

THOUGHTS AND IDEAS FROM THE PROGRAMMING RESOURCES PAGE

by Alex Shapiro

Many conductors, directors, ensembles, and curators want to program the music of women, people who are non-binary, and composers of all racial, sexual, and ethnic identities, but sometimes don't know where to find these works, and don't have a lot of extra time to start looking.

Thus, there's the very human tendency to program the composers and pieces that they already know.

It's not uncommon for someone to say, "I don't care about gender or race, I just want to program excellent music!".

Absolutely: we can't think of anyone who would prefer to program non-excellent music. That's a perfectly reasonable sentiment, and in a perfectly balanced world this page of resources wouldn't be needed.

Unfortunately at the moment, with only about 7% of all programmed concert and film music being composed by women, people of color, or those of alternate gender or sexual identities, it's actually very important to take diversity into account when choosing excellent repertoire. The people responsible for creating the music should be a reflection of the people playing it and listening to it! Unless the many wonderful pieces by currently underrepresented composers are able to be heard, few will know just how much terrific music is out there, and the significant imbalance will only perpetuate itself. It's easy to solve the problem!

We call this, intentional programming.

There's a LOT of excellent music being written by composers of all backgrounds-- it just takes an extra moment to discover these pieces. The many links on this page will help, and if you scroll lower down you can gather some easy, useful ideas. Relax, sit back, and enjoy clicking around and discovering fresh musical voices!

The Programming Resources page is designed to be a guide for:

- Conductors and ensemble leaders
- Professional musicians
- Concert presenters and curators
- Educators
- Students
- Anyone interested in a more balanced and diverse concert music world!

The thoughts included on the page are published with the intent for them to be useful talking points. Everyone, whether a musician or not, whether a high school student or a seasoned professional, can effect change by continuing to have conversations that raise awareness.

ACTION POINTS FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

There are at least four prongs to achieving a diverse musical community of composers, instrumentalists, conductors, and anyone else in the field. The responsibility is equally shared by:

- Those who, through conversation, education, writing, and social media, can keep the realities of inequity in the public consciousness,
- Those who are curating concerts and/or commissioning composers,
- Those who are professionally established, and
- Those who desire their work to be known in the field.

It's important to note privilege: equal access is much easier to achieve with a modicum of financial stability. Many of the actions prescribed below assume at least a basic economic footing in society. If artists struggle to feed and house themselves, expenses like monthly internet fees, computer purchases, concert and conference tickets and the like are further from reach—but not impossible to grasp.

1. PERSISTENCE:

Encourage your peers to join you in using the power of the pixel to raise everyone's consciousness about inequities. Part of the success of the #metoo movement has been the ongoing media coverage, making the issue unavoidable and part of the fabric of daily conversation. Use opportunities to converse, write, and post about the need for diversity.

2. AWARENESS and INTENT:

Encourage those curating concerts and teaching in classrooms to practice intentional programming and to put thought into the lesson examples they select. With greater forethought, their concerts and classes will better reflect the diversity of their musicians, students, and audiences, and serve to inspire the next generation of composers. This is equally the case for required passages and pieces for performance competitions, as well as selections for inclusion on state lists.

For those who work in educational institutions with limiting purchasing protocols, seek ways to circumnavigate the school's system in order to present students a broader selection of music not found on state lists, or accessed through large music retailers.

One fast and highly effective way of diversifying a concert is for an ensemble director to use the power of Facebook or any interactive social media platform to crowd-source! Whenever someone posts a specific question like, "who are the female composers with short wind band fanfares" or, "give me the name of a composer of color who has an anthemic piece under 10 minutes with a big ending," etc., the responses pour in immediately and introduce everyone reading that thread to many terrific composers who were not previously on their radar.

3. ACTION:

Encourage those on the inside of the circle to reach beyond its edges to talented individuals, and expose these newcomers to possibilities of which they might not be aware. Everyone was once an outsider.

When established ensemble directors and composers meet newer composers, they can introduce these fresh faces to colleagues, let them know about opportunities, and encourage them to attend conferences and other events at which they can further build their own networks. It won't be long until those composers are doing the same for their peers. A supportive community is one of the best aspects of our expanding music world.

4. INITIATIVE:

Encourage those who are not yet known to their established peers to take the initiative, and introduce themselves and their work.

Below are a few effective things composers, conductors and others can do that will help them become part of the fabric of the professional world:

—Attend concerts:

Say hello to the participants afterward, and follow up with a friendly, personal email (NEVER a bulk mailing). If appropriate, include a website link, especially one to a specific piece or event that might be of interest to the performers.

—Attend conferences:

Armed with business cards and media to hand out, walk the aisles and engage with people at the booths, go to the workshops and chat with the participants afterward, and participate in social events.

—Be present in interactive online communities:

Be supportive of peers, and avoid posting too often solely about yourself, in favor of posting things geared toward a broader swath of other people's interests. Taking a genuine interest in other people often leads to them wanting to know more about you.

—Get involved with music advocacy organizations:

Join national and international groups and be engaged with them online, and become active with local groups. There is a wealth of knowledge, camaraderie, and potential opportunity to be had through the joy of volunteerism and improving conditions for one's peers, whether or not one's already established.

A word about unintentional exclusion:

The vast majority of music curators are not intentionally discriminatory — it just doesn't occur to them to have a closer look at their programming choices. Yet a lack of purposeful inclusion usually ends up excluding anyone not already in a curator's immediate sphere.

Think of swimming in tepid water: when the water is about the same temperature as our body, we're not really aware of it, because it's as though it's a part of us. The same thing is true for many conductors and ensemble leaders: when every composer they program looks like them, it's natural that they don't "see" the lack of composers with differing gender and racial identities— unless someone brings it to their attention.

A cautionary word about intentional exclusion:

What's needed in the music field is the normalization of the presence of composers (and conductors and musicians, etc.!) from ALL backgrounds, equitably represented across the board. This is why ongoing diversity efforts are crucial to bringing unheard voices to the fore.

But in the interest and best of intentions of reversing longstanding inequities, there is a potential danger in swinging the pendulum too far in the other direction when offering opportunity. It's neither productive nor ethical to be as adamantly non-inclusive of members of the current majority as that majority has historically been of the current minority.

True diversity and inclusion is not achieved by completely excluding a portion of the artistic demographic. Embracing discriminatory practices does not create equity, it merely creates another version of imbalance.

The pipeline of opportunity that has for so long shut out underrepresented artists, can be opened up without entirely turning off its existing intake valves. Regulating their throttle bit, perhaps, but not shutting them down. It's not necessary to deprive audiences of new compositional or conducting talents that happen to be attached to White men, when we have the ability to raise up all excellent new voices by rebalancing programs that used to be entirely White and male. Our goal is for the music of composers from ALL backgrounds to flow freely, side by side, and reach audiences with a powerful array of voices.

To this point, even the most well-meaning of curators can risk an appearance of insulting tokenism when, for instance, they opt to create an all-woman, or all-Black, or all-"Name Your Underrepresented Composer Here" concert— if they are not including plenty of works by such composers on their regularly programmed concerts. The gesture rings hollow.

Self-isolation, -segregation, and -ghettoization make little sense when working to demonstrate that every composer from every background is equally excellent (and sometimes as equally mediocre!).

A positive way to present a balanced program is to allow the pieces and the names of the composers to speak for themselves. Well meaning a gesture as it may be, calling out the presence of formerly underrepresented composers on a concert through promotional materials or when addressing an audience does the opposite of normalizing the work and instead, risks making these pieces appear more like a "special exhibit".

Connecting audiences with the music of all composers is the goal. One engaging approach is to gather a short video from, or about, each composer on a program. Use it for PR leading up to the event, and play it for the audience at the event, either at the start, or as an introduction to each piece.

The most supportive statement is made when the music from diverse composers is naturally presented alongside the equally worthy music from those who have historically been the majority. It's powerful for concertgoers to see creators from all backgrounds and periods together. This is what's meant by the term, normalization.

The new world of equal access:

Until recently, the music of women and non-White people was not widely distributed. Concert repertoire remained the bastion of White men, with relatively few diverse composers included in the fabric of the canon. The latter part of the 20th century brought long overdue changes in society, and the advent of the internet suddenly offered artistic and financial freedom to composers of all backgrounds. As a result, the majority of repertoire from non-White-male composers is relatively new.

This presents an additional programming hurdle for some curators: the need to include contemporary music on their programs.

The boon in technology has changed the music world for the better, and offers all composers an equal opportunity to share their art. There are thousands of fresh musical voices of all races, genders, and sexual identities, and many of them are composing works of excellence. Now it's easier than ever to find the voices that speak to us, program those composers, and expose audiences to the music of their own time.

The joy of the future:

Let's keep expanding these lists and expanding our awareness! This growing series of aggregated links aims to make it easy for everyone to experience the diversity of composers and the joys of their music.

We look forward to a time not long from now when the term "underrepresented composers" becomes, "formerly underrepresented composers"!

ENGAGEMENT!

Do YOU know of a link that should be added to the Programming Resources page? SEND ALEX AN EMAIL to tell her! She can be reached at <<hello@alexshapiro.org>>.

Did you catch a typo or an outdated link on this page? LET ALEX KNOW and it'll be fixed!

Do you know of additional composers who should be included in these lists? Each of these links welcomes suggestions! Get directly in touch with the individual curators of these resources, or:

SEND ALEX AN EMAIL, and she'll do it.

SHARING!

Let's keep expanding these lists and creating additional ones. This growing series of aggregated links aims to make it easy for everyone to experience the diversity of composers and the joys of their music!