

June 16, 2020

Members of the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music

Greetings,

For me, one of the marvels of our Society has always been its atmosphere of hospitality and scholarly encouragement, qualities instilled by its wonderful founders. At times our meetings can feel almost like a classic Academy, removed from the wearisome world in pursuit of knowledge and intellectual refreshment. In reality, of course, the SSCM very much participates in the world, responding to its realities, both idyllic and otherwise. Few such realities have more insistently demanded a response than the recent and horrific cases of violence against people of color. I therefore write today to communicate how the Governing Board imagines the Society contributing to the crucial work of anti-racism and inclusivity.

Any such effort must begin with an uncomfortable acknowledgement of our contribution to the problem. To be honest with ourselves, we must accept that academia has long played a role in maintaining systemic racism. (Many sources expand on this point; I recommend Jasmine Roberts's concise *White Academia: Do Better*, at <https://medium.com/the-faculty/white-academia-do-better-fa96cede1fc5>.) Key aspects of the modern academy—and certainly the discipline of musicology—were born in a racist (and sexist) environment that predetermined what was studied and who could study it. That legacy remains with us. Indeed, as a predominantly white Society studying predominantly white artists and cultures, we unwittingly uphold *whiteness* as the norm, appearing to prioritize it even as we fail to name it. At the same time, many of us study cultures and artworks that could only have existed through the exploitation of non-whites, whether in the Atlantic slave trade or the many other colonial projects of the seventeenth century. We must, I believe, accept our unintentional complicity in these matters, a complicity our privilege has often allowed us to overlook.

While the SSCM alone can hardly undo systemic racism, this moment offers us the chance to go beyond platitudes and take some first steps toward change. In this spirit, the Board held a special meeting on June 12 and made two decisions. First, we officially adopted the following statement on diversity (adapted from a similar statement by the AMS) as the policy of the Society:

The Society for Seventeenth-Century Music is committed to the principles of inclusion and access, and it rejects discrimination against anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, [added: gender identity], ideology, or field of scholarship.

The statement will be featured prominently on our website and other publications, and we will propose to add it to our By-Laws through a vote at our upcoming Business Meeting.

Second, we decided to establish a Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. As currently envisioned, the committee will be charged with three activities, each of which will result in recommendations to the Board:

- Considering how best to support scholarship about historically underrepresented groups and/or by minority authors. Such efforts might involve creating prizes, research funds, travel grants, or other means of support.
- Strategizing about ways to encourage greater diversity among the scholars who choose to work in our field. One possibility might be to use our various communications (Newsletter, Facebook page, etc.) to engage with questions of diversity.
- Assembling resources and pedagogical tools for de-centering whiteness in the teaching of seventeenth-century music and fruitfully contemplating the practices of slavery and colonialism.

For all these activities, the committee may well choose to solicit ideas from the membership.

Indeed, I know many members of the Society have thought deeply about the issues raised here and would have much to contribute to this committee. Rather than appointing the people I know, however, **I would like to encourage anyone interested in serving on the committee to email me.** If we have many volunteers, I might need to make some choices, just to keep the size of the group manageable. The treasurer and I will be *ex officio* members.

I hope you will agree that the adoption of a diversity statement and the establishment of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion—along with the important work that committee will do—represent healthy steps for our Society. I welcome your feedback on any of these issues and hope to see you at our online conference, June 26-28.

All best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Freitas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Roger" being more prominent than the last name "Freitas".

Roger Freitas, president
Society for Seventeenth-Century Music