

With Love, Letters to my Fellow White Music Colleagues

Composed by Black Music Educator, Jasmine Fripp

June 5, 2020

Dear White Composers,

In my opinion, when it comes to arranging, I prefer spirituals and other black subgenres to be left to black composers and arrangers. I would be lying if I said a tiny piece of me isn't saying this selfishly- but the bulk of my reasoning is simply some of y'all do an amazing job, but some of y'all just ain't got it (I'm aware of my vernacular- it is used with intention because I'm not in the mood to code-switch). But if for some odd reason you feel you must go forth and do an arrangement, consult with some of these black composers and other experts, not because we feel you're incapable, but because we want you to strive to make sure these arrangements sound as authentic as possible. And for the love of Christ, hire black singers (or at least singers with the vocal flexibility) when promoting these arrangements. I'm sick of going on JW Pepper to look and listen to spiritual arrangements and I hear nothing but colonization in the sound. It does not sound authentic, and quite frankly, it sounds a hot mess and it's a slap in the face.

Dear White Choral Directors,

First and foremost, if you or majority of the students within your program have a problem with BLM, or you are subconsciously (and in some cases outright) racist, the fact that you program negro spirituals, African music, gospel songs, and other black literature (a majority of the time as the grand finale insert eye roll here) in your concert infuriates me. How dare you take our music and use it for the sake of glitz and glamour and to claim you teach "a variety of music" within your classroom, when you don't even respect the history of it or it's people. Then some of y'all don't even take the time to teach yourselves or seek assistance in learning the correct styling/tone/history of these songs- THEN PROCEED TO TEACH IT INCORRECTLY TO YOUR KIDS! And do not sit here and tell me it's impossible. I graduated from Winthrop University under the direction of Dr. Katherine Kinsey (the GOAT). After rehearsals (sometimes smack dab in the middle of rehearsal), she would sit down with several black students and ask questions to make sure our sound was authentic when singing gospel

songs and spirituals. The black students, including myself, respected her efforts in striving to perform our music correctly. I currently teach at a school where our demographics is pretty much 60% black, 40% Hispanic. I took two years of Spanish in 4th and 5th grade...I'm 30 years of age...I don't remember a lick of Spanish. When I teach songs in Spanish, I allow some students to lead and teach the class the pronunciation and translation. When I do lead in teaching the pronunciation, I allow my Spanish-speaking students to respectfully and openly correct me every time I make a mistake. I tell them, "Do not allow anyone to speak YOUR language incorrectly. It is beautiful and it has value."

If you don't feel comfortable teaching certain subgenres of black music, call in reinforcements. We are happy to help and teach! A good friend and colleague of mine is a white teacher and she has a predominantly black choir. Every year for Black History Month, she brings in a black music instructor who specializes in gospel music to work with her kids. She sits back and takes notes. The kids absolutely love the experience and guess what else...they don't think she's incompetent or less of a teacher. Kids will always respect a teacher who says "I don't know, but I'm willing to learn with you" before they respect a teacher who doesn't know the answer and allows their pride to take away a precious teachable moment. Reach out to your black music educator friends/colleagues. When NAFME and ACDA offer workshops ran by black music educators discussing stylings of black music and other topics; when black music educators bring their predominantly black choir to perform at these conferences- **PACK THE ROOM OUT!** You or your district paid good money to get you to that conference- **SOAK UP ALL OF THE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY HONEY!** **INVITE THE BLACK MUSIC EDUCATORS WHO ARE LEADING THESE FORUMS TO COME WORK WITH YOUR STUDENTS!** We are not here to judge! Thank you for taking the time out to educate yourselves! We love it, we applaud you, and we're proud of you!

Last, but not least, fellow music educators- if you are a white music teacher and you teach a predominantly black choir, **DO NOT LIMIT THEIR REPERTOIRE TO ONLY "BLACK" SONGS AND TEACHING THESE KIDS BY ROTE!** Because of stereotypes, you may be led to believe black students have a specific preference in genres of music...lemme tell you somethin' - **WE LOVE IT ALL!** **WE WILL FUCK UP** (this is a good thing) **A GOOD ERIC WHITACRE PIECE IF YOU LETTUCE!!!** (I said what I said) Black kids, like every other kid involved in music and other

visual and performing art programs, want nothing more than to be a part of a family where their interests and unique qualities are accepted. Also, I'm going into my 6th year of teaching. I've intentionally chosen to work in schools where the population is predominantly black- therefore, my choirs are predominantly black. 5 out of 6 years of teaching, I've taken my choir to Choral/State Festival. We always walk away with an excellent or superior trophy in sight-reading. If you want to be a part of my choir program, it is REQUIRED that you learn to read music. Just like in predominantly white music programs, you will have some students who push back and question why we learn to read music and why we simply can't learn by rote. Because I have a close and valuable relationship with my kids and their parents, I can look them dead in eyes and say- "What happens if you leave my program and you want to become a music major? Young Black King/ Beautiful Black Queen, I cannot send you to college as an illiterate musician. Not on my watch. I know this is tough material to learn, but I promise if you practice and stick with it, you will get better over time. Trust the process." This should be the outlook of all music educators towards all of their choir babies.

Dear Collegiate Music Programs...specifically at PWIs,

The cycle starts with you. You teach music educators, who go on to teach within our primary and secondary schools. Based on their experience within these music programs, some kids become interested in studying music on the collegiate level. They will go on to become music majors and the cycle will continue. While I acknowledge some programs and professional organizations are further along than others, it is time for some of these collegiate programs to diversify their curriculum to educate and better equip their music majors. Specifically, regarding music education, negro spirituals, gospel music, jazz music, and other subgenres under the black music umbrella SHOULD ALL BE CONSIDERED STANDARD LITERATURE. The same way we are all forced to know the periods of European music to pass the Praxis, it should be standard practice to learn the Evolution of Black Music Within America and Around the World. Require courses that teach our future music educators not only about black music but music from different cultures- because quite frankly, some of these white teachers do not choose music that represents various cultures...not because they don't want to...BUT BECAUSE THEY DON'T HOW TO!!! They are scared out of their minds to even touch cultural music because deep down inside they want to perform it correctly, but they were not given the tools to do so. Black music educators have been forced to sing standard WHITE choral

literature in every predominantly white music program they've ever been in. Therefore, black music educators can go into a rehearsal with confidence and teach Byrd, Bach, Mendelssohn, and other white composers with confidence. H.T. Burleigh, Moses Hogan, Jester Hairston, Robert Nathaniel Detts, Jeffrey Ames, Andre Thomas, Marques Garrett, Brandon Boyd, and other black composers are just as important. And no, one negro spiritual a semester in your solo vocal repertoire or Tshotsholoza as your spring concert finale will not suffice.

The purpose of this status is not to say you, as a white composer/educator, are doing a terrible job. The purpose of this status is to acknowledge an issue within our music programs that stem from a long line of systematic racism. I do my best to never call out an imperfection without offering a solution or myself as a resource. Please feel free to inbox me if you would like to have a conversation or use me as a resource to aid in diversifying music within your program. If there is a question that I do not have the answer to, I know somebody that knows somebody, and we'll figure this thing out. At the end of the day, I want all of our programs to be successful and these kids deserve a quality music education that includes music taught from all cultures...including black culture. I love you all and I look forward to seeing the success of your program.

And another thing- stop performing Big River and The Book of Mormon...it's racist.