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Our Family Is A Proud Member Of Beyoncé's #Beyhive Despite All The Swearing

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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One Monday last month it was B-Day at our house. It wasn't anyone's birthday, although the excitement level was almost as high.

After school I piled onto the couch with my three girls, and we watched the opening sequence of the new Beyoncé concert movie *Homecoming*.

Filmed live at Coachella last year over two nights, it features Beyoncé in full monarchical splendor. As the first black woman to headline Coachella, the legendary show has now become known as Beychella. And her show-opening walk down the catwalk towards the stage had my daughter's fullest attention.

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“It’s like she’s a queen!” said Elizabeth, age 6.

“She even has a sceptre!” said Sonia, 8.

“Paw Patrol?” said Maggie. She’s two.

We listened to the crowd roar after her first number.

“Imagine how much noise it would be if you were there,” said Elizabeth.

“Imagine if I were Beyoncé,” murmured Sonia, mostly to herself.

The opening 15 minutes of *Homecoming* crams together five songs performed by a massive marching band comprised of musicians from all across America. Designed to showcase the music and culture of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), my girls had never seen musicians and dancers move like that on stage.

At the end of the first set I asked them what their favorite thing was about Beyoncé.

“She’s a good singer,” said Sonia with classic understatement.

‘What does it mean ‘Imma f**k me up a bitch?’ she asked one day.

“She sings even when her hair is in her face,” said Elizabeth. There was probably a life lesson in there somewhere, but I didn’t belabour the metaphor.

A couple of years ago, Sonia found an old iPhone in our basement and asked to use it to listen to music. I happily said yes as long as I retained the sole rights to transfer songs to it from iTunes. I saw it as a golden opportunity to craft the coolest, most musically-savvy kid in the first grade.

I did my fatherly duty and loaded her iPhone with the perfect collection: the Beatles, Radiohead, the Roots, St. Vincent. She ignored it all. So instead I begrudgingly complied with her Katy Perry requests and added the nineteen different versions of *Despacito*. The only artist in her regular rotation that we both agreed on was Beyoncé. I have been a Beyoncé fan ever since I saw a drag king perform *Irreplaceable* at Pride in 2007, solo on stage with only an acoustic guitar as accompaniment. When *Lemonade* came out in 2016 I must have listened to it more than she did. We’d crank the music in the living room and sing along. (Well, she’d sing. I’d mostly lip synch to comply with her request that I stop ruining the song.)

The only bump in the road with our shared fondness for Beyoncé was not with the music but with some of the lyrics. English is not her first language, so Sonia would sing along and rap along phonetically, not really knowing what she was saying. Enter *Lemonade*, an album that is, to put it mildly, angry. Sonia had questions.

“What does it mean ‘Imma f--k me up a b--ch?’” she asked one day.

Trying to play it cool my wife asked her where she had heard that delightful phrase.

“Beyoncé,” she said.

“Oh. Well, she was really mad when she wrote that song,” she explained. “And sometimes when you’re really mad it’s OK to swear.” (Some background, for the adults: Beyoncé was really mad when she wrote *Lemonade* because Jay-Z was cheating on her (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/42177522/jay-z-admits-to-cheating-on-beyonce-and-says-music-was-their-therapy>).)

This explanation seemed to satisfy her and, although we heard her sing along to some other questionable lyrics, she seemed to understand that the lyrics were part of the song and not something to be repeated outside of that context. We considered it a first lesson in the use of an artistic persona.

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We haven’t yet let the girls watch the rest of *Homecoming*. Documenting the rehearsal process and production of the concert, the rest of the film has lots of swearing and lots of tears. It can get pretty heavy and we’d prefer to keep those emotions contained, for now, inside the music where the swear words live.

Until we are ready to pick it up again, we’re going to keep cranking the tunes. Consider our family a member of the #BeyHive.

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