

East Asian Voices of Resistance Against Racism in Music

Edited by

Maiko Kawabata and Ken Ueno

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Contributors

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Frederick Lau is Chair and Professor of the Music Department and Director of the Center for Chinese Music Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His expertise spans a broad spectrum of Western and Asian music, encompassing performance, practice, and scholarly pursuits. Lau's accomplishments are evidenced by his extensive research, notable publications, prestigious positions, and numerous awards. He is the author of *Music in China* and co-editor of *China Sounds Abroad, Making Waves: Traveling Musics in Asia and the Pacific, Vocal Music and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Music:*

Unlimited Voices in East Asia and the West, and Locating East Asia in Western Art Music. Prior to teaching in Hong Kong in 2018, Lau held professorial positions at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and Cal Poly State University in California. Additionally, he has served as visiting professor at various universities in Asia and the United States.

Hedy Law (she/her) is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of British Columbia. She received her Ph.D. in Music Theory and History at the University of Chicago in 2007 and has published in the *Journal of Musicology*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, the *Opera Quarterly*, *Musique et Geste en France: De Lully à la Révolution*, the *Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, the *Oxford Handbook of Music and Censorship*, and the *Oxford Handbook on Music and the Body*. Her research interests include eighteenth-century French spectacles (including opera, ballet, pantomime), the French Enlightenment, gender, Cantonese opera, Cantonese music, Chinese immigrants in the Pacific Northwest Region, and global music history. Her book, *Music, Pantomime, and Freedom in Enlightenment France*, was published by Boydell in 2020.

Sarah Miyamoto (she/her) is an independent researcher in the field of Musicology. She graduated from the University of Ottawa in 2016 with a Bachelor of Music and received her Master of Arts in Musicology at McGill University in 2023 under the supervision of Professor Roe-Min Kok. Her master's thesis revises past approaches to the orchestral music of Tōru Takemitsu in the 1970s. Her current areas of research include eco-musicology, soundscapes, twentieth-century Japanese classical music, and the role of music in the Japanese Canadian internment.

Ken Ueno (he/him) is a composer, performer, sound artist, and scholar. Leading performers and ensembles around the world have championed Ueno's music. His piece for the Hilliard Ensemble, *Shiroi Ishi*, was featured in their repertoire for over ten years. Another work, *Pharmakon*, was performed dozens of times nationally by Eighth Blackbird during

their 2001-2003 seasons. A portrait concert of Ken's was featured on MaerzMusik in Berlin in 2011. As a vocalist, Ueno is known for inventing extended techniques and has performed as soloist in his vocal concerto with orchestras in Boston, New York, Warsaw, Vilnius, Bangkok, Sacramento, Stony Brook, Pittsburgh, North Carolina, and Berkeley. As a sound artist his installations have been commissioned and exhibited by museums and galleries in Beijing, Guangzhou, Taipei, Mexico City, Art Basel, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. Ueno currently serves as a Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. His writings have been published by the Oxford Handbook, the New York Times, Palgrave Macmillan, and Wiley & Sons. He holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University and an M.M.A. from the Yale School of Music, and his bio appears in The Grove Dictionary of American Music. www.kenueno.com

Grace Wang (she/her) is associate professor of American Studies at University of California, Davis and author of *Soundtracks of Asian America* (Duke UP). She is currently working on a book about practices of exclusion in classical music institutions and co-directing a documentary film about timpanist Elayne Jones.

Sharon Yang (she/her) is a Chinese-Canadian musician whose bicultural background inspires a strong interest in ethnomusicology and interdisciplinary studies. She graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance and the University of Edinburgh with a Master's degree in Musicology. She employs interdisciplinary approach to examine nuanced interactions between music and sociopolitical frameworks as part of her postgraduate studies. Sharon's research interests include Orientalism in Western music works, the ways in which music reflects political ideologies and cultural identities, and the disparities between Western and Eastern musical traditions. Most recently, she's focused on the intersection of music and politics in modern Chinese history.

Daniel York Loh's (he/him) stage plays include *The Fu Manchu Complex* (Ovalhouse/Moongate), *Forgotten* 遗忘 . (Arcola/Plymouth Theatre Royal/Moongate/New Earth) and *The Dao of Unrepresentative British Chinese Experience (Butterfly Dream)* (Soho Theatre/Kakilang), as well as for the Royal Court's *Living Newspaper* and *Living Archive, Silent Disco in the Sky* (Northern Stage 'Scroll' collection), *No Time For Tears* for Moongate's *We R Not Virus* online collection. He is one of 21 'writers of colour' featured in the best-selling essay collection *The Good Immigrant*. He is Associate Artistic Director of Kakilang with whom he co-created and performed in *every dollar is a soldier/with money you're a dragon* which won the 2022 Arts Council Digital Culture Award (Storytelling). For Papergang: *Invisible Harmony* 无形的和谐 (Southbank Centre/2020 CAN Festival) and *Freedom Hi* 自由闊 (Vault Festival). As an actor he has performed at the Royal Shakespeare Company, National Theatre, Donmar Warehouse, Royal Court, Hampstead Theatre, Finborough, Theatre 503, Gate, Bristol Old Vic, Edinburgh Traverse and most recently in *Dr. Semmelweis* in the West End, as well as extensively in Singapore for Wild Rice, Pandemonium and Finger Players, and in the feature films *Rogue Trader*, *The Beach*, *The Receptionist* and *Scarborough*.

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Figure 2.1. Program of “Rediscovered Composers” (BBC)

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N.B. All musical examples are reproduced with kind permission from the composer and the lyricist.

Introduction

Maiko Kawabata

The idea of the yellow peril... helped to define that challenge posed by Asia to Europe's dominance and was inscribed within the colonialist discourse as a justification for barbarism/paganism. Like orientalism, however, yellow peril discourse was hegemonic but not all-powerful, breaking down or changing when confronted with Asian resistance. The fear, whether real or imagined, arose from the fact of the rise of non-white peoples and their defiance of white supremacy.

Gary Okihiro (1994): 198

As co-editors of this volume, we take courage from the example of Gary Okihiro as we raise our voices collectively in resistance to anti-East Asian racism in music. In doing so, we explicitly wish to draw attention to a basic first principle, namely, the need to recognize the fact that racism exists against East Asians in the field of music. Too often, the observation of this fact becomes obscured or elided in the rush to jump to conclusions or to arrive at solutions. But we believe that only by understanding the ways in which such racism arose in the first place, and the ways in which it continues to persist in music, can informed action result. Thus, the act of bringing our voices together begins by naming and calling out the tropes of othering – yellow peril, orientalism – and in the next moment, we pause to resist and oppose these tropes. We inhabit this particular moment for a deep dive in the belief that only from such probing can we truly arrive at a point where we could even begin to imagine that musicians can stand as equals in the music field regardless of how we are racialized.

The origins of this volume lie in the “Racialised Performance in Western Classical Music” conference hosted in July 2022 by the Open University and Royal Holloway, University of London. The conference sparked new discourses of East Asian(-plus) perspectives in Western Classical Music practice and a strong sense of community, collectivity and inclusion among scholars based in Asia, Europe, and the USA. Building on this momentum, this volume centers East Asian voices – in collaboration with our allies – as narrators of our own racialized experiences in music. Featuring eleven author contributions, in a mixture of tone that is academic and personal or reflective – thus deliberately disrupting conventional linguistic norms – the volume goes beyond the usual conference proceedings volume to bring together our voices in a creative act of resistance against racism in music, and in solidarity with activism that targets inequalities in the arts more broadly. Each author contributes their own perspective either based on the live sessions at the conference or developed directly in its aftermath.

The conference was part of a research collaboration between Maiko Kawabata and Shzr Ee Tan, a project entitled “Cultural Imperialism and the New ‘Yellow Peril’ in Western Classical Music.” It followed a Study Day in 2019 (report published as Kawabata and Tan 2019), which attracted approximately 60 attendees, and “Orchestrating Isolation: Musical Interventions and Inequality in the COVID-19 Fallout” in 2020, which drew together approximately 160 delegates. These events were designed to highlight the lived experience of musicians of East Asian heritage, primarily in the UK. As such, these were the first events of their kind. They powerfully revealed commonalities of experience in the realms of musical performance and music education of racial minoritization. While we noted the research of U.S. colleagues relating to Asian and Asian American musicians in the U.S. context (Yoshihara 2007, Wang 2015, Yang 2014), we identified that the academic discourse pertaining to the U.K. and European contexts was lacking. Simultaneously, we discovered that many of our experiences of minoritization were shared by East Asian actors working in British theater. Both events emphasized practitioner perspectives and featured

musical performances from Tangram and Kiku Day, East Asian musicians based in Europe, while the incomparable Jennifer Koh gave a keynote.

While the 2020 Symposium took place during the Coronavirus pandemic, when anti-Asian hate crimes spiked in the UK and other parts of the world, making our discussions even more relevant than before, by the time of our 2022 conference, the pandemic context had become just the latest in a series of contexts for racisms against East Asians. Attended by about 120 delegates (online and live), discussion topics ranged from casual and structural racism in classical music institutions and discourse to intersectional considerations and brought up examples such as harmful stereotypes of East Asian musicians as “automatons” and the problematics of “Madame Butterfly” and of yellow facing. Looking at both histories and contemporary contexts, analysis delved into the ideological baggage surrounding the myth of Western classical music as a “universal” language and the hegemony of whiteness in our field. As we shared our personal reflections and narratives, we found common ground, a sense of community, strength through collectivity.

This radical volume foregrounds the voices of a growing network of activist-minded colleagues in academia, music, arts administration, and theater. The volume is by us, for us, in the sense that when Asians voices are in the majority in a particular space, it can help shift the conversation (as Kunio Hara notes in his chapter). The simple fact that safe spaces are needed in order to develop the conversation should not go unacknowledged, and neither should the reality of informal or behind-the-scenes labor that is a necessary consequence of the unsafe spaces that many of us move and work within.

This volume is also for gatekeepers and leaders of institutions, to help dynamize the conversation around initiatives to address racism and improve equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI in the UK, DEI in the USA). It is our hope that this volume will contribute to positive and

long-lasting changes in music that will make it more inclusive, building on the work addressing inequalities emerging in academic discourse (see e.g. Bull and Scharff 2023, Scharff 2018) and academic networks (such as Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Music Studies). This volume is, most importantly, for students. We hope that this volume will be read in part or in its entirety in classrooms which, as bell hooks (2014) reminds us, are the most radical spaces.

This volume is organized thematically into three sections. The first section, "Racism, Diversity, and Institutions" begins with my own chapter examining the structural racism faced by East Asian musicians in Western European orchestras, emphasizing the need for systemic change in music and the arts practices and advocating for the diversification of orchestral repertoires to include works by women and minority composers. Next, Kunio Hara draws much-needed attention to the centering of Asian American subjectivities in the performance of a notorious and over-familiar opera. The author's own involvement in discussions around new "Butterflies" that are revisionist/subversive/radical/critical/deconstructionist is an exemplar of how academic work and activism can overlap. Hara's chapter raises important questions about the agency of individuals and institutions and about what comprises leadership in enacting change. This is followed by Grace Wang's chapter, which explores the challenges faced by Asian American musicians in classical music, focusing on violist David Kim's experiences with racism and the limitations of diversity initiatives, highlighting the enduring impact of exclusionary practices and the need for broader systemic changes to truly achieve equity in the field. The first section ends with Ken Ueno's paper which discusses the concept of "corseting," where non-Western musicians are molded to fit Western classical music standards, advocating for alternative epistemological frameworks that promote artistic agency and resistance against these hegemonic norms.

The second section, "Personal Narratives in Resistance" features Daniel York Loh's powerful poem, lambasting the ever-present culture of

racism in music and the arts. Risa Kaneko's touching account of what she calls "racialized adversities" in music draws on both a personal narrative of her journey from pianist to arts administrator and on fieldwork interviews with musicians of Asian descent. With astute observations of experiences of negative racialization, she outlines the steps she took to equip and empower herself with knowledge of racism and with learning to resist racism. Frederick Lau draws on his own personal experiences and observations to highlight issues in the racialization of Asians who perform Western classical music. Linking micro and macro, he demonstrates the complexities of these issues, for instance by disentangling the visual aspect of performance from the auditory, and by interrogating the purported universality of whiteness. Ultimately, his vision is for a more inclusive domain that addresses existing biases and is characterized by diverse voices. Sharon Yang's autoethnographic study explores the impact of China's One-Child Policy and rapid socioeconomic changes on classical music education, using the author's childhood experiences to illustrate the pursuit of Western art music as a symbol of social status and the anxieties it generated within middle-class families.

In the third section, "Countering Minoritizations," Beata M. Kowalczyk's essay addresses how racial microaggressions perpetuate racial divisions in Western classical music. Using interviews with Japanese musicians and existing literature, she identifies six themes of microaggressions that highlight the subtle, often unconscious ways racism persists in the field. Sarah Miyamoto's paper introduces us to David Kai, a Japanese Canadian church musician who names his Christian hymn tunes after former internment camps to memorialize and resist the historical injustices of the Japanese Canadian Internment. His work promotes recovery, reconciliation, and resistance through place, displacement, and memory. The section concludes with Hedy Law's contribution, which discusses the Cantonese choral suite "Requiem HK" (2017), composed by Ng Cheuk-Yin with lyrics by Chow Yiu-Fai. The piece features wordplay in its bilingual title to express collective mourning for the demise of a version of Hong Kong's political

system, blending elements of Western requiem and Cantonese opera to create a politically charged and culturally resonant piece.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention how grateful I am to all authors for their courage in speaking up and to my co-editor Ken Ueno for sharing a vision of music that is less unequal as a goal to work towards as a community, drawing strength from each other.

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I: Racism, Diversity, and Institutions

Chapter 1

Racism and Diversity in Orchestral Practice

Maiko Kawabata

Abstract

This chapter forms a companion piece to “The New ‘Yellow Peril’ in Western European Symphony Orchestras” (Kawabata 2023), which revealed the prevalence of racism experienced by ethnically East Asian musicians in professional Western European symphony orchestras. Here, I reflect further on the question of what it means to seek inclusion for racially minoritized musicians in a system that is fundamentally unequal. The chapter seeks to expand our understanding of structural inequalities that exist at the core of Western classical music ideology and makes the case for diversifying orchestral repertoire, in part by making a case study out of my own diversity work with orchestras. The benefits that come out of such work are then considered alongside critiques of diversity work levelled by musicologists and scholars in adjacent disciplines. Finally, I touch on the relevance of anti-racism when considering the changes that orchestras could implement to take responsibility for historical racism.

Keywords

East Asian musicians, orchestras, racism, diversity, anti-racism

Introduction

In exploring the risks and necessity of speaking about racism... my aim is not to suggest that we should stop doing diversity, but that we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity.

Sara Ahmed (2012: 17)

This chapter forms a companion piece to “The New ‘Yellow Peril’ in Western European Symphony Orchestras” (Kawabata 2023), which revealed the prevalence of racism experienced by ethnically East Asian musicians in professional Western European symphony orchestras. My interview-based ethnographic study uncovered significant evidence of bias in the application process, audition procedures, and in the course of rehearsals, concerts and tours – evidence of the prejudice that an “alien” invasion (“Yellow Peril”) is overtaking “authentically white” (Eurocentric) spaces. Drawing on this evidence, I concluded that certain measures were necessary to address existing inequalities (and thereby improve diversity) in Western European orchestras, e.g. to standardize anonymous applications and screened auditions. While there is undoubtedly a place for such measures as a stopgap in the short term, they only scratch the surface. Here, I reflect further on the question of what it means to seek orchestral inclusion for racially minoritized musicians in a system that is fundamentally unequal. This is because, as I also argued before, “the underlying problem is structural” (Kawabata 2023: 168).

This chapter takes the question of how to respond to racist orchestral practice as a jumping-off point. It seeks to expand our understanding of structural inequalities that exist at the core of Western classical music ideology because what is needed beyond a change to orchestras is a wholesale structural change in the culture and practices of Western classical music institutions. An account of the full range of requisite changes being beyond the scope of this chapter, here I will focus on one change that slices across the sector, namely, diversifying the orchestral repertoire. To focus on this aspect is to strike at the core of the ideology since composers are positioned at the centre of it and their works are positioned at the apex of the hierarchy of performance. At the same time, I suspect that change to any part of the system via “diversity work” will have knock-on effects to other parts of the system. While my approach suggests utilizing Western classical music’s composer-centrism to effect change from within, in the long term this structure itself should also be challenged.

Diversifying Orchestral Repertoire

One of several previously unpublished findings from my earlier study is the fact that the majority of the East Asian musicians I interviewed took it as read that being an orchestral musician meant performing the music of a handful of dead white male composers. Hardly any of them had performed music by women composers or by composers of color in the course of their training and orchestral careers, nor had it occurred to that many of them to question why this was the case. This finding raises the question of what it means to seek inclusion in an organisation whose *raison d'être* is predicated on a pantheon of composers in which these musicians rarely if ever see themselves represented.

In Europe in recent years, and especially in the wake of the #BLM and #MeToo movements, calls to diversify the canon have increased via institutional initiatives designed expressly to promote orchestral music by women and minority-ethnic composers such as Chineke!’s promotion of black composers, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra’s focus on “Women Composers,” and the BBC Philharmonic’s collaboration with the Arts and Humanities Research Council scheme “Celebrating Classical Composers from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds.” The last scheme supported research leading to new performances of orchestral works by Margaret Bonds, R. Nathaniel Dett, Isaac Hirshow, Kikuko Kanai, Ali Osman, and Julia Perry in two explicitly diversity-themed BBC Radio 3 live concerts in 2022.

My involvement with the scheme enables me to draw on my first-hand experience as a case study in diversity work in an orchestral setting. My research into the Japanese composer Kikuko Kanai (1906-1986) led to the UK premiere of her Symphonic Poem *Deigo no Hanasaku Ryūkyū* [*Ryūkyū where the Deigo Flowers Blossom*] broadcast live, reaching approximately 100,000 listeners. As I told the presenter in the course of introducing the Symphonic Poem, Kanai’s example is important because it can inspire young listeners, especially girls of color, who may not be accustomed to seeing composers who resemble them in the

canon. This point about representation and the pipeline is worth underscoring as one of the most important aspects of diversity work in our field: to highlight the possibility of inclusion for the next generation. The full program of the concert is given in the following table (trigger warning: one of the titles contains a racial slur referring to African American women).

Figure 2.1: Program of “Rediscovered Composers” (BBC)¹

A live concert from Media City UK in Salford given by the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Jack Sheen, showcased the music of composers from diverse backgrounds working in the Western classical music tradition. The programme was suggested by a select group of academics under the umbrella of the Arts and Humanities Research Council who, in collaboration with Radio 3, are investigating and bringing this rediscovered music before the public.

Part One

Nathaniel Dett: Magnolia Suite Part Two: No 4 ‘Mammy’ (BBC First Performance)

Championed by Dwight Pile-Gray

Chevalier de Saint Georges: Sinfonia concertante in B flat Op 6 No 2 (UK Premiere)

Championed by Christopher Dingle

Julia Perry: Piano Concerto No 2 - in 2 speeds (BBC First Performance)

Championed by Michael Harper

Interval music

Nathaniel Dett: Music in the Mine

Isaac Hirshow: Shlof mayn kind (UK Premiere) Kol Gojim (UK Premiere)

Championed by Phil Alexander

Part Two

Nathaniel Dett: The Daybreak Charioteer

Margaret Bonds: Troubled Water

Championed by Samantha Ege

Ali Osman: From The South (UK Premiere)

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001dg1r>

Championed by Ahmed Abdul Rahman

Kikuko Kanai: *Ryūkyū* where the Deigo flowers blossom (UK Premiere)

Championed by Mai Kawabata

Margaret Bonds: Montgomery Variations

The BBC Philharmonic's performance of this program raises questions around the notion of authenticity in the interpretation of so-called diverse music. *Deigo no Hanasaku Ryūkyū* is built on Okinawan folk melodies and the instrumentation includes Japanese *taiko*. How authentic were the orchestra's renditions of the rhythms and inflections of the folk melodies? How convincingly did they capture the spirit of the Okinawan people and culture? Similar questions arise from the orchestra's performances of the other works in the programme. How authentic were their renditions of African American spirituals? How convincingly did they capture the spirit of enslaved people who sang them under bondage? The notion of authentic expression in the performance of the masterpieces of Mozart, Beethoven etc. is frequently invoked as a way of preventing "outsiders" from entering white spaces. Grace Wang (2015) coined the term "innate capacity" to describe the belief that certain types of music originate from, and therefore belong to, certain groups or places. According to this logic, only musicians of Okinawan heritage and African American heritage could have performed this programme authentically – which is obviously absurd. If orchestral musicians could be retrained to absorb skills of what Jon Silpayamanant (2023) has called "polymusicality and hybridization," such as improvisation or the traditional music of, say, China or Azerbaijan, then orchestral practice itself could be diversified. The point is that diversifying orchestral repertoire and diversifying orchestral practice ought to go hand in hand.

Overall, the fact that the scheme gave unprecedented, wide exposure to the music of Kanai *et al* signals progress in that it gives a much-needed impetus towards changing the orchestral repertoire, which has traditionally lacked diversity. Although it remains to be seen if the scheme will result in long-term or substantive commitment to change

in orchestral practice, ripple effects are starting to emerge as musicians come forward with an interest in performing Kanai's music. In February 2024, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales gave the UK premiere of Kanai's *Capriccio Okinawa* conducted by Nodoka Okisawa (who, as a Japanese woman, embodies podium diversification).² At the time of writing, there are plans for more performances of Kanai's music by musicians who have gained familiarity with it as a result of the scheme. The process of diversifying orchestral repertoire may be slower than ideal but is pointing in the right direction as the name "Kikuko Kanai" finds its way onto concert programmes – along with the names Florence Price, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Toru Takemitsu, yes, but also the names Franz Liszt and Antonín Dvořák.³

"We need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity"

Diversity work is worthwhile, as we can see from the benefits outlined above. But that does not make it exempt from critique. How meaningful is the diversification process if it is about expanding the repertoire infinitely while retaining its centre vs. periphery structure of familiar masterpieces vs. "diverse" works? What are we doing with diversity, if the unchanging nature of core programming means that for orchestras it is business as usual, only now with the added pretence that diversification is no longer an issue? These questions recall the critique levelled against diversity work by Sara Ahmed in the context of British and Australian universities, namely, that diversity discourses obscure racism. The BBC's branding of the 2022 concerts as "Forgotten Music" and "Rediscovered Composers" used the words "forgotten" and "rediscovered" as euphemisms for "excluded." My intention here is not to single out or to shame a particular institution but rather to draw

² *Capriccio Okinawa*'s instrumentation features *sanshin*, a traditional Okinawa folk instrument. I am grateful to the Daiwa Foundation for their generous support of a specialist performer to travel from Okinawa to Wales, without which the performance would not have been possible.

³ The programme of the BBC NOW concert was: Toru Takemitsu's *Three Film Scores*, Kikuko Kanai's *Capriccio Okinawa*, Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 2, and Antonín Dvořák's *The Wood Dove*.

attention to how diversity work functions as a smokescreen for the centring of whiteness. Those euphemisms make it sound like the lack of diversity in orchestral repertoire was due to innocuous omission rather than active exclusion for hundreds of years.

The history of racism against East Asians is entrenched in the texts, discourses and practices of Western Classical music, which have long constructed the “Orient” as “Other.” As Edward Said (1978) argued, the Western cultural hegemonic construct of the “Orient” grew out of Orientalism – and not the other way around – previewing the logic of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s (2015) statement that “Race is the child of racism, not the father.” Said invoked Antonio Gramsci’s notion of an inventory to take stock of the way historical processes shape our consciousness when he pinpointed the dynamics of Orientalism (racism, cultural stereotyping, cultural imperialism, colonialism, and cultural domination) in “aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts” (1978: 12). The degree to which Orientalist tropes are ingrained in the consciousness of Western classical music performers and institutions is the degree to which East Asian composers have historically been delegitimated. Among the numerous examples which I lack space to elaborate here is, to put it crudely, how the barriers to equality are placed on Japanese women as musical “subjects” by othering them as musical “objects.”⁴ We should celebrate the achievements of marginalized composers but, without also dealing with the racist past that relegated them to marginalization in the first place, the celebration sounds hollow.

Diversity work is not exempt either from the critique levelled by Philip Ewell in the context of U.S. music theory that “to ‘diversify’ the curriculum by adding a few POC composers actually reinforces [the white racial frame]” (2020: 3.4). Along similar lines, it can be argued that

⁴ To give an example, Judy Tsou (2015) argues that Puccini crafts musical language so as to portray *Madame Butterfly* as “striving to be occidental” by giving her lyrical lines but never allowing her to break out of her monotone lines or pentatonic scales which keeps her perpetually childlike, primitive, and “othered” in every way.

the tokenism of adding “a few POC composers” to an otherwise unchanging orchestral repertoire reinforces whiteness, for instance when their music is relegated to specially designated occasions (such as International Women’s Day or Black History Month) as a box-ticking exercise and fails to be integrated into core programming. As Chineke! founder Chi-Chi Nwanoku once said at a workshop I attended, “in order for someone new to sit at the table, someone has to get up from their seat.”⁵ The table remains a white space that is most visible as such to those who are denied a place.

The argument that “diversity” is a buzzword that deflects from the recentring of whiteness has been convincingly made by musicologists. Marianna Ritchey (2023) observes of the New York scene such as the MET that “diversity initiatives” are actually corporate exercises of the neoliberal machinery designed to add a little color without altering the status quo. In Mina Yang’s (2023) devastating critique, the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Youth Orchestra programme instantiates “white saviorism.” The problem with “diversity” initiatives is that implementing them makes institutions *look* inclusive while going about doing business as usual. Given the situation depicted in music institutions, Ahmed’s words are relevant: “we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity” and we need to speak about racism, which is both risky and necessary.⁶

⁵ Printed with kind permission (via personal communication) from Chi-Chi Nwanoku, who spoke at “Interrogating Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music: BAME routes into and through Higher Education”: A workshop organised by the Royal Musical Association, the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, and the National Association of Music in Higher Education, in association with City, University of London (2019).

⁶ The work of interrogating diversity in other disciplines can inform the work of interrogating diversity in music studies. Theatre scholar Swati Arora (2021) has argued that to simply add minorities to the canon in the name of “diversity” without examining the canon fails to address the deep structural inequalities historically embedded in it and in canon-formation. Media scholar Anamik Saha’s (2023) provocation to “end diversity” draws attention to the inefficacy of diversity initiatives that serve as proxies for action – that are implemented to give the appearance that institutions are taking action. Angela Davis has stated that “Diversity without

Conclusion: Towards Inclusion

Returning to the plight of East Asian professional orchestral musicians in Europe: while it might seem a positive aspiration on one level to seek to remove existing barriers to inclusion, that alone will not advance the cause of equality as long as orchestral practices continue to reinforce Eurocentrism and whiteness. (And it is worth mentioning here that recent research into the history of orchestras under colonization has revealed the existence of slave orchestras comprising musicians of color, for example in eighteenth-century Indonesia under Dutch rule – which complicates our picture of orchestral diversity as the ideal to work towards (Silpayamanant 2020, 2023)). I have argued that diversity work to change the repertoire to be inclusive of music by ethnic minority composers goes some way towards challenging the status quo. I have also shown, drawing on scholars in musicology and adjacent disciplines, that diversity work of this type is not exempt from the critique that it reinscribes the racism that it ought to eradicate.

Ewell (2020: 3.4) has gone so far as to suggest that “what we need is not ‘diversity’ but ‘anti-racism’.” By anti-racism, what is meant specifically is active opposition to racism, as distinct from non-racism, which, instead of indicating neutrality on race issues (a common misconception) is a way of passively perpetuating white-centred structures – to echo Ibram X. Kendi (2019) and Juliet Hess (2019). While exploring the question of what an anti-racist orchestral practice would look like lies beyond the scope of the present chapter, this is precisely the kind of question that diversity work raises and that it is important to remember to keep and absorb fully as a question instead of rushing to half-baked solutions.

structural transformation simply brings those who were previously excluded into a system as racist, [as] misogynist, as it was before” (quoted in Arora 2021).

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