

August 18, 2020

Dear SAA board,

It has been our privilege to work with you in the Advisory Committee on Race. With its commitment to Dr. Suzuki's philosophy based on the principles of diversity and inclusion, the Suzuki Association of the Americas is truly a unique musical organization. We are a group of idealistic dreamers, and our power rests in our ability and willingness to act on our collective dream. Thank you so much for allowing us to be part of the Advisory Committee on Race to work with you in finding viable solutions for the benefit of everyone.

Marla Majett has done a little bit of research concerning diversifying our organization, and the evidence is clear that there is a need for our organization to redirect our current path in order to achieve a more inclusive and healthier organization. One of the most powerful steps our organization can make to become the standard bearer of inclusion is to diversify the leadership. In the New York Times Article, "Nine Performers Describe Steps They Recommend to Begin Transforming a White-Dominated Field," three out of nine of the black musicians interviewed cited having a diverse board as components critical to realizing this transformation.¹ Research has proven that successful and productive organizations value inclusion, and a diverse board trickles down to a more diverse and satisfied membership. Most nonprofits understand that the lack of diversity and inclusion can impact an organization's reputation. ("Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices Report," copyrighted by BoardSource 2017, www.leadingwithintent.org; "Board.")

There has been a decrease in the number of black families and teachers in our Suzuki communities and the SAA at large. Research has shown that appointing more BIPOC Board members is the first step to the SAA fulfilling its policy in having a "collaborative learning community(that) sustains growth and improves the quality of Suzuki" (Policy 1.2 of the Governing Policies Manual, p. 2).²

Our organization will benefit from having a diverse board in the following ways:

- The face of the board would become more reflective of the inclusive mission of our organization
- Leadership will be empowered with new and different perspectives that will improve major decisions when faced with crises

¹ "Black Artists on How to Change Classical Music," by Zachary Woolfe & Joshua Barone; New York Times: July 16, 2020.

² "The Time is Now: How Companies and Leaders Can Join the Fight for Racial Justice," Bradlee Benn, Cecyl Hobbs, Art Hopkins, Evan Sharp, Jemi Crookes, Alix Stuart; www.russellreynolds.com; July 8th, 2020.

- More donors and grantmakers will be attracted to the SAA
- Black and brown communities will feel more welcomed into the organization
- New members will be welcomed authentically knowing they are in an organization that reflects diversity on every level
- A structure that benefits black and brown communities can be created.

Conversely, research has also shown that:

- Mostly white boards are more likely to perpetuate an all-white staff and board
- Mostly white boards are more likely to fund organizations that are mostly white and funnel the money into mostly white communities
- Mostly white boards are more likely to ignore people most affected by injustice and implement ineffective strategies based on second-hand knowledge
- Mostly white boards are more likely to perpetuate “white savior complex” when working in marginalized communities.³

Having a diverse board plays an important role in fulfilling the mission of any nonprofit organization, whereas a homogeneous board results in myopic viewpoints. Additionally, there is a direct correlation between board diversification and an increased diversity in membership participation. An increase in BIPOC board membership is good for us all.⁴

The most logical approach to diversifying the board is to increase the membership by three to five members, and fill those positions with BIPOC from North America, the Caribbean, Central America and South America. The SAA Board currently has ten directors. Studies have shown that the median size of nonprofit board membership is thirteen, and nonprofit boards are most efficient when it's between seven to fifteen members.⁵ If five people were appointed to the board, the organization would still be in a good place.

Appointing three to five additional board members is critical to diversification. If there are only one to two appointees, there is a very good chance that the appointees will experience “tokenism.” Tokenism is defined as, “when the respondent’s perception of others actions or attitudes resulted in the individual feeling marginalized.” For example, the member might feel the pressure of being a “lone voice,” but will be used as a photo opportunity. Another common experience is being treated as the “diversity” member. Tokens are typically treated with condescension. Vernetta Walker and Deborah Davidson of “BoardSource” noted that having too few people of color negatively shapes the nonprofit board experience of BIPOC.⁶

³ “Seven Things You Can Do To Improve the Sad, Pathetic State of Board Diversity,” Vu Le, www.nonprofitaf.com, September 11, 2017.

⁴ “Beyond Political Correctness: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Board,” by Vernetta Walker, boardsource.org, April 5, 2017.

⁵ “Is There An Ideal Nonprofit Board Size,” by Dathan Montes, greatergiving.com,

⁶ “Vital Voices: Lessons Learned from Board Members of Color,” by Vernetta Walker & Deborah Davidson, boardsource.org.

Once appointments are made, it is key to have an orientation process for the new members. There must be a system in place to guarantee that they will be able to succeed and feel included in the process.⁷ This idea is not unique to the Suzuki Method. Dr. Suzuki called it “The Law of Harmony,” and it was taught to him by Dr. Albert Einstein.⁸

Classical music is a field that is built on racist perspectives. Dr. Suzuki modeled how to break these barriers and stereotypes through Talent Education. His philosophy emphasized that all children have the ability to thrive--but everything depends on parents and teachers. Shock at an Asian child’s ability to play the music of Bach or even Bruch is a thing of the past. It’s up to us to continue Dr. Suzuki’s legacy, and bring Talent Education to all of the children of the Western Hemisphere--empowering them with the tools to thrive and become people with noble hearts.

Successful nonprofits recognize that diversity is essential. It must be our aim--as an organization representing Dr. Suzuki’s philosophy--to model inclusiveness and diversity from the leadership down to the general membership. It is our recommendation to start immediately, by appointing three to five BIPOC by September, and to help them transition with a comprehensive orientation into the board of directors. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Marla Majett, Co-Chair of the ACR
Carolina Borja
Andrea Kelly

References

Governing Policies Manual. (2018, January). Suzuki Association of the Americas.
https://suzukiassociation.org/download/board/Board-Governing-Policies-updated_20190620.pdf

⁷ “Diversity on Nonprofit Boards,” National Council of Nonprofits, www.councilofnonprofits.org.

⁸ “Nurtured By Love,” by Shinichi Suzuki, trans. Waltraud Suzuki, Suzuki Method International, Summy-Birchard, Inc. 1983.