

American Sign Language (ASL) Translation & Choreography, Statement by Natasha Ofili

Creating the ASL translation of a song is like creating a visual story that is a poetic painting. It starts with reading the lyrics and analyzing the song to understand what the song is about and tapping into the depth of feelings that I want to share through my translation. The challenge is sometimes the English words or syntax can't be signed word for word because those specific signs sometimes do not express the true meaning of the sentence or word. For example, "Any Angel on my windowsill, But it's so dark inside, I throw the windows wide." My ASL translation transformed the sentence into a visual story of pushing a person away, then embracing them to my heart, then releasing and opening my inner darkness to light.

Crafting my ASL translation for FLIFIL was a personal journey that I resonated with, infused with its own choreography. Every deaf person has their own style—my way is to integrate a mixture of sign language, signed English words, visual pictures using ASL, emotions, and body movement. When people see ASL, they watch the movement of the hands and think, "Oh my, so beautiful." But it is more than that—it is also about the eyes, the emotions on our faces, and how we show it through our bodies. By taking apart the song verse by verse and then putting it back together, I created a visual story of emotions, facial expressions, hand movements, hand placements (i.e., hand on heart), and signs that align with the song's meaning, Chris's meaning, and my interpretation.

What helped me even more with the translations was receiving the song track with the visual bars of the instruments, vocals, and embedded closed captions. This was the first time I had experienced this type of access for a song. That was truly incredible and helped me understand the song on a whole other dimension because I was able to visually see the vocals, bass, guitar, and drums. Seeing it helped precisely shape my translation and choreography to match the song. When I showed the visual video to the deaf Venezuelan choir, Coro de Manos Blancas (CMB), they were so excited because they felt like they were able to understand the rhythm of the song and the beat. Coldplay set a new standard for accessibility, and I am honored to work with them on this song.

Integrating Venezuelan Sign Language (VSL; Spanish: Lengua de señas venezolana, LSV) with ASL was a beautiful artistic process. I made sure to honor the language of CMB and LSV. Sign language, to me, is not just a form of communication but a language filled with culture, feelings, connections, and expressions that become a medium for understanding and connecting with humans. I wanted to create a dimensional choreography with CMB and me that shows a "ripple" effect. Within the choreography, we have visual sign language that is in sync with each other along with the music. It was beautiful to see both ASL and LSV translations come to life for FLIFIL because you can see the signs are aligned with the meaning of the song.

Performing at the Herodeon with Coldplay, CMB, and in front of 3000 Greek Coldplay fans was something I never imagined myself doing. All our energies were in sync with the unifying power of music, visuals, lights, sign languages, dances, and love. feelslikeimfallinginlove to me is about love, how scary and painful it can be, how beautiful it feels, and how each of us can harness the power of love to give and receive. Love was all around the Herodeon, a field of flowers/love, especially when the audience signed "You Are Not Alone" in unison (this shot did not make the cut, but it was beautiful to see). Love does not discriminate sign languages, does not discriminate the purpose of life; love is full of openness and acceptance. That is why we have this beautiful music video.

For Coldplay to be open with their minds and hearts and honor the art of ASL and LSV as a human form, I feel incredibly honored and grateful to be a part of this project. I am happy and grateful Chris said Yes and truly believes in me. I feel seen and understood. I am extremely grateful to the entire team, including Ben Mor (director) and others, for supporting me from beginning to end.