

August 25, 2020

Dear SAA Board of Directors,

We, the undersigned members of the Advisory Committee on Race, are unclear on how the Board views our role in the discussion on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the SAA. It was surprising to see the letter to the membership which was sent out on August 21, 2020 without having been consulted regarding the content. It is recognized that one of the first steps in the process of improving diversity in a community or organization involves centering the voices of marginalized members of the community. It is equally clear that the Board sees itself at the center of this work, with the ACR on the margins. How can we improve this situation so that we are working together, instead of working in parallel or even divergent pathways?

There are several points in the Board News about which we would like to comment. The following phrase is of great concern: "Our goal is to provide access to [DEI] training for teachers and others during the next 18-24 months." This is far too long—the timeline should be quartered to be effective. As Dr. Suzuki said: "Anything you think of doing, however insignificant, should be done immediately. Spur yourself on and carry it through without becoming discouraged. If this becomes an ingrained habit, things you thought were impossible will become possible, and closed doors will open, as you will discover in many ways." In fact, many other organizations have responded to the present state of heightened awareness by immediately examining their structures and operations as well as investing in required changes. An example of this is MacPhail Center for Music which is currently undergoing an Intercultural Development Inventory. This process includes the participation of members of the organization and highlights areas for improvement, including bias and overall DEI competency. SAA trainers must not be merely competent in this area. They must be highly aware, sensitive, and skilled to be able to reach the level of Dr. Suzuki's humanitarian ideals.

We also have questions about the following statement: "Materials include videos, books, articles, websites, etc. resources sanctioned by the Board's Advisory Committee to the Board." Assuming that the ACR is the committee being referred to, we are not aware of having sanctioned any materials, particularly for a website resource area. It is quite concerning that the voice of the ACR is being employed in this way, when the committee was not involved in the creation of this resource database nor did we even have knowledge of it. Is the creation of the committee merely a prop to lend validity to measures decided on and undertaken by the Board?

The fact that the SAA Board News, on the topic of DEI and Anti-Racism Education, was sent without our prior knowledge is an example of the lack of communication between the Board and the ACR. We recommended a DEI consultant to revise the entire SAA structure and culture—including placement of underrepresented groups in leadership positions within the organization, overseeing DEI training for the whole membership,

and communication between the ACR and the Board. We were led to believe that the SAA was positive about working with the DEI consultant recommended two months ago because she spoke to the community as a former Suzuki mother and a culturally fluent professional that could be of great service to the membership in North, Central, South America and the Caribbean. However, we were asked to wait for another proposal, which we have not received up until this date. How do we know if we need to provide other references if we are not kept in the loop? Why do we continue to receive letters to the membership concerning issues of diversity and race about which the Advisory Committee on Race has had no notice and has not been given the opportunity to advise?

This has been an ongoing problem. As working professionals and for the sake of the health of the organization, we encourage you to agree to a communication path that is one in which we are not only a seat to fill or a name to put on paper. We aspire to one where the voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color are truly heard and respected with their cultural and historical nuances. We believe we are supported in this position by the many members at the SAA the Zoom Town Hall Discussions who called for the ACR to have official status within the SAA.

With knowledge and awareness that education inequality is the most urgent civil rights issue, we wish you a productive week and close with Dr. Suzuki's empowering words: "We all have unlimited shortcomings. Yet one way of seeing things is to consider our lives as a time frame that allows us continually to work at changing our weaknesses into strengths." Black lives matter.

Respectfully,

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