

REVIEW

Online EDI Resources: Towards a Reflexive Archive

Erin Johnson-Williams

Durham University

erin.g.johnson-williams@durham.ac.uk

On 2 June 2020, the music world fell silent for ‘Blackout Tuesday’ as a response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery and in solidarity for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.¹ Two days later, Classic FM followed up by publishing a list of ‘9 Black Composers who Changed the Course of Classical Music History’.² Now over a year later, there has been an explosion of interest in how the history and teaching of Western classical music can be expanded to make room for more diverse composers, performers, and educators. Yet there is still a risk that many of these new diversity ‘archives’—as in the Classic FM list—will remain uncomfortably tokenistic until they have been integrated systemically within pedagogical and historiographical discourses.

We live at a momentous time for encountering and engaging with the possibilities of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and, specifically, decolonial and anti-racist activism in the musical archive.³ Digital archives have been growing for several decades now. Yet, given the rise of the BLM and Rhodes Must Fall movements (where academics have been called to drastically rethink their curricula), complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic (where researchers have been constrained to work from archival material in largely digital forms), there has been an upsurge of digital resources that attempt to highlight the extensive range of diverse (and previously silenced) musicians throughout history. Over the academic year of 2020–2021 alone, music departments, particularly across the Global North,⁴ have started to compile EDI-themed—and often explicitly antiracist—resource lists. There is also a growing (and entirely warranted) pressure from undergraduate students to be assigned readings from open-access online sources rather than expensive, physical textbooks written by white men about white men.⁵ In light of the *RMA Research Chronicle*’s commitment to critically discuss ‘primary sources’ (or, up until the 2020 issue, ‘raw materials’), the challenges of actually getting to physical archives during Covid lockdowns also raise important questions about access and equity: who has, traditionally, held the power in terms of archival access to the primary sources of history? How can academic studies respond,

¹Helena Asprou, ‘The Show Must be Paused: The Classical World Falls Silent to Honour George Floyd’, *Classic FM*, 2 June 2020, <<https://www.classicfm.com/music-news/show-paused-classical-world-silent-george-floyd/>> (accessed 22 August 2021).

²‘9 Black Composers who Changed the Course of Classical Music History’, *Classic FM*, 4 June 2020, (updated 6 October 2020), <<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/black-composers-who-made-classical-music-history/>> (accessed 22 August 2021).

³While ‘EDI’ is often used in the UK as an umbrella term for all matters of equality, diversity, and inclusion, which includes topics such as gender, sexuality, religion, race, and disability, the themes of anti-racism and decolonisation have received heightened attention by academic institutions since the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. It is important not to conflate these terms, and to contextualize the recent rise of decolonial and anti-racist resources as a sub-category of EDI topics.

⁴Search engine results for the terms ‘music EDI resources’, ‘music decolonisation resources’, and ‘anti-racist music resources’ from my UK Internet connection at the time of writing this review revealed a range of music departments across the UK, the US and Canada that are compiling such open-access websites. I am acutely aware, however, that this does not mean that the higher education institutions of the Global North are alone in doing this work, and that what is ‘visible’ from a UK search engine or a university / department web page does not provide a full picture of EDI resources or conversations in the rest of the world.

⁵For a summary of recent disciplinary controversies written for a general audience, see Alex Ross, ‘Black Scholars Confront White Supremacy in Classical Music’, *The New Yorker*, 21 September 2020, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/09/21/black-scholars-confront-white-supremacy-in-classical-music>> (accessed 1 September 2021).

critically and productively, to the explosion of online resources that by their very existence and utility underscore the limitations of how music history has been written? Will we, as a discipline, rise to the challenge and use the last year as a chance to reassess what archival ‘representation’ means for our work and our understanding of ourselves?

Drawing upon the wider context that we now find ourselves in, this review takes several EDI web resources as case-study examples of the primary sources of music EDI initiatives in 2020–2021. Holding digital resources to be worthy of academic review is conceivably a positive decolonial step in itself, because of the potential for disrupting and dismantling ‘elite’ hierarchies of knowledge, although I am careful to bear in mind Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s compelling argument that pretensions to decolonisation must be sensitive to issues of material reparations.⁶ Taking Tuck and Yang’s approach onboard, and conscious of reinforcing racial tokenism in the name of inclusion, I contend that it is important to recognise that unless digital EDI resources are embedded within the highest structures of music academia, they run the risk of being perfunctory. As Juliet Hess claims, ‘Western music in music education’ continues to act ‘as a colonizer’.⁷ By extension, owing to previous scholarship’s tendency to reproduce white European forms of knowledge, one could argue that older published academic histories of music continue to ‘colonize’ educational curricula despite the enormous range of diverse sources now available through digital formats. As such, I suggest that the sources below are useful for initiating decolonial dialogues about what values have upheld, and continue to uphold, the musicological canon.

The ‘Composers of Color Resource Project’, set up as a Humanities Commons open access web page, is described on its home page as a site ‘for music by composers of color’, not limited to ‘traditional’ music theory topics or ‘notated music in the Western art tradition’.⁸ Submissions of annotated scores and lesson plans are welcome, and the site is updated regularly. The website is professionally presented and easy to navigate. The overriding intention is to make it as easy as possible for music educators to diversify their teaching curricula with music by composers of colour. As the home page proposes: ‘Simply swap out some of the examples by white men that you fall back on when teaching, e.g., the IV chord, and you’ll introduce the representation of voices of color and non-canonic composers overnight.’ Practically speaking, the growing list of ‘analytical notes and annotated scores’ and ‘lesson materials’ provided on the website comprises a rich, helpful, and very accessible resource that is easy and quick to use. What the project might benefit from is a greater critical reflection on—or at least a positioning of—‘how’ these scores and lessons are being presented. The directive to ‘simply swap out’ one musical example for another leaves the reader drowning in annotated scores before there is any contextualization about why these repertoires have been so historically sidelined, or the fact that the methods of score annotation promoted here stem from the same structures of white academia that silenced an archive of compositions by composers of colour in the first place.

The website ‘Engaged Music Theory’,⁹ by contrast, frames the project of an academic bibliography on diversity in music theory as a direct, critical response to the cultural politics of ‘race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, intersectionality, decolonization, and disability’ in order to ‘highlight scholarly work that confronts the centralized, historically Eurocentric and heteropatriarchal framing of North American music theory.’ Set up by the Engaged Music Theory Working Group, made up of a diverse range of primarily US-based graduate students and early-career scholars,¹⁰ the project takes Naomi André’s 2018

⁶See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization is Not a Metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

⁷Juliet Hess, ‘Decolonizing Music Education: Moving Beyond Tokenism’, *International Journal of Music Education* 1–2 (2015), 1.

⁸‘Composers of Color Resource Project’, <<https://composersofcolor.hcommons.org>> (accessed 20 August 2021). In contrast to some of the other sites mentioned here, it is not immediately evident from the ‘Composers of Color’ web page who, exactly, has been involved in setting it up.

⁹‘Engaged Music Theory’, <<https://engagedmusictheory.com>> (accessed 20 August 2021).

¹⁰The members of the working group are listed as: Co-organizers – Michèle Duguay, Marc Hannaford, and Toru Momii; and Group Members – Makulamy Alexander-Hills, Clifton Boyd, Michael Bruschi, Samuel Chan, Johanna Devaney, Kristi

challenge of an ‘engaged musicology’ as the inspiration for its title.¹¹ The bibliography that forms the substance of the website—which is constantly growing, and readers are invited to submit suggestions for consideration—is easily searchable and well presented, with direct hyperlinks provided for many of the online sources. Indeed, the website’s transparency is refreshing in its presentational simplicity; the list of bibliographical sources provided highlights just how much EDI-related scholarship on music theory is already available. The list will be an invaluable resource for academics and students who are looking to diversify their music theory and analysis reading lists. The format of one, long bibliography, nevertheless, is itself the main obstacle to the website being more accessible: while the opening introduction provides a helpful list of scholars whose work comes from outside of music,¹² there is little framing available for the non-initiated reader in terms of understanding a subdiscipline or providing a point of entry for non-academics. A list alone is in this way both powerful and limiting. It demonstrates, by its length, the sheer amount of content available. Yet a list always runs the risk of appearing decontextualized, despite the excellent gestures to academic contextualization outlined at the top of the website’s home page.¹³ Would a future incarnation of the website include summaries, discussions, or pathways to interdisciplinary explorations?¹⁴

In a slightly different vein, the ‘Inclusive Early Music’¹⁵ site aims to foster a community of inclusive scholarship on early music, with a bibliography and teaching resources appearing as subsections. Attractively presented with colourful images of early music-making, the image on the home page shows two musicians with different skin tones playing stringed instruments.¹⁶ ‘Inclusive Early Music’ was set up in 2020 by a community of academics associated with the American Musicological Society, led in the first instance by Erika Honisch and Giovanni Zanovello. In the spirit of fostering a community, the website has a ‘News and Updates’ section, where recent publications, conferences and roundtables on early music and inclusive pedagogy are posted. The bibliography hyperlink takes users to a Zotero tab, which is effective for those who are accustomed to the open-source application (and it contains an exhaustive list of resources), but less accessible to those who are not. The Zotero bibliography likewise brings up challenges about categorization and disciplinary crossover in line with my comments above about the ‘Engaged Music Theory’ project. Less exhaustive is the ‘Assignments’ hyperlink, which links to a OneDrive folder, where, at the time of this writing, there are only two assignment examples available, although there is an invitation for contributors to submit suggestions. Contact information is accessible and the website as a whole is very inviting.

The elephant in the room for many of these resource sites is ultimately the issue of tokenism. The three websites described here, for example, have been set up in the context of Anglo-American academic privilege (at least as far as is readily obvious from the available content), and, as such, do not take into

Hardman, Stephen Lett, Vivian Luong, Rowland Moseley, Nathan Pell, Blake Ritchie, Lauren Shepherd, Danielle Shlomit Sofer, and Noel Torres-Rivera. ‘About’, ‘Engaged Music Theory’, <<https://engagedmusictheory.com>> (accessed 1 September 2021).

¹¹See Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

¹²For example, the home page introduces the limitations of the bibliography by pointing to relevant work that is not included: ‘The bibliography purposefully omits work by scholars who do not self-identify as music theorists or musicologists, but whose work is indispensable to the aims of our group. A list of these authors would include Sara Ahmed, Daphne Brooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, Fred Moten, José Esteban Muñoz, Christina Sharpe, Eve Tuck, and Alexander G. Weheliye, among many others. We strongly encourage anyone who is interested in the goals of our group to read and cite this body of scholarship’. ‘Engaged Music Theory’, <<https://engagedmusictheory.com>> (accessed 1 September 2021).

¹³As the opening statement notes, ‘While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, we hope it offers a starting point for engaged music theoretical research. It focuses primarily on music theoretical work as well as directly relevant scholarship from musicology and ethnomusicology’. ‘Engaged Music Theory’, <<https://engagedmusictheory.com>> (accessed 1 September 2021).

¹⁴The website does recently appear to be moving in this kind of exciting direction: as of October 2021, Engaged Music Theory has also introduced a blog series: <<https://engagedmusictheory.com/blog/>> (accessed 19 October 2021).

¹⁵‘Inclusive Early Music’, <<https://inclusiveearlymusic.org>> (accessed 1 September 2021).

¹⁶The caption given for this image is ‘Musicians Playing Stringed Instruments. Madrid, San Lorenzo de El Escorial Library, The Cantigas de Santa Maria. Cantic n. 120’. ‘Inclusive Early Music’, <<https://inclusiveearlymusic.org>> (accessed 20 August 2021).

account the complexities of EDI for teaching music in global, postcolonial contexts. Further, over the course of writing this review, several contacts who identify as musicians of colour have indicated to me that they would object to being included on a ‘diversity list’ because of the idea of being ‘reduced’ to a list, where one could simply be ‘swapped out’ for a white composer, and for no other reason. The deeper issue, which the above websites touch on without necessarily foregrounding, is that achieving equity and pursuing decolonisation, at least as defined by Tuck and Yang, is not possible without dismantling and critically reframing the systemic structures of racism that have upheld academia for so long. Therefore, while lists of works by composers of colour or academic bibliographies are immensely important as digital archives, they will remain just that—lists—unless *reflexively* embedded into how we teach and write about music studies. One digital project that is, in this way, more directly seeking to ‘reframe’ pedagogical discourses in a critical way is ‘Beyond Tokenism: Dismantling, Rethinking & Reframing Narratives in Music History Pedagogy’.¹⁷ Set up by a group of US-based scholars,¹⁸ this website avoids the reductive list format by dividing the sections of the website into narratives, techniques, testimonies, and resources that are further contextualized as ‘calls for action’, ‘reflection essays’, and ‘techniques that can be implemented immediately’. This kind of contextualization makes ‘Beyond Tokenism’ accessible to the non-academic, as it provides lesson plans, reflection essays and reading suggestions for working music educators.

The websites described here comprise only a small fraction of the growing number of EDI online resources that are currently available. Returning to the context of the explosion of EDI conversations during Covid lockdowns, it will be interesting to watch the longevity of online archives over the next decade: will a fetishization of ‘primary sources’ from the physical, institutional archive return, leaving ‘critical’ discussions about open access, information, and power to be confined to prestigious, well-funded accredited institutions (like libraries and museums) rather than grassroots digital projects? Digital EDI resources hold significant potential for democratizing and decolonising music studies if we can remain open to *how* digital archives are sounded, and who they are sounded for (i.e. as noted, most online EDI music resources are geared towards Anglo-American forms of teaching, learning, and researching). As Venter et al. have proposed, the process of decoloniality is a ‘fracture’, and ‘like every break, it sounds. Let musicology find the words with which to listen’.¹⁹ There are ways in which online EDI resources can be both a decolonial fracture as well as a reinforcement of the structures that they are trying to break away from. If EDI resources can be critically understood as a reflexive archive, we may hopefully be looking toward a future where online archives can become even more creative, and ultimately paradigm-shifting, suggesting alternatives for more ‘traditional’ forms of archiving and knowing.

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¹⁷‘Beyond Tokenism: Dismantling, Rethinking & Reframing Narratives in Music History Pedagogy’, <<https://musichistoryredo.wordpress.com>> (accessed 20 August 2021).

¹⁸The listed ‘Policies and Project Team’ consists of: Jacqueline Avila, Joy Marie Doan, Kunio Hara, Jasmine A. Henry, and Eric Huang. ‘Beyond Tokenism’, <<https://musichistoryredo.wordpress.com/policies-and-project-team/>> (accessed 20 August 2021).

¹⁹Carina Venter, William Fourie, Juliana M. Pistorius, and neo muyanga, ‘Decolonising Musicology: A Response and Three Positions’, *SAMUS: South African Music Studies* 36–37 (2017), 149.