

June 4, 2020

RE: CALL TO ACTION FROM ALUMNI - Make addressing systemic oppression, racism, and coloniality a strategic, faculty-wide goal

To the University of Toronto Faculty of Music strategic academic planning committee,

This strategic planning meeting at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music comes at a crucial moment in our community—one where, over the past years, months, and weeks, issues of coloniality, racism and other systemic inequalities have been made more visible than ever in the public eye. We are writing this letter as a group of University of Toronto alumni, in the midst of ongoing racially-fueled police brutality in both the United States and Canada; continued systemic violence against Indigenous communities; and a global pandemic that has amplified and revealed the ways in which our social systems unfairly advantage some over others. We list these as examples of how our institutions are continuously failing the people they serve.

Music institutions are no exception. As a leading Canadian institution of western classical and jazz music, the University of Toronto Faculty of Music is fundamentally implicated in the establishment and perpetuation of these racist, colonial, and otherwise oppressive structures. Eurocentrism, white supremacy, and coloniality are built into the core of how we perform, analyze, teach, and learn classical music—and institutionalized jazz music owes its existence to the labour of BIPOC (Black/Indigenous/People of Colour) communities. **As alumni, we call upon the Faculty of Music to make a concrete, transparent and public-facing commitment clarifying its stance on issues of systemic oppression, racism, and coloniality—both in its public programming and in its pedagogical practices.**

Other schools have already taken first steps in this direction. One example is the Manhattan School of Music, which recently [made a statement](#) in solidarity with Black Lives Matter protesters that, “for the upcoming 2020–21 academic year, all performances will feature work by African American creators or those from the African diaspora.” This is a music institution that has made a clear stance against systemic racism, backed up by a specific, deliverable action.

In your 2016-2021 Strategic Academic Plan, you point to diversity of the student body, diversity of the city of Toronto, and academic diversity via enhanced “world music” curricula as key areas of focus. Our hope is that you now go further, by **making a strong stance against systemic racism, coloniality, and related issues a core planning goal**. This should be a concern not only in your ancillary curricula but in the core classical and jazz art forms taught at the school. It is an issue not only of diverse representation, but also of dedicating funding, programming, and training to crafting an explicitly anti-racist and anti-colonial school environment.

It is impossible to be at the forefront of musical education without acknowledging social issues that are central and urgent within our music community—and it is impossible to achieve what the 2016-2021 Plan lists as the school’s core objectives while this overdue action holds it back from being on the vanguard of music pedagogy in North America.

As initial requests, we urge the University of Toronto Faculty of Music strategic planning committee to include in their next plan:

1. A publicly-stated, concrete and continuing commitment towards supporting the work of BIPOC artists and other marginalized artists in your public-facing programming, concerts, and lectures.
2. A commitment to allocating increased and ongoing funding towards programming regularly-occurring events (both public and internal) that explicitly address colonialism, racism, and other issues of systemic oppression in the fields of classical and jazz music.
3. A commitment to allocating increased and ongoing funding towards regularly-occurring professional development training for faculty and staff in the fields of a) anti-oppression, b) workplace harassment and c) diverse pedagogy- and curriculum-planning.

If needed, we can direct you to resources and organizations that might serve as examples.

(This document was compiled between June 2 and June 4, 2020 as a result of recent correspondence between alumni and the Faculty of Music alumni office. It is a brief sampling of a much larger and wider-ranging discussion. We urge you to view this as a preliminary document, and to be open to further alumni requests over the coming months and years.)

In the face of these urgent issues, **outdated programming, pedagogical conservatism, and public silence are all merely forms of complicity** for the status quo—in an industry where Eurocentrism, coloniality, and racism are built into the foundations of the community, its institutions, and its music. As current music professionals, we are trying to build a better, fairer, and stronger community via our own lives and work—and we want to uphold the University of Toronto as an institution that, at the very least, does the same.

An active stance towards anti-oppression is long overdue. This can and should be a part of your next strategic plan, and considered as a part of who is heard (and how) during your strategic plan creation process. We hope that in doing so, it will make us proud to say that this was the university that taught us what music-making means—not only the ways that classical and jazz music can perpetuate trauma and oppression, but rather, that these art forms can also be used by institutions today as avenues for learning and un-learning: as representations of power and beauty in our communities, and as vehicles for real, systemic change.

Thank you for your time.

Signed,

University of Toronto Faculty of Music alumni (document edited and 372 signatories removed)

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