
SHERI-ANN NISHIYAMA ARTIST STATEMENT

For the alternative project, I chose to create a diorama/sculpture that represents where music education should be going and what could happen if music educators continue to ignore the history and background information of where each piece of music comes from. Although there are many factors into why music education is lacking in depth of knowledge, I chose to focus my energies on how music education is seen and how that effects the way students learn about music.

In the process of creating this tree, I realized that the leaves are representative of what myself and my students can see on the sheet music while the notes and rhythms on the page is what is presented to the audience. Although the tree may have leaves, it cannot stand without a base, the roots, what is not seen. The roots are representative of the way music education continues to hide and erase history, cultures, and identities.

This made me think about how music education has always been on unstable ground: we are worried about our programs being defunded or cut, thus focusing only on what is seen. This worry continues to outweigh the importance of going beyond the sheet music and in turn, has created a barrier for not only myself as a teacher, but for my students of color and acting as a disservice to my white students. The constant search for perfection in the physical look/aural sound pushed away and buried the voices of these cultures that are behind the sheet music.

We continue to fight, as music educators, why music is important and beneficial for students, but I have realized that music education's systemic racist cycle of performance-based learning is detrimental and harming to students. Therefore, the tree topples over if the roots are not secured to the stage: we continue to remove the history of the music; music education continues to live on unstable ground and students are given misinformation about the music and continue to appropriate the cultures outside of the Western Classical Canon.

To combat this, in my alternative project, I have intertwined the roots with the translations of the lyrics, quotes about Christianity in Kenya and appropriation in music, and a discussion starter: "Appropriation versus Appreciation". I chose the song Wana Baraka by Shawn Kirchner because it is one of the songs that I taught during my student teaching that was outside of the Western Classical Canon and it represented how I failed my students by following the same performance-based procedures in music education. Although, the notes/rhythms are what's seen/heard by the audience, I have incorporated the roots of the tree onto the stage that intertwine with the information to symbolize the growth of how including the history and background of each piece of music only helps student learning and supports discussion and discourse on race in the music classroom. Uncovering the truths of each song and supporting my students' music education with a more in-depth historical survey in music will be my life's work in teaching as I start my career in music education.

Works Cited

Hackman, Heather W. (2005). Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 38(2), 103-109. doi:10.1080/10665680590935034



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