work as a show writer for *30 Rock*, Glover issued the first Gambino mixtape, leading in time to his first multi-track extended play album, or **EP**.
- ◆ The song “Redbone” from Gambino’s third album was used in the 2017 film *Get Out*, thus linking him to Michael Abels, composer of *Global Warming* (Listening Example 8).
- ◆ Gambino premiered the song and video “This Is America” in May 2018, challenging his audience in a new and unexpected way.
- ◆ Also in 2018, Gambino released the multi-layered “Feels Like Summer” (Listening Example 13), using a contemporary R&B approach. Set in verse-chorus form with a **pre-chorus**, Gambino’s lyrics made clear reference to the environmental threats stemming from an ever-warming planet. He employed **word-painting** to simulate the silence that would result from the loss of birds.
- ◆ Gambino **dropped** the companion video six weeks after the song’s debut, and the animated film shows dozens of prominent Black individuals engaged in various summertime activities. Almost immediately, all published commentary about the song shifted to discussions of the celebrity portrayals, ignoring the environmental message of the lyrics. Listeners’ behavior demonstrated how we close our ears to uncomfortable topics by focusing on entertainment.
- ◆ Multiple organizations are trying to use music to help people recognize the need for environmental changes.
- ◆ The Tempo Project is led by a well-known seismologist, Dr. Lucy Jones, who has written *In Nomine Terra Calens: In the name of a warming Earth* (2019) for a **viola da gamba** ensemble. One of the **bass viols** plays a line that is derived from the Earth’s average surface temperature data for 138 years; the melody starts on the instrument’s lowest pitch and ends, ambiguously, on the highest possible note.
- ◆ The ClimateMusic Project is using concerts to alert people, musically, to environmental challenges. ClimateMusic has sponsored four original works so far: *Climate*, *Icarus in Flight*, *What If We . . . ?*, and *Audyssey*. A fifth is underway.
- ◆ The activist organization Greenpeace commissioned Ludovico Einaudi to assist them with a 2016 campaign to persuade the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (better known as the OSPAR Commission) to create a marine sanctuary in the Arctic Ocean. Einaudi wrote *Elegy for the Arctic* (Listening Example 14), and the plan was hatched for him to premiere the work in the middle of the Arctic Ocean.
- ◆ The filming of the performance was filled with challenges, including steep waves resulting from falling (calving) ice from the nearby glacier. The resulting footage is astonishing, but it failed to persuade the OSPAR Commission to preserve the region. Still, the U.S. and Canada protected part of the Arctic waters later that year, while the video has been viewed over twenty million times.
- ◆ Einaudi’s **elegy** is a suitably mournful piece for the ecological sufferings of the Arctic region. Its minor mode is reinforced with **pedal tones**, contrasting with **delicato** passages. The opening material returns to close the piece, but in **augmentation** that elongates the previous rhythm. The piece does not reach a clear conclusion; instead, it leaves listeners hanging on an unresolved leading tone.