

Curating for Diversity: Two Case Studies

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CURATING FOR DIVERSITY: TWO CASE STUDIES

Working as a curator for arts organizations increasingly concerned with equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice in programming can feel like fighting a losing battle. There are many ways to take small steps forward, and – unfortunately – even more opportunities to take two steps backward. Efforts to diversify canons and repair artistic histories across artistic disciplines are more important than ever, as technology pushes back against much of the work that has been done over the last few decades and creates new barriers for artists from historically excluded groups. In this article, I situate and present strategic initiatives that I oversaw as a leader in two different nonprofit organizations that present annual new music programs. These initiatives were inspired by the academic study and data analysis that I outline in the first portion of this article.

Even as there are organizations and individuals actively working against historical oppression, technology may be working to confirm historical canons of art through the adoption of algorithms and AI for collating information. As I have written about with Rob Deemer in a chapter for Bloomsbury's *A Cultural History of Western Music*, volume 6 (to be published later this year):

The algorithms are essentially a popularity contest, with user information feeding back into the system: the more an item is requested, the more it will be suggested to further users. The design of algorithms to further promote content that is already popular inevitably skews users' Internet search results toward certain histories and ideas.¹

In an insightful keynote speech delivered at the 2018 Music Encoding Conference at the University of Maryland, musicologist and librarian Anna Kijas explained that ideas of canon and greatness so pervade the information about music available online that a simple search on Google for “composers” essentially re-created the standard canon of composers of notated music from the Western classical tradition. Kijas notes that composers from historically excluded groups are missing because many of the scholars who compile digital, open-access editions of histories and works in sources such as Wikipedia and the International Music Score Library Project simply leave them out, preferring to focus on completion of histories for the best-known composers while glossing over lesser-known composers from historically excluded groups. As she writes, “Even when published scores or digital images are available, these [lesser-known] composers continue to be overlooked and excluded from projects, especially those receiving grant funding for the creation of large music datasets. If we continue to exclude works by women, people of color, and non-canonical composers, then how useful will our data be and for whom?”²

¹ Penny Brandt and Rob Deemer, “Technologies: Media, Myths, and Movements,” in *A Cultural History of Western Music*, vol. 6, *A Cultural History of Western Music in the Modern Age*, William Cheng and Danielle Fosler-Lussier, eds. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 225–228.

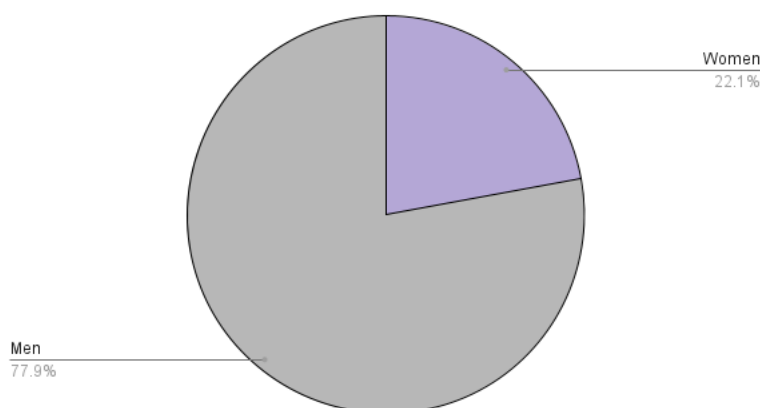
² Anna Kijas, “What does the data tell us?: Representation, Canon, and Music Encoding,” Keynote text delivered at the Music Encoding Conference, University of Maryland, May 24, 2018. Published on Medium. Accessed July 15, 2023. <https://medium.com/@kijas/https-medium-com-kijas-what-does-the-data-tell-us-926ba830702f>

In his 2005 *Oxford History of Western Music*, Richard Taruskin recommends the practice of “mainstreaming” — an activist practice of including lesser-known works by women composers in order to advance the political and social causes of women in present times.³ He credits this practice for his inclusion of a cantata by Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677) in his *History of Western Music* in lieu of one by “the more famous and prolific [Giacomo] Carissimi” (1605–1674), with the hope that “mainstreaming may constructively counteract the unfounded assumption that women are lacking in innate capacity to compose.”⁴ Many scholars (particularly the so-called “new musicologists” of the latter half of the twentieth century) have worked to identify the ways in which our aesthetic sensibilities have generated an exclusive canon full of “dead white men in wigs.”⁵ Taruskin correctly identifies ways in which our societal concept of “greatness” is closely aligned with maleness, but while we can applaud his decision to “mainstream” women into his textbooks in 2005, we can also see the damage done when he framed his decision as a choice with the goal of performing activism and by immediately comparing Strozzi to Carissimi.

Taruskin’s error may seem an obvious misstep when viewed retrospectively from a current perspective. However, Artistic Directors, curators, program note authors, historians, and other writers and speakers — even, and perhaps especially when endeavoring to be advocates and allies for inclusivity in music — often re-perpetuate damage to historically excluded and marginalized artists. Analysis of music programming trends in orchestras in the United States demonstrates one way that programmers are doing exactly that: re-marginalizing composers from historically excluded groups by handling their music differently from that of composers from the traditional canon of “Western Classical” music.

Sarah Baer at the Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy has been tracking representation of music by women composers in “regular season ‘Classical’ programs” of the top twenty-one orchestras in the United States for the last three years. The good news is that their research reveals a slight trend upwards in the numbers.⁶ However, analysis of the data by composer name over-represents the presence of women in orchestral programming. In the first chart from Baer’s blog post, copied here, women composers are shown to comprise 22.1% of programming:

Composers 2023-2024



³ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 2, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sophie Fuller, “Dead White Men in Wigs: Women and Classical Music,” in *Girls! Girls! Girls!: Essays on Women and Music*, ed. Sarah Cooper (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 22–39.

⁶ Sarah Baer, “2023-2024 Season: By the Numbers,” Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Blog, accessed June 12, 2023, <https://wophil.org/2023-2024-season-by-the-numbers/>

Figure 1: Chart by Sarah Baer for “2023-2024 Season: By the Numbers,” Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Blog.

When the same data is analyzed by *individual works*, women composers are shown to comprise only 13% of the programming, as seen in Baer’s second chart.

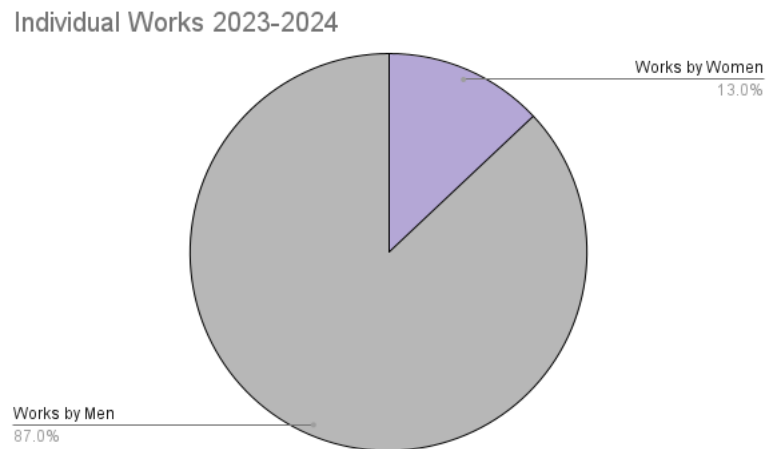


Figure 2: Chart by Sarah Baer for “2023-2024 Season: By the Numbers,” Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Blog.

Why did the number go down? How do women composers account for more than 20% of the composers but only 13% of the individual works? The reason is that women composers rarely have more than one work presented in a concert season. If audiences hear Jennifer Higdon’s *Blue Cathedral*, then they will not hear her Violin Concerto. Meanwhile, many men composers have more than one work featured. In particular, audiences are often presented multiple works by Ludwig van Beethoven — perhaps his fifth and sixth symphonies and a piano concerto or two. This is why, in many analyses, works by Ludwig van Beethoven alone account for more musical programming than all works by women composers.

In the second chart, the numbers include every individual work. Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is counted once, regardless of how many orchestras perform it. If the data is reconfigured to count each orchestra’s performance of a work as one instance, the disparity becomes even greater. This is because several of the orchestras may be performing the same Beethoven symphony, while only one is performing the aforementioned piece by Jennifer Higdon. As Baer shows in a third chart, the disparity becomes even greater when the data is grouped to include individual performances from each orchestra.

Total Performances 2023-2024

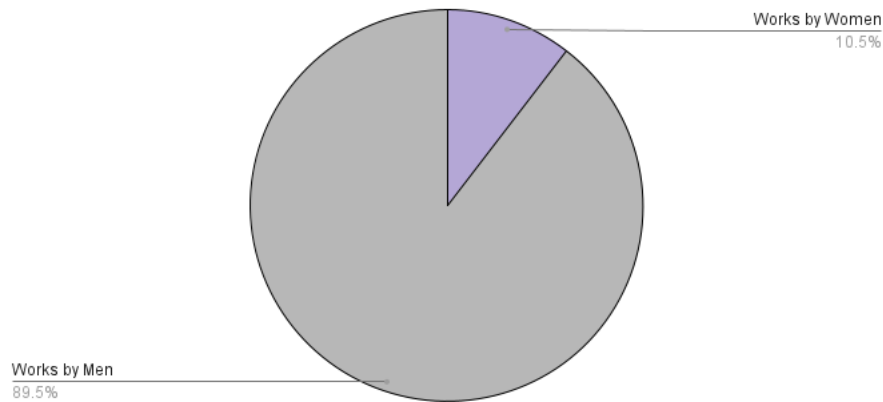


Figure 3: Chart by Sarah Baer for “2023-2024 Season: By the Numbers,” Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Blog.

At this point, the performance of works by women composers has shrunk from 22.1% to less than half — 10.5%. If repeat performances of individual works were counted, the numbers would likely get even worse — Beethoven’s fifth symphony may be performed in five separate concerts over a long weekend, while Clara Schumann’s piano concerto is only performed once. Baer also notes that orchestras tend to program longer works by dead men composers and shorter works by living women composers. If the data were analyzed to include repeats of individual works and average playing time, it would show that orchestral audiences spend far less than 10% of their time listening to music by women.

Similar results can be found in data analysis of BIPOC composers, as shown by additional analysis by Baer and in the 2022 Orchestra Repertoire Report by the Institute for Composer Diversity.⁷ The latter shows a 400% increase in the programming of works by women composers and composers of color in the top 120 orchestras by budget between 2015 and 2022. Yet, their numbers also appear different when viewed by composer name (42%), programmed titles (31.2%), and programmed performances (22.6%).⁸

⁷ Sara Baer, "The Programming of BIPOC Composers," Women’s Philharmonic Advocacy Blog, accessed June 28, 2023, <https://wophil.org/the-programming-of-bipoc-composers/>
Rob Deemer and Cory Meals, "Orchestra Repertoire Report: 2022," Institute for Composer Diversity, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://www.composerdiversity.com/analysis> or https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b9ee971fcf7fd7add652207/t/62960a5d2a1998349128b94d/1654000223744/ICD_2022_ORCH_REPORT_MAY31.pdf

⁸ Deemer and Meals, 21.

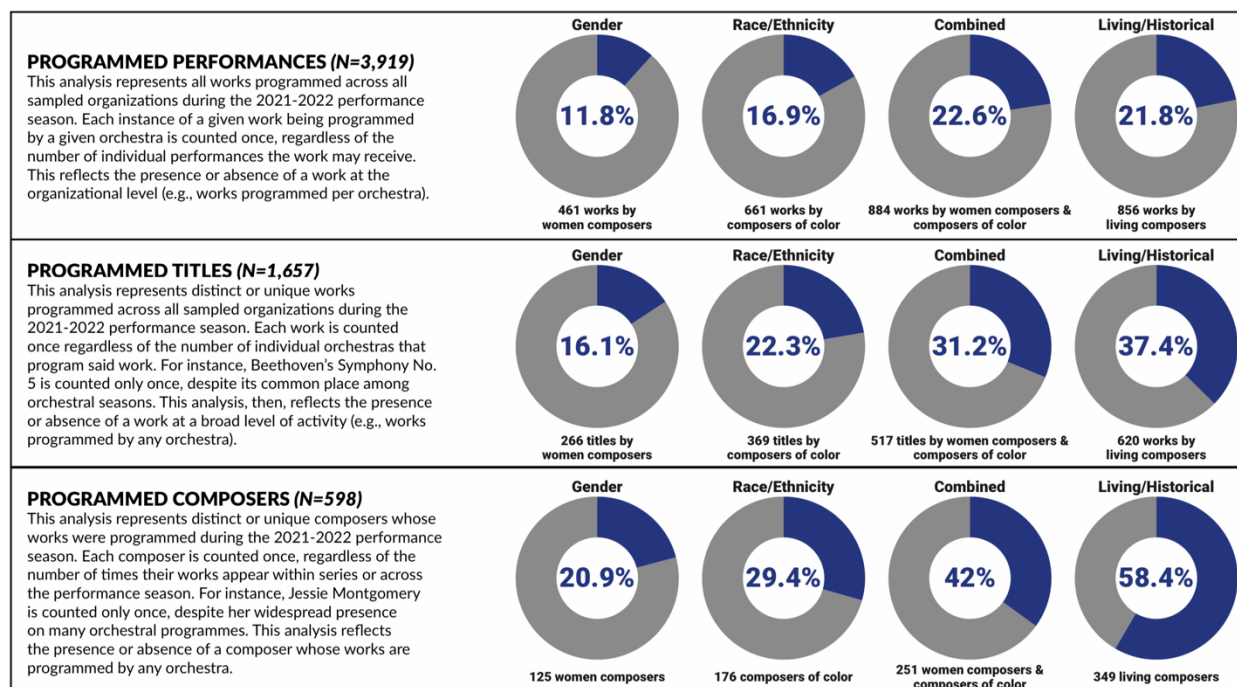


Figure 4: Chart by Rob Deemer for "Orchestra Repertoire Report: 2022," Institute for Composer Diversity.

Something important to note is that both ICD and the Women's Philharmonic Advocacy have pointed out that the numbers would be different if they included non-mainstage performances. In a previous blogpost, Baer writes, "For example, the Los Angeles Philharmonic has a fantastic new music series titled Green Umbrella . . . [with] many exciting new commissions by contemporary women."⁹ Similarly, the Seattle and National Symphony Orchestras are presenting music by women in "Family Concerts." This trend of including women in non-mainstage programming is not exclusive to orchestras. The Metropolitan Opera of New York announced in 2018 that it would be working with composer Missy Mazzoli, but added that the company would "venture beyond the walls of its opera house to collaborate with the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Public Theater" — an admission that the Met Opera production of Mazzoli's chamber opera is slated to take place outside of Lincoln Center.¹⁰

Analysis of orchestral programming data reveals an additional trend in the programming of music by composers from historically excluded groups: that the BIPOC composers and women composers being programmed are typically living composers. This contrasts significantly with the work of white men composers, the vast majority of which were alive in the 18th and 19th centuries. Of course, there are many reasons to prioritize the work of living composers over that of dead composers — one of which being that many living composers need to pay rent, buy food, and afford other necessities of life. It is vital that arts organizations look for ways to support living, local artists in their work. But the disparity in treatment of these demographics is significant. BIPOC folks and women have been systematically erased and forgotten from music history. They are left out of our textbooks and our concert halls, even though they have existed in every era. Part of supporting historically excluded

⁹ Sarah Baer, "2020–2021 Season: By the Numbers," Women's Philharmonic Advocacy Blog, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://wophil.org/202021-by-the-numbers/>.

¹⁰ "The Met Is Creating New Operas (Including Its First by Women)," The New York Times, accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/23/arts/music/metropolitan-opera-bam-public-theater-women.html>

composers in our own time means telling the stories of historical composers that always existed and have long been ignored. In this way, we prove that work from these communities has always been valuable. If we can prove that, then the artists of today only have to create; they don't have to use their work to prove the validity of their race or gender, as they are often asked to do.

In her book *The Woman Composer*, Jill Halstead notes that living women composers are often reluctant to be described as "women composers," but rather are "desperate for their work to be judged on merit alone; they wish to be treated equally and without discrimination, whether positive or negative." She continues,

However, the belief that musical quality alone will catapult women composers into the midst of the musical canon is not only somewhat optimistic but also tends in many ways to confirm that women composers of the past and present are being ignored for all the right reasons.¹¹

It becomes vital, therefore, to look at the reasons why music by historically excluded groups has been left out of the history textbooks to ensure the echoes of this discrimination do not appear in the communications of arts organizations today. There are many audience members who will insist that "We shouldn't include music by women or people of color just to include them," or who will ask "Do you really think that the quality and structure of Clara Schumann or Florence Price's music is equal to that of the more famous [white, male] composers of their time?" Arts organizations have a responsibility to educate and inform audiences about exclusions of the past while also ensuring that these exclusions do not infect portrayals of artists today.

What, therefore, are some of the reasons that music by non-white, non-men composers was excluded historically, and how do we see historical racism and sexism appearing in our materials today? My own work has focused on the exclusion of women from classical music, but of course structural racism and the practice of enslaving people of color has had a profound influence on who could be seen as a composer throughout classical times. Only recently, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–1799) has been re-introduced to music history, in spite of his extensive Parisian career that drew jealousy from his better-known contemporary, W. A. Mozart (1756–1791).¹² As the cultural center of "classical music" composition moved from Europe to the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans were legally subject to discrimination, barred from many of the institutions where music was taught and supported. Despite this, there were always talented African American musicians, some of whom received recognition through white-dominated institutions. There were many more who enjoyed recognition in their own communities.

Similarly, many women composers created and performed music within communities of marginalized peoples, none of whom were invited to write the history books. For instance, Hildegard von Bingen (ca. 1098–1179) composed for nuns to sing in enclosed monasteries. Her compositions were rediscovered in the 1990s. Similarly, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847) is known to have composed for fancy salon parties held in her home. Although her music was known in her community in her own time, few of her pieces were published, because publishing indicated a need for money, which would have been unseemly for a lady – although it turns out that some of her music was published under her brother's name.¹³

¹¹ Jill Halstead, *The Women Composer* (Vermont: Ashgate, 1997), x.

¹² Dominique-René de Lerma, "The Chevalier de Saint-Georges," *The Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 1 (1976): 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1214399>

¹³ Marian Wilson Kimber, "The 'Suppression' of Fanny Mendelssohn: Rethinking Feminist Biography," *19th-Century Music* 26, no. 2 (2002): 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2002.26.2.113>

Another reason that women composers were excluded from history books is that their contributions as collaborators were devalued. For instance, Anna Magdalena Bach (1701–1760) was an educated and capable composer. She helped write down J.S. Bach’s works as his eyesight diminished in his old age. Some scholars believe she composed some of his music; regardless, she was capable of understanding the traditions of harmony and counterpoint that he used to compose many of his works. Similarly, Maria Anna (Nannerl) Mozart (1751–1829), who was a prodigy like her brother Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, wrote down his first symphony. Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo (Respighi) (1894–1996) completed and re-arranged her husband Ottorino Respighi’s (1879–1936) works after his death.¹⁴ Each of these women was working as what we might term a composer’s “assistant” or “arranger” today. However, history books rarely devote space to people in these roles.

Perhaps one of the most complex barriers for composers from historically excluded groups is that of self-censoring as a result of facing a lifetime of barriers. German composer Clara Schumann (1819–1896) wrote, after a lifetime of performing and composing music in public, “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up on this idea; a woman must not desire to compose. There has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?”¹⁵ Similarly, African American composer Margaret Bonds (1913–1972) once explained, “Many a time when I would compete in a contest I’d say . . . ‘I know I’m not much good, but my mother is so good; please good God, let me win for her.’”¹⁶ In a 2013 *New York Times* article titled “Confessions of a ‘Composeress,’” composer Annie Gosfield wrote that “After serving as a juror on dozens of grant panels and competitions, I started to notice that female composers frequently make up about 10 percent of the initial applicant pool, but often represent 20 percent of the awardees.” That women are significantly underrepresented as applicants, but comparatively over-represented as awardees suggests that women are more likely to self-select out of the composition process. The few who remain are those who are most qualified to compete.

There are many other reasons why groups of composers have been excluded from history, but these are a few of the ideas that can be found repeatedly over hundreds of years of music history. The barriers described kept composers out of history books, classrooms, radio programs, and concert halls. The reasons are important, because they are also some of the same barriers that women and people of color and composers from other marginalized groups face today. Composers from historically excluded groups may still choose to compose for less-visible audiences; they may write children’s music or perform in a religious organization where they find cultural connection. This work may cause them to be less visible than composers who work with more prominent groups. Women and BIPOC composers are still more likely to appear as collaborators and assistants — particularly as assistant or associate conductors in orchestras and as orchestrators and assistants for film scores. Organizations may focus on assistants in marketing materials in order to appear inclusive; often their faces appear in programs or on websites more than their work appears in performance. BIPOC composers may be expected to represent entire demographics but may also be expected to code shift and placate the etiquette expectations of prominent donors or administrators. These kinds of pressures lead to self-censoring — avoiding work that requires cooperation with hegemonic institutions. Perhaps most importantly: all of these things work together to create a sense of internalized bias, or a lack of realization that

¹⁴ Penny Brandt, “A Marriage and Its Music: The work of Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo Respighi in Fascist Italy” (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 2017), 1-31.

<https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7689&context=dissertations>

¹⁵ Quoted in Carol Neuls-Bates, ed., *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 154.

¹⁶ Margaret Bonds, “A Reminiscence,” in *The Negro in Music and Art in the International Library of Negro Life and History*, ed. Lindsey Patterson (New York: Publishers Co. Inc., 1967), 190–193.

composition is even something that people from historically marginalized groups can do, which is why white men continue to be over-represented in composition programs at all levels.

TWO CASE STUDIES: WOMEN COMPOSERS FESTIVAL OF HARTFORD & GOLDEN HORNET

The two case studies that I present in this paper are from my own work with the Women Composers Festival of Hartford, in Hartford, Connecticut and Golden Hornet, in Austin, Texas. I served the former as its first president, working with former executive director Daniel Morel to oversee incorporation as a 501(C)3 nonprofit organization in 2014. I subsequently replaced myself as CEO/President with music theorist and arts administrator Sacha Peiser and took on the newly created role of Artistic Director. I received no compensation for my work with the Women Composers Festival of Hartford (WCFH). I became involved with the festival as I looked for opportunities to present my musicological research on historical women composers, and it became my passion project for several years. In contrast, my position at Golden Hornet was in the full-time, compensated role of Managing Director. I accepted the position in March of 2020 and subsequently managed the organization for a full year through the international COVID-19 pandemic. Both organizations continue to thrive under their current leadership, though my own career path has taken me in a different direction.

As I took the helm at WCFH, it became clear that the organization primarily presented music by affluent white women for audiences comprising affluent white people. According to recent census data, more than half of Hartford's population is Black/African American (36%) and/or Hispanic (46%), while less than a third identifies as "White alone" (28%).¹⁷ I found it discordant for the organization to describe itself as "of Hartford," while being closed to two-thirds of the city's population. Thus, I took steps to change how the organization interacted with residents of Hartford and with the new music community at large. Some of the steps I took were more successful than others, and I will mention some failures here. I will focus on the efforts that were successful, in the hopes of providing helpful tools to others interested in doing this work. I acknowledge my privilege as a white-bodied person of mixed heritage, who grew up in a supportive, if low-resource, environment and share these suggestions with humility and awareness of my own advantages.

Collaborate with Creative Thinkers

Early on in my work with the Women Composers Festival of Hartford, I invited local musician and actor Alike Hope to brainstorm how we might work together. Alike's "Ray of Hope Project" brought white and Black musicians together to perform spirituals and tell stories of how white and Black folks worked together historically to fight to free enslaved people, and to stand against racism and discrimination. When I asked her if her group ever included music by women, she responded "Do Spirituals count? I mean... we don't actually know who wrote them." I felt so ignorant! Centuries of enslavement and racist violence had rendered gender invisible in a large portion of African American music, and, as a result, none of that music was included in WCFH. So, we changed that. We opened a presentation of the Women Composers Festival of Hartford at Capitol Community College with Alike Hope singing a haunting, unaccompanied rendition of "Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child," as we took a moment to think about all the women whose artistic contributions to the world were lost to the practice of enslavement in the United States.

Similarly, Golden Hornet, under the artistic direction of Graham Reynolds, took the step of elevating some of our artistic collaborators to "co-curator" status. Endeavors such as the MXTX Project – a live performance, album, and open-source audio sample library crossing physical and social

¹⁷ US Census, accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hartfordcityconnecticut/>

boundaries – added co-curators like Felipe Pérez Santiago and Coka Treviño to ensure a diversity of ideas in every stage of the planning process. The result was a unique collaborative exchange that resulted in a gender-balanced project involving more than forty DJ-producers and composers from both sides of the Rio Grande.

Attracting Diverse Applicants

Our score calls primarily attracted applications from white cis-men (in the case of Golden Hornet) and white cis-women (in the case of WCFH). I began looking for specific steps to take to attract a more balanced group of composers. The first step, in both cases, was to network with individuals and organizations who were already doing diversity work in music. Since both organizations highlighted performing groups and judges in our marketing materials, we sought performing groups and judges who were BIPOC individuals. This was a difficult step to take, because in some cases, it meant discontinuing a multi-year tradition of hiring an individual or ensemble to make space in our roster for new relationships. However, in each of these cases, we were careful to offer a transitional gig and/or recommendations to different institutions.

Hiring BIPOC judges and performers allowed us to model representation for groups we wished to attract in our application process. We also reached out to organizations that work to recruit and support composers from historically excluded groups, including Austin Soundwaves, the Institute for Composer Diversity, the Alliance of Women Film Composers, Maestra Music, Boulanger Initiative, and many more. We asked these organizations to share our score calls on their social media pages, knowing they would be likely to reach a diverse group of composers.

Golden Hornet’s international score call for its String Quartet Smackdown event historically received most of its applications from the United States and Europe. I worked with an intern, Ally Moreno, to implement a strategic communication initiative utilizing social media to reach a target audience in the Global South.¹⁸ We began by identifying significant cultural centers that have music conservatories. These included Sao Paulo (Brazil), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Lagos (Nigeria), and Manila (Philippines). We also translated our application into several major languages spoken in these areas: Spanish, Portuguese, French, and simplified Mandarin. Interestingly, very few applicants used the translated applications; we received a few applications in Spanish, but most applicants used our original English application. However, I believe that the availability of languages besides English may have helped international applicants feel encouraged to apply. Overall, we experienced a 33% increase in applications, with most of the increase coming from the Global South. We received our first ever applications from Africa. Within the United States, we experienced a 50% increase in applications from women and nonbinary composers and a 75% increase in applications from BIPOC composers.

Multi-tiered semi-anonymous selection process

At both WCFH and Golden Hornet, we used a multitiered semi-anonymous selection process to determine which new music would be presented at certain concerts. For WCFH, this process was used for most of our programming; for Golden Hornet, we used it for String Quartet Smackdown. This process

¹⁸ I use the term “Global South” to refer to countries primarily in the southern hemisphere characterized by comparatively low incomes, dense populations, and less broadcast and digital communications infrastructure than countries in the Global North – a definition used by the United Nations and other NGOs. The lists created by these organizations include countries like Mexico and Iran, even though they are in the northern hemisphere, whereas Australia is considered to be part of the Global North, because it is economically and structurally more similar to other members of the British Commonwealth.

is my attempt to balance the desire of composers to be recognized for their talent and skill (contextualized above in relation to Halstead's *Woman Composer*), while also keeping in mind the historical and continued exclusion of non-white, non-male bodies in music programming.

Both organizations held open score calls. In the first round of judging, judges were instructed to anonymously score dozens of compositions according to a rubric that included elements such as musicality, structure, and idiomatic writing. When the scores were tallied at the end of the first round, I found that the top scores primarily went to white, cis-gendered women in the case of WCFH and to white, cis-gendered men in the case of Golden Hornet. Again, the majority of our applicants were from these demographics; it was unsurprising that the same demographic dominated the top scores.

After the anonymous scoring was complete, I added a category for diversity, giving an extra point to folks whose identities included groups that have historically been excluded from classical music. We had collected demographic and diversity-related information as part of the application, giving applicants the opportunity to check boxes and/or write in identity characteristics that they felt were appropriate. This is, literally, the type of affirmative action that has recently been struck down by the Supreme Court of the United States as “unconstitutional” on the grounds that it awards benefits based on race, gender, sex, and other identity characteristics. Like many Americans, including Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ketanji Brown Jackson, I disagree because I know that “racial inequality will persist so long as it is ignored”¹⁹ and that “those who demand that no one think about race (a classic pink-elephant paradox) refuse to see, much less solve for, the elephant in the room — the race-linked disparities that continue to impede achievement of our great Nation’s full potential.”²⁰

In the third round of competition, we again anonymized the finalists and asked the performing ensembles to choose several pieces for performance. Interestingly, without fail, the results of this third round of selection were more diverse than the results of the first round. Part of this may be due to statistics; each of the score calls routinely attracted a disproportionate number of applications from white cis-men and cis-women. Once diversity points had been added, the compositions scored in the third round represented a more balanced set of identities. However, in every case, the performing ensemble chose at least one composer who would not have been in the third round without the diversity point. Somehow, leveling the playing field in the second round altered how pieces were perceived. This was most evident in String Quartet Smackdown when the pieces were performed in front of a live voting audience. The competition winners — chosen by Austin residents who voted for their favorites as they heard them — were not those that had scored highest in the initial round of judging by experts. Each of the final four competitors were women or nonbinary composers of color, though these were not the composers who had received the highest scores in our initial anonymous round of judging. As someone who spends a lot of time trying to figure out what audiences want, I found this disparity profound.

Program Entire Seasons

One of the organizations working toward more diverse programming is the Institute for Composer Diversity that, in addition to its award-winning database of composers and their music, offers resources for “Best Practices” in programming for inclusion and diversity. Utilizing these resources can help groups to avoid a misfire that inadvertently reinforces the canon. These resources are available on

¹⁹ *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 20-1199 (2023) (Sotomayor, J., dissenting), accessed July 30, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf

²⁰ *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 20-1199 (2023) (Jackson, J., dissenting), accessed July 30, 2023, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf

the Institute for Composer Diversity's "Best Practices" website.²¹ (Note: some people and organizations are leaving the phrase "Best Practices" behind, feeling that it is an exclusionary phrasing. Criticisms include that it is white-led organizations, like ICD, that most often use phrases like "Best Practices" and that those "Best Practices" assume a certain level of success and adherence to hegemonic values that are inaccessible for many organizations.)

The first recommendation is to program in full seasons, not just concert-to-concert. It is important to avoid doing a concert of women's music for women's history month and a concert of music by Black composers for Black history month, even if your organization only does four concerts each year. Such concerts reinforce the idea that this music is less-than and needs to be segregated from music by white men. It is vital to incorporate music by a variety of composers throughout the season. Start by planning 15-25% of the season around BIPOC and women composers, then fill in the rest of the program – it is easier to put together a satisfactory program in this manner. Perhaps the best piece of advice from ICD is to not program more than two works by any one composer. If an orchestra is limited to just two Beethovens per season, many spots for other composers become available. Most genres of art have their own "Beethoven" – the artist that curators tend to come back to repeatedly.

Conclusions

Curating for Diversity requires complex processes that include data analysis, historical understanding, collaborative leadership, flexibility, and constant growth. Curators who are aware of both algorithmic curation trends and national programming data can use that information to be at the forefront of change. It is important to understand the history around exclusion of identity groups from hegemonic music curation to ensure that arts organizations are working against that history today. Organizations can look to their own data to see where improvements can be made and are being made to make responsible decisions for the future. Change is possible, but it remains difficult, and organizations must work with intention and care to create truly diverse, equitable, and thoughtful artistic programming.

In the field of Arts Management, we spend a lot of time talking about creative placemaking. Individual artists need support and recognition to develop the credibility to become creative placemakers. The individual composers who benefitted from these strategic initiatives were granted increased legitimacy in other spaces; we heard many stories of local commissions and awards following the "international" recognition offered by our organizations. Thus, the Women Composers Festival of Hartford and Golden Hornet each contributed to creative placemaking beyond the original presentations. These case studies demonstrate that thoughtful strategic diversity initiatives can be used to create meaningful change.

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²¹ "Best Practices in Programming," Institute for Composer Diversity, accessed June 1, 2023, <https://www.composerdiversity.com/best-practices-2023>.

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