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Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in the Music Theory and Musicianship Program at Sacramento State

General Principles

I recognize and denounce the lack of diversity, inclusion, and equity that for decades has been at the core of the Sacramento State School of Music theory and musicianship program. These qualities are reflected in the repertoire, styles, and even the analytical models we teach. It is inexcusable to accept or ignore these reprehensible facts. Quick and easy “solutions” are inadequate at best and offensive at worst. Tokenism, for example, exemplified by the simple inclusion in our studied repertoire of one or two works by composers who are not white men in order to check the “diversity” box, is unacceptable. Cherry-picking works by underrepresented groups of artists to study because they align neatly with the values we have established based upon the racist notion of the inherent superiority of predominantly white art forms and genres also badly misses the mark. We require an antiracist approach to the study and teaching of music theory. Therefore, our music theory and musicianship program requires a fundamental overhaul, a complete reimagining of its vision and mission, its curriculum and content, and its pedagogy and methods.

This revision is under way, although it is in its early stages. Since I joined the faculty in 2017, with the support of my supervisors, colleagues, and several generous grants from the university, I have been engaged in an ongoing project to redesign the school’s music theory and musicianship curricula. The primary tenets of the new program include: developing students’ flexibility, versatility, and imagination by studying and creating music in a broad variety of styles and traditions from around the world; engaging music created by artists of a diverse range of backgrounds, with a special focus on underrepresented and marginalized groups; developing reading and critical listening skills; and prioritizing the study of and engagement of contemporary music. These goals have resulted in a reorganization of courses required in all music students’ programs of study and general commitments to course content revisions, which were approved by the university in the 2018–19 academic year.

For many reasons, including a lack of models in other universities around the world, a dearth of textbooks and anthologies that adequately support or even address the aforementioned tenets, the substantial amount of training and development required to develop effective pedagogies that inform a unified approach to the study of disparate styles and structures, and our school’s general lack of financial resources and personnel, this project will take many years to design and implement. During that time, courses will gradually change until the new vision has been realized in full.

The new curriculum is informed by a “comprehensive musicianship” model, the principle traits of which have been described by theorist and pedagogue Michael Rogers thusly:

1. “All style periods are treated as being equally important.” Accordingly, we will integrate aspects of medieval European, contemporary Western, folk, jazz, popular, Hindustani, Arabic, Persian, Sefardic, African, Latino, and Caribbean art music in our classes.

2. “Real compositions in a variety of textures and mediums, as opposed to artificial exercises in four-part chorale style, form the core of study.” Our program will join those of a growing number of institutions around the country in deemphasizing or even eliminating part writing in favor of assignments that resemble “real music.” There will be a greater focus on rhythm, motive, melody, counterpoint, texture, and orchestration.
3. “Parametric analysis—both written and aural—is prominently featured.” We will introduce new modes of analysis in class that allow students to negotiate structural aspects of a larger body of repertoire in more flexible ways. Students will be made aware early on that a harmonic analysis of a piece of music provides insight into only one aspect of a piece of music, and that that is important but insufficient.
4. “Composition and/or improvisation projects, not just mechanical note-pushing drills, are stressed.” Our new courses will place just as much emphasis on creative work as analysis. Our students will be expected to be proficient performers, composers, arrangers, and improvisers, and they will be able to incorporate these skills into their daily lives as musicians.
5. “Rehearsing and performing of student or other compositions in class is a part of many [comprehensive musicianship] programs.” In addition to performing composition assignments in class throughout the semester, final exams will be replaced by performances and evaluation of student composition projects.
6. “The most important aspect in the [comprehensive musicianship] philosophy is that all of these activities and components be related to one another and lead to a unified and complete understanding.” Furthermore, analysis is not a means unto an end; it will be used to inform interpretations that lead to new modes of listening, expression (performance), and composition. Students are encouraged to think creatively about musical rhetoric and narrative. They will learn to communicate analytical insights and interpretations through prose and speech (e.g., program notes).

Resources and Textbooks

This curriculum will result in the creation of three principal textbooks:

1. *Reading Tonal Music*: A music-reading method book / anthology designed according to a pedagogy I have been developing over the past twenty years. Repertoire will be grouped according to tonal features, not style or genre, and will include compositions and transcriptions of music by composers of a broad spectrum of styles. A substantial amount of this music will have been created by members of underrepresented groups, including female-identifying, BIPOC, and LGBTQ musicians. Repertoire will be drawn from the genres detailed in the first trait of comprehensive musicianship defined above. This book/anthology will be used in musicianship classes.
2. *Reading Rhythm*: A rhythm-reading method book / anthology designed according to a pedagogy I have been developing in recent years. Repertoire will comprise my own etudes, a variety of compositions by other musicians with a focus on contemporary music, and spoken word poetry from hip hop and rap. This book/anthology will be used in musicianship classes.
3. *Music Theory, Analysis, and Composition*: A textbook that prepares students for engagement of all of the aforementioned topics in musicianship classes, and teaches composition and arranging skills. In the process of writing this book, I will strongly consider the implicit racial and other biases of these analytical techniques and methods, and I will endeavor to pursue and/or develop flexible and inclusive pedagogical models. This book will be used in music theory classes. Thus, many topics in music theory classes are designed to inform studies in musicianship classes: in

addition to the theory topics of composition and arranging, the musicianship topics of performance, expression, and improvisation are considered the culmination of analytical studies.

The first two of these books are in progress and will be authored concurrently. Thus, the first stage of the development of the new curriculum will be musicianship studies. The last of these books will be written after the completion of the first two texts.

Timeline

The timeline for fully realizing the new courses corresponds to that of the completion of the textbooks. The following dates are estimated and likely optimistic, subject to change as the program's mission and vision evolve:

- Musicianship I, II, and III (MUSC 12A, 12B, and 12C): Fall 2023
- Music Theory I and II (MUSC 11A and 11B): Fall 2024
- Music Theory III and Contemporary Music Theory and Musicianship (MUSC 11C and 104): Fall 2025

Instrumentation and Arranging (MUSC 109) and Pedagogy of Music Theory and Musicianship (MUSC 130) require less research and will be developed concurrently with the lower-division musicianship sequence.

Plan for Faculty Development

I am not only the coordinator of the music theory and musicianship area at Sacramento State, but I am also the school's sole full-time member in this area. I accept that the responsibility of the development of this curriculum, including the authorship of the aforementioned textbooks, falls entirely on me. My plan for self-development includes the following:

1. I will learn North Indian and Arabic music from the perspective of a music theorist and a practitioner. Since June 2019, I have studied Hindustani music with Saily Oak, the acclaimed North Indian classical vocalist of the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana. Since June 2020, and I have studied Arabic music with the international prize-winning Palestinian qanun virtuoso and vocalist Ali Paris. Mr. Paris and I are co-authoring a text on teaching Arabic music theory, performance, and performance practice to Westerners.
2. I will conduct extensive research in music theory and performance of all other genres I will include in my courses and books, as well as pedagogical approaches. Among my resources are the Analytical Approaches to World Music (AAWM) Journal, the Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy, the Journal of Music Theory, Music Theory Spectrum, Music Theory Online, and many books.
3. I will consult with colleagues in the fields I am engaging, both at Sacramento State and around the world, for input and feedback regarding content and methodologies.

After developing and teaching each completed new course at least once, I will create manuals and instructional videos with presentations and demonstrations for my colleagues to prepare them to teach these courses. I will share these materials, including my books, with colleagues at local junior colleges from which we receive transfer students so they are free to adapt their curricula if they wish.

Conclusion

The world of classical music is woefully out of touch with the general population, and it can be assumed that one reason is that it neither resembles, reflects, recognizes, nor supports the general population. Eighty-eight percent of musicians in professional orchestras in the United States are non-Hispanic/Latino White, while 2.5 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and less than two percent are Black. The New York Philharmonic boasts one Black person on its roster in a city of 8.4 million people. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the flagship orchestra of a city of 2.7 million people, 860,000 of whom are Black, has no Black musicians. Works by women constituted eight percent of the repertoire of the 2019–20 seasons of the largest 120 orchestras in the United States, compared to 10.5 percent by Beethoven alone. Compositions by all BIPOC came in at a paltry six percent. Closer to home, Sacramento has a population of over 500,000, over half of whom are women. On February 20, 2019, the Sacramento Bee proudly published an article titled, apparently seriously, “Sac Philharmonic will make history with first composition from a woman on program.” The Philharmonic has not repeated this “remarkable” feat since. In short, our field is racist, sexist, and classist.

Representation matters. In her 2015 dissertation “The Obama Effect on African American High School Males,” Dr. Aundra Simmons Vaughn concluded that “President Obama’s election changed the way [male African-American high schoolers] perceived themselves as well as how they perceived the way the world sees African American males; and most participants were positive about their futures and believed that President Obama’s election has increased their likelihood of success.” How can members of underrepresented populations perceive that they have a place in classical music if everyone who attends an orchestra concert sees that almost all of the musicians on stage are all from a single demographic? How can members of underrepresented populations feel that they will be likely to succeed in a field when the music we teach in music schools was written by a single demographic of composers? We are perpetuating racism in our field at the professional and academic levels. It is well past the time for change.

This change will be difficult, and it will take time. But we have a responsibility to do the hard work to be responsible educators, ambassadors of our art, and members of a wonderfully diverse and pluralistic society. I pledge to take on this task with optimism and enthusiasm for the betterment of our music theory and musicianship program at Sacramento State, and—because it is our constant and top priority—in the interest of the success of *all* of our students.

Respectfully submitted,



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August 31, 2020