As I sat in the Microsoft holding room surrounded by computers and keyboards, my heart pounded and my palms began to sweat. For the most part I sat quietly as RIOT MUSE gently applied my makeup. Sometimes I hummed the melody of the songs I anticipated singing to keep my voice warm. I smiled an easy smile at Valerie Madison, the Community Development Specialist at the Houston Galleria, when she entered the room. But the truth was, I was excited, yet very nervous to conduct the first ever Interactive Songwriting Workshop and Live Concert in Microsoft. Over 150 guests RSVP’d a week prior to the event. Yet I still wondered what the turnout would actually be and hoped that those in attendance would have a positive and revelatory experience that they would remember forever.

The opportunity was presented to me just a few weeks before the event. Jarren Small, Co-Founder of nonprofit organization, Legends Do Live, approached me about a conversation that he’d had with Valerie Madison about a Microsoft OneNote on the Surface Pro and since she’d worked with Jarren in the past with their Reading With A Rapper literacy program, she knew he would be just the one to call. Jarren proposed Microsoft partner with a singer-songwriter, rather than a rapper and the rest was history. Well, not necessarily. Microsoft was impressed with my music but they still weren’t completely sold on why their first-ever Black History Month creative venture should be with LENORA, rather than the hundreds, maybe thousands of other talented singer-songwriters in Houston. Jarren quickly quipped, “Not only is she a singer-songwriter, but she is also the Business Manager and Entertainment Editor of one of the most historic Black publications in the country… The Forward Times, which her family also founded and owns.” From there, I visited the Microsoft store to get acquainted with the Surface Pro and began working on my presentation.

After we confirmed the date at Microsoft, my manager, Joshua Dada asked if it would be possible for my band and I to set up and treat the attendees to a Live Concert after the workshop, NPR Tiny Desk-style. Although it had never been done, we got the “okay.”

Fast-forward to Wednesday, February 19th, just minutes before I was to greet the attendees and conduct the workshop. Once my makeup was done and it was time for RIOT MUSE to style me, we quickly shuffled into the restroom in Microsoft to use the mirror. The only problem was that there are only two restrooms in the store, both of which are in plain sight of the attendees and the goal was for me to remain hidden until the time of the workshop. With the help of three people, we made it to the restroom undetected and I caught a glimpse of the crowd. The store was jam-packed with attendees. Some that I knew and most that I didn’t. I got a rush of excitement and quickly got dressed, as RIOT MUSE layered belt after belt to create a comfortable yet iconic look.

When it was time to come out, I could hear the attendees screaming so loudly you would think that the Microsoft store was a stadium. I walked out and began the workshop, which actually ended up being a songwriting masterclass.

The opportunity was presented to me just a few weeks before the event. Jarren Small, Co-Founder of nonprofit organization, Legends Do Live, approached me about a conversation that he’d had with Valerie Madison. Valerie wanted to organize a creative Black History Month event at Microsoft that utilized Microsoft OneNote on the Surface Pro and since she’d worked with Jarren in the past with their Reading With A Rapper literacy program, she knew he would be just the one to call. Jarren proposed Microsoft partner with a singer-songwriter, rather than a rapper and the rest was history. Well, not necessarily. Microsoft was impressed with my music but they still weren’t completely sold on why their first-ever Black History Month creative venture should be with LENORA, rather than the hundreds, maybe thousands of other talented singer-songwriters in Houston. Jarren quickly quipped, “Not only is she a singer-songwriter, but she is also the Business Manager and Entertainment Editor of one of the most historic Black publications in the country… The Forward Times, which her family also founded and owns.” From there, I visited the Microsoft store to get acquainted with the Surface Pro and began working on my presentation.

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I had 30 minutes to conduct the workshop and I couldn’t have asked for a better group and outcome. There was a room full of eager attendees; some standing, some sitting on wooden stools, and some sitting comfortably on pillows that we provided on the floor. I started with an introduction of myself and my work as both a songwriter and journalist and joked with the
Telling Our Own Stories

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Below the Belt

By Jeffrey L. Boney

again and boy have things gotten interesting. All across the Greater Houston area, countless political ads, endorsements, campaign literature, brethren, by the mercies of I beseech you therefore, God, that ye present your Romans 12:1 (KJV)

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Sincerely, Lenora

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