CLASSIFYING DIVERSITY: COMPOSER IDENTITIES AND THE COMPOSER DIVERSITY DATABASE

Gavin Goodwin
CAPAL21 Conference – May 19, 2021
Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is situated on unceded Indigenous lands, territory of the Kanien’kehà:ka Nation. Tiohtiá:ke, otherwise known as Montréal has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations. I would like to recognize and respect the Kanien’kehà:ka as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters from which I am presenting today.

To learn more about the traditional land holders where you live, visit https://native-land.ca to learn more about your region.
Diversity in Western Art Music programming

- Classical, or Western Art Music, is very traditional and rooted in white, male and European composers
- Lack of diversity among classical music concert programming
    - 8% of programmed works by women composers
    - 6% of programmed works by underrepresented heritages
    - 16% of programmed works by living composers
Lifting the Cone of Silence From Black Composers

Listen to how artists have explored what it means — and could mean — to be American.

For These Classical Musicians, It’s Always Been About Racial Equity

The work now being taken up by large institutions has long been the purpose of many smaller ones. We spoke with seven of them.

Seeking Orchestras in Tune With Their Diverse Communities

(Cooper 2018)

(Barone 2021)

(Lewis 2020)
A SIMPLE LIBRARY REQUEST

“I’m looking for works by female indigenous composers. Can you help me find some?”
Music Subject Access and Musical “Aboutness”

- Traditional Library of Congress subject headings for musical scores focus on describing the medium of performance and genre or form of a work.
- Determining the “aboutness” of artistic works is challenging.
- New Library of Congress faceted vocabularies improve description of musical materials:
  - Genre/Form Terms
  - Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music
  - Demographic Group Terms
Composer Diversity Database

- Created by the Institute for Composer Diversity at SUNY Fredonia
  - The Institute’s goal is to “encourage the discovery, study, and performance of music written by composers from underrepresented groups”
- Began as a project for highlighting female composers in a musicology seminar
- As of May 2021, the Composer Diversity Database includes 1,901 entries
- Accompanying databases exist: musical works by composers represented in the Composer Database, a database for choral works, and forthcoming individual databases for orchestral works, wind band, chamber music, and art song.
- [www.composerdiversity.com](http://www.composerdiversity.com)
## Composer Diversity Database - SUNY Fredonia

**Faceted searching by:**
- Gender identity
- Sexual/romantic orientation
- Ethnic/racial demographics
- Musical genre/medium
- Place of residence and origin

### GENDER IDENTITY and SEXUAL / ROMANTIC ORIENTATION CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intersex</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Non-binary</th>
<th>Third Gender</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
<th>Two Spirit</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>LGBTQIA2s+</th>
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### DEMOGRAPHIC CRITERIA

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<th>African</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latinx/Latin American</th>
<th>Indigenous Peoples</th>
<th>East Asian</th>
<th>South Asian</th>
<th>Southeast Asian</th>
<th>West Asian/North African</th>
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### GENRE CRITERIA

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<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>Wind Band</th>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Chamber</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Musical Theatre</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Game</th>
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<th>Electroacoustic/Installation</th>
<th>Jazz/Improvisation</th>
<th>Songwriting</th>
<th>Folk/Traditional Genres</th>
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### MEDIUM / SUBGENRE CRITERIA

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<th>String Quartet</th>
<th>Piano Trio</th>
<th>Wind Quintet</th>
<th>Reed Quintet</th>
<th>Saxophone Quartet</th>
<th>Brass Quintet</th>
<th>Pierrot Ensemble</th>
<th>Percussion Ensemble</th>
<th>Young Band</th>
<th>Young Orchestra</th>
<th>Young Choir</th>
<th>Young Piano</th>
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### LOCATION CRITERIA

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<th>City (of residence)</th>
<th>U.S. State or Territory (of residence)</th>
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<td>(e.g., Paris, NYC, Rome)</td>
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<th>Country (of residence)</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
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https://www.composerdiversity.com/composer-diversity-database
Limitations of the Database

- Cumbersome search interface
  - Limited filtering and search refinement capability
  - Cannot perform “AND” Boolean searches
  - Data exported as CSV files; not encoded as metadata

- Free text entries and personal statements from self-reporting composers are not searchable
  - Incorporating this information as a folksonomy is a possible solution

- No inclusion of disabled or neuro-divergent composers

- Database records are incredible bare
  - Includes only demographic criteria and personal statements and website links if available
Key Takeaways

◦ The Composer Diversity Database can be used as a meaningful supplement to existing library catalogues
  ◦ Useful in academic libraries with active music programs to encourage students to explore outside of the traditional musical canon
  ◦ Possibility for use as a collection development tool, as the majority of composers included are self-published

◦ The ongoing development of similar supplementary resources in or outside of libraries should be encouraged as finding universal solutions that can be applied to any type of resource found in a library is far from being settled issue
References


Thank you!

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