

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND *INCLUSION*

Being the Change

By Leah Claiborne



It has been inspiring to learn about the transformative work that MTNA teachers are spearheading to create inclusive, diverse and more equitable education and programming in their areas. Below are two examples, in their words, of how a MTNA state affiliate and a local music teacher powerfully change their communities with music being the driving center of their mission.

Denver Area MTA

DAMTA has launched efforts toward deeper understanding of the historic inequities within music teaching. We are taking ongoing action steps to increase awareness of DEI work in the study and performance of music and in the operations and programming of our organization. In October 2020, our board amended our bylaws to create a vice president of DEI. We celebrated a membership vote that passed unanimously and appointed the position. We formed a DEI Committee to become a working group that seeks to respond to Dr. King’s vision:

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

As we state in our DEI Committee Mission Statement: “We are devoted to the development and implementation of strategies and best practices that dismantle the oppression of Black, Indigenous, People of Color and historically marginalized communities through racism, cultural and ethnic erasure within all aspects of our music teaching profession in the greater Denver area and society at large.” We enjoyed meeting with members of the Ann Arbor Piano Guild Anti-Racism Taskforce to unite in conversation with shared experiences toward deeper discussions, and we hope to make connections with more groups and individuals about this important work.

This year, DAMTA’s annual teachers course brought our community’s diverse voices

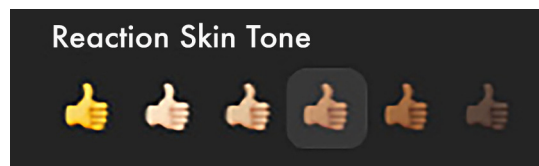
■ HOW DO YOU...?

together in our Fall Course 2021 “Meet Your Neighbors: Conversations with Local Artists.” Presenters included topics such as “JoFoKe Presents,” “Chinese Music Past and Present,” “Music as a Symbol of Culture Among Mexican and Chicano Populations in Colorado,” “Kiowa Tribal Singing” and “Nobu and Kô Kôda: The Women Who Made Music in Japan Happen.” Completing our second year of this work, we are proud that our Student Musicale celebrated Black History Month through music and orature.

The DAMTA DEI Committee includes Ben Raznick (DAMTA President), Deborah De La Torre (DEI Vice President), Marilyn Madsen, Nazila Nekoorad and Jan Romero.

Penny Lazarus Piano Studio Newburyport, Massachusetts

My piano studio does not look like America. Missing are the beautiful arrays of the darkest part of the rainbow spectrum that is a symbol of diversity. During online recitals, when we applaud, Zoom gives us six choices for reaction skin tones. My Korean, Hispanic, Sephardic, Egyptian, Lebanese, Guatemalan and Trinidadian students match four of these. Still, at least two colors are missing. Yet we work to broaden the canon with Afro-centric composers. We include the myriad castles of our skin,¹ highlighting achievements of Black artists throughout the studio.



Outside we have a Little Free Music Library that identifies my studio. It is filled with traditional music as well as Florence Price’s *Album of Piano Pieces* and Nathan Holder’s *Why is My Piano Black and White*. In the hallway are books about Beethoven, and *Change Sings* by poet Amanda Gorman, who delivered her poem “The Hill We Climb” at the 2021 presidential inauguration. Music by Hale Smith, Margaret Bonds, William Grant Still, Valerie Capers,

Joseph Bologne, Zenobia Powell Perry, Jeremy Ajani Jordan and Regina Harris Baiocchi share space with favorites by classicist composers.

We are a project-based studio. This means, I work with an organizing idea that forms repertoire, recital themes and community engagement events all year long. This year, students are studying music by Black composers and will perform these pieces at a showcase recital. I also weave these themes throughout our general music study. In one event, we practiced conducting. So, when students conducted videos of symphonies, my guest conductor and I included Black maestros. In another event, we toured the church where 19th-century anti-slavery activist William Lloyd Garrison preached and eventually, evicted.

My zoomer students look forward to our annual practice project in which students find a sponsor who gives them three cents for every minute at the piano during a 6-week period. We raise \$1,000 annually to support a “sister” studio. This year we are working with the Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts after-school program in Roxbury, Massachusetts, so that our donation will support their mission to “pass on the rich legacy of Black cultural music to the next generation.”

Notes

1. Castle of Our Skins is a concert and educational series in Boston, Massachusetts, dedicated to creating more equity in composer representation on concert stages and highlighting achievement by Black historical figures. The phrase “castle of our skins” comes from the celebrated poet Nikki Giovanni’s *Poem (for Nina)*.

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