

A Conversation on Racism and Computer Music. Complete interview transcription

By the Honourable Elizabeth A. Baker, Jessie Cox, Joy Guidry, Yvette Janine Jackson, Eric Lyon

Abstract

In its call for contributions to the Fall 2021 issue of Array Journal, the editors asked why the ICMA has so few members who identify as Black, given the considerable debt that the field of computer music owes to musical and technological innovations of Black artists. This article provides a set of responses to the question posed. Virginia Tech invited four Black artists whose work might be considered computer music (this piece puts pressure on borders implied by the term “computer music”) to participate in a conversation. Perspectives not often heard within ICMA discourse are shared herein. It is hoped that this conversation will lead to self-reflection on the part of the ICMA membership, and to further conversations, ultimately motivating the ICMA to adopt policies that will make the organization a more inclusive association than it is currently.

Eric Lyon: The ICMA is the International Computer Music Association. It was founded in 1974. The organization puts on an annual conference called the International Computer Music Conference (ICMC) that attracts computer musicians from around the world. For its Fall 2021 issue, Array, the journal of the ICMA, put out a call entitled “Diversity, Pluralism, Equity?” After suggesting that in theory the term “computer music” implies inclusivity and pluralism, since computer music is defined by its medium rather than a style or genre and includes any possible sound in its vocabulary, and possibly even democratizes sound and helps to abolish cultural hierarchies, the Array editors observe that in practice these noble utopian goals have not been reached. As they asked in the call that we’re responding to here, “are we able to say that our field, e.g., ICMA and its sister organizations, as well as in the wider music academia truly represents the music and the cultures that computers make possible? Despite the debt that Electronica, IDM, laptop music, and live coding owe to Black electronic artists, composers, and producers, for instance, al-

most none of our ICMA members identify as Black. Why is this? How can we, as a field, take hold of this issue as our own and set about the project of decolonizing and diversifying computer music?"

Let's start by hearing your individual reactions to that statement.

The Honourable Elizabeth A. Baker: There's a lot of elitism that comes with computer music that really creates a divide between communities that are Black making music with technology, and the academic world, which is a very much white world due to barriers of access. People look down a lot on the things that are used, particularly by Black performers or engineers. That is a huge part of why they're not feeling like they're included. Also, Black folks are doing cool things and getting their stuff out there without the help of white people all the time. It's not really necessary to be a part of the ICMA because they're getting their stuff out there in their own way and people are loving it and vibing with it.

Jessie Cox: There's a couple of things in the ICMA call that to me are problematic, which computer music adopts from its larger contexts. I mean, computer music is not isolated from the world; that's one thing that we need to remember. For example, one really problematic idea is that computer music is limitless and that the only restrictions produced are by the imagination. It reminds me of the idea of colorblindness. It forgets racist hierarchy and modes of coloniality. Colonial modes of acting, systems, etc., are not reproduced. That is what this call tries to say but that's, of course, not the case. As we know even algorithms can be racist. That's something that has been highly discussed in the past year. Colorblindness is problematic because it undermines the racism that is already there.

Joy Guidry: Three of the biggest things after reading that are accessibility, aesthetics, and money, which goes with the first two things. Starting with the money, as Elizabeth said about Black people, we produce things without white people, and have been successful out there all the time. We don't have to go to these schools, but that's where the money is. Maybe we should make Black coding camps for music. I've started learning how to do this. I've always

had a lot of respect for you all but it's so hard. Ableton is so hard. Everyone wants to charge so much money to teach me how to do it, and they talk in these huge words that I have no idea what they're saying. It's just been coined in this way that makes it almost impossible for people to even know that most, if not all of this music, comes from Blackness. I think so many things have to be torn down. But starting with the aesthetic being torn down and giving correct representation and credit. Then the other things will really start to fall into place.

Yvette Janine Jackson: Sure. A lot of how I feel about this has already been said but there are three things that stand out for me: One is the social aspect of music-making. Music involves people, and people have and cultivate their own connections. This was already said in terms of people already being out there creating different types of music and building their own communities and putting things out there. In the past couple of years, I've been asked a similar question by different groups, "How can we attract more people of color to our organization?" My response may be cynical but, "Why should people want to join your organization?" It's one thing to put up the invitation, "You're welcome to join", because I think a lot of people don't feel welcomed by many organizations. But don't expect for people, who may have been historically excluded, to be excited to then join just because the doors have suddenly opened. Why do you want them to join? Is it to help with your optics so that you can control the narrative? We've all seen this since last spring - the proliferation of organizations putting out various statements about how they care about everyone and want to include everyone, but then shy away from doing the work to enact the change described on their websites.

Baker: To stay with Yvette's comment, I feel like this is being done really well by King Britt with Blacktronika, where it's not just a class, it's a whole movement of going into schools and saying to kids, "Hey, you can go to college for this." Because a lot of Black kids don't know that you could go to college for computer music. I think the representation within the Blacktronika movement has a huge amount to do with it. Because if you can't see yourself there, then you're not even going to register it on your radar.

Jackson: One more thing in terms of the educational opportunities: just knowing that it's possible to get a degree in computer music or similar programs... If you look at the demographics of many institutions, there really is a lack of diversity within graduate programs, especially when it comes to Black representation in computer music and composition programs. There might be one or two Black students, but there's not really a sizable presence, which affects whether one feels welcome or not. Students have to decide if they want to spend years in a program in which they may feel isolated or unwelcome. If a group does not want you, why would you pound the door trying to get in?

Guidry: You can put out these statements and invite people, but is the space ready for us? You can even give us a \$100,000 fellowship. But we'll need a million dollars from the trauma we're going to have after doing that fellowship. When I was at Peabody, they had Computer Music. But I didn't know what that was. I remember seeing it on the application and I was so confused, and that's all I thought computer music was until I had my Black awakening. But I would listen to this music and see laptop orchestras and think, "There has to be more to it than this." But representation is so important. If you don't see yourself, how can you see yourself there? Put that on the flag.

Jackson: Just one more thing. People need to know that these options exist earlier than by the time that they're in college, or grad school, or even high school. For me, I stumbled upon computer music by complete accident.

Baker: Part of my thing on tours is, I'll go to elementary schools, middle schools around the country, and let children touch my gear, which seems really scandalous. But you know, a theremin's very safe. They're not going to knock it over, and they make sounds by not touching it. For those kids, it changes their life because it's like, "Oh, we don't just have to play cello, we can do a whole bunch of other stuff."

Knowing the possibilities of what art can do, someone that first comes to mind is Solange. She isn't much into computer music but she's taken R&B and made it her own way, in this minimalist style. So many kids make beats on computers and they're told that that's bad. But all of these things and maybe

their hip hop can turn into something else. Or the hip hop is valid within itself. But there's still so many options for it to grow. Because Lisa Harris also does the theremin in Houston, she has so many of them. I think she hosts a camp or workshop every so often. The first time I played a theremin, I was like, "What is this?" I couldn't imagine being eight and having that experience. You'd think, "I have superpowers" because you're not touching the instrument. It just needs a bit more access.

Cox: Maybe we should unpack this genre question. On the one hand it says there's this non- genre possibility, but on the other hand, when we speak about people of color, specifically Black people, they are put in genres that are markers purposefully created, in the beginning with the classical vs. jazz dichotomy, and then going forward, to draw a sonic color line. This is a problem related to questions of representation, but also the problem of the foundational myth of computer music along with electronic music, and the absence—the purposeful erasure of people of color from that history. Which is why it's a colored myth or a non-colored myth. For example, we had this wonderful symposium at Columbia, and one of the artists that I absolutely love is Michiko Toyama. But we didn't know about her until Brigid Cohen began doing this phenomenal work of uncovering Toyama. The same was happening with Halim El-Dabh. Of course, this brings in the African, and El-Dabh purposely educates on the African roots of electronic music. Even within the stance of computer music being outside of genre (an uncritical view related to "colorblindness"), we're still bringing Black life in through a container. It's not investigating the problematic of computer music itself first.

Baker: I hate the term "jazz" because it was put there so that we can say, "this is Black people, and they can't be in this concert hall because that's jazz and this is a classical space." I always hate labels. Also recently this "Sisters with Transistors" documentary came out. I was very excited about it. I sat down to watch it. There was absolutely no representation of anyone who was not a white woman. Then they had a panel discussion and Moor Mother was on the panel and they let Moor Mother speak once, and then negated everything that Moor Mother said. To me it was the exact example of why I don't like to

associate myself as a computer musician. Because the people that are held up to high acclaim don't look like me and don't care about my voice.

Lyon: In our conversation so far, we've gotten a diagnosis of a system of bad faith. There was an article recently by George Lewis where he said that the tragedy of this is that even musicians who have all of the benefits and privileges of whiteness are still trapped in a system of bad faith along with everybody else. We must be honest about differences in our advantages and privileges. But we can all aspire to a better world that benefits everybody without exclusion. In moving from the diagnosis to remedies that the ICMA can implement, I mean, it's a big organization. It has many members and it spends a lot of resources on its yearly conference. That conference is influential because it publishes a large number of papers that become an important part of how people develop academic careers and get tenure and so forth. It's important, it's powerful, and now they're asking this question about inclusiveness that maybe should have been asked 40 years ago. But now that the question is on the table, what can we do today to make computer music become more diverse and inclusive in the future?

Jackson: I want to go back to what Joey was saying about accessibility in relation to economics, not just financial resources, but resources of time. For example, I know people who have been discouraged from applying to conferences (or residencies) if the conference is going to be in a location other than one's hometown. Even if there is funding or a stipend to cover travel and lodging, a lot of people can't afford to take a week off from their job or from taking care of their children or parents. A lot of Black and Latinx students take on more educational debt, and they have the added responsibilities of taking care of their families, often financially. So when there's some type of conference in a region that requires travel and time, that can become a barrier.

Baker: This goes back to access and then also being clear about what's needed to do things. I recently had a discussion with Brittany Green about this. Why does academia hate Pro Tools and why are they complaining that it crashes all the time? Because people are telling them, you can't run it on a

computer that doesn't have these very minimum requirements. But the price of Pro Tools for the student is not very expensive. It's \$10 a month. People could figure out how to subsidize that for students so they'd have access to more of these different tools. I really think it's a matter of letting people have access to things but also collective support as with Joey's student who needed a bassoon to go to college, so there was a GoFundMe and it provided way more than was needed pretty quickly. Treating systems whereby there's a share of resources, both economic and actual tools and software, so that people can have their hands on the best things that they can have. I find a lot of people that get into computer music with Ableton or something like that. Ableton is pretty inexpensive compared to some of the other options, but it might not be the right choice for their first thing given how their brain works and how they like to interact with music. Being able to have access to any type of software and really discover which one works for them is a really important thing. With such a large breadth of humans, there has to be a way to make those tools accessible. I was in a production school, so I got a different entree into computer music. But there were so many programs I had access to through student membership that really helped me either get gear or get my hands on gear. I think that's what one has to look towards. If you're looking at assembling resources with the ICMA membership of 4,000 different humans, that can do a lot of good, very quickly if it's built well.

Guidry: I completely agree. All these organizations are built on the structure of academia. Within academia, the power structure needs to be Black, Brown, and Indigenous. A white person does not know about diversity because they don't have to be a part of it, and that includes white queer, and trans people. Everyone has white supremacy in them in that community and race. They don't need to just hire Black artists because oftentimes, if they invite us onto panels, they only talk about us fighting the whites instead of all of the training and the art we produce. At the conferences, at least the bassoon ones, there are reviewers and journalists. Have Black reviewers, have Black journalists, have Indigenous reviewers, because white journalists don't know what we're trying to say with our art. It really struck me, especially with Black Mirror, there was the Black Museum episode. It covered slavery and abuse in slavery,

just all the violence, and a lot of white reviewers were like, "I didn't get it" and it's like, sure you can't get it. That's why we need Black reviewers and journalists everywhere. But really just making sure the space is open. Ableton was expensive; I had to think a lot about making that purchase. There is no monthly option and Pro Tools was a bit intimidating. They made it seem like this impossible feat, so I decided, I'm not learning how to do this. All of the doors and everything, it's just so inaccessible because the people that have been empowered to teach these machines essentially just don't want other people to know. That's what I felt in the last year as a performer/composer.

Baker: With that, there's this disconnect for me because I was in production school and not academia. In production school, it's a whole different culture. If somebody needs help, you help. Skill share is a thing, it's just how you learn. Now that I'm out of production school, I work with the same people professionally. I see a lot of people doing recording and engineering work in schools who are not what I would consider to be an engineer. They know enough to carry academic applications, but they're not engineers for whom this is their craft, this is what they do every day. A lot of the Black engineers are on that other side - this is what they do every day. They're mixing, they're mastering, that is their specialty. There's a huge disconnect because there's a lot of white folks in positions of recording technology in universities who should not have those jobs, but don't want to de-access those jobs to the Black people that should have those jobs, and this creates this culture where they don't want to tell you any information because they don't want you to possibly get ahead of them. That whole mentality is just ripe for destruction and not helping people and not advancing the industry as whole.

Jackson: I was just thinking about what both Joey and Elizabeth said. At the start of the conversation, I mentioned the social aspects of musicking, and also there's the psychological aspect. I'm not a sociologist, but I think there are systemic mind games that take place in a lot of these spaces. If someone keeps telling you, "You can't learn this technique," it's going to have an effect. If someone says, "This is too difficult for you to learn," it's going to have an

effect. These mind games make people feel that they don't belong or they can't belong in these spaces.

Cox: For me, there's these couple of questions that your main question here raises. One is: Why would one want to go to the conference? If the reason for that is to get tenure, then why would Black people who will not get tenure—even Cornell West doesn't get tenure—why would they want to come to the conference? I don't know. This is, I think, a real problem. There needs to be a reason for wanting to be at a conference, if one has to invest one's own resources. There's also danger in this idea that there are these simple solutions and then we can have a diverse world. But really what one has to do is decolonize, or deal with racism, deal with whiteness and Blackness and what all of that means—the problem of the color line. W. E. B. Du Bois already articulated it over 100 years ago and we still have not really dealt with it in all the spaces, especially these kinds of spaces. This is why I didn't say anything because I don't really have an answer. It's a continuing task and we cannot really give simple answers that will solve the problem. It is not possible to solve racism with a simple “12 step plan” or something like that. At the same time one has to keep working with and on this problem.

Lyon: I'm hearing that there are some trust issues with white academia and white computer music.

Cox: Maybe before you ask the question. I don't think it's a trust issue. It's not trust because I think it's verifiable. So it's not a question of, “am I trusting” or something like that, it is more a fact. It's more like statistical, undeniable fact, so it's not a question of trust.

Lyon: Thank you. I agree with you 100 percent. The facts speak for themselves. So one question is, how do we create new facts so that Black computer musicians might actually want to be part of the ICMA? Everyone here seems to agree that computer music needs to be decolonized. So how do we do that?

Baker: I want everyone to go to therapy because I believe that a lot of these issues, like the people that are too scared that somebody's going to take their job because they don't know how to do their job properly, all of these issues could be solved if we could somehow make therapy subsidized and free to all of these humans, Black and colored folks combined, because we are going to have trauma from entering the spaces. Also white folks because a lot of the issues which prevent you from making equitable space for non-white people stem from just not feeling confident or not knowing when to step aside. You can't rewrite trust, we can't rewrite facts, but we can move forward if we have the tools. People could become better humans and better equipped to deal with one another and be more equitable and fair, if we all just went to therapy.

Cox: What if the conference is not for getting tenure or for getting published to get tenure? Does that have to be the goal of an artistic meeting? If that is not the goal, then how can we make a goal that needs this to be happening? Decolonization is part of the core goal because the goal is to meet in an artistic space where we can exchange ideas. Then I think the tool that Elizabeth pointed to, I think it's a reorientation also of the goal of a meeting.

Guidry: I think the problem is that we live in such a capitalist structure. We can't really break down to just "let's get tenure here." Going back a couple of questions, to what Elizabeth was saying of skill share, I will bet the price of my bassoon that so many people who do computer music that have asked me to help them with samples have no idea where to place the one mic on the bassoon at all. There's this level of God complex when you try to correct someone. It's terrible and that also it needs to be a part of these conferences, especially for white people, on how to communicate with other people and how to collaborate, because you don't know everything. You can learn so much from every single person that you decide to make music with. But also all of these institutions are saying, we're pro Black, we're pro Indigenous sovereignty and we fight for immigration reform, but they're not anti-capitalism. As soon as you start to break that down, skill share will be the way of the future because we're all broke now. Corona wiped us out and we still have to

learn. We need to start teaching each other, especially Black people. That's why we make all of our own groups. It is just unfortunate that after we make our groups, these other organizations don't really want to involve us, and then we lose access to large amounts of funding. At the end of the day, to me, it's just so rooted in capitalism, and a lot of racism is also rooted in capitalism, and capitalism is rooted in racism. It just goes into this endless cycle. It is an impossible question of, which one do we tackle first?

Jackson: I think maybe instead of trying to change a system that one's already in, you're going to have to dismantle it, and as Joey was saying, start by bringing in Black and Indigenous and other people to help build it from the start. Otherwise, it's back to that question of why would someone try to get into a space in which historically they've not been welcomed, without any real change other than some rhetoric of "we see you" or "we're listening." There's also what Elizabeth was saying, in order for these things to take place, there has to be a sharing of resources, which for the people who are holding on to the power, a lot of them do not want to let go of that. It's easy to put on a rhetorical mask of saying, we welcome everybody, we want to see diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. But it's a different thing to actually step back to make space for others at the table.

Baker: I think it comes from this mindset: music school was super competitive and I did not fit in because of that. I have always held that if you have some power, then you should step aside for people who need access to the things that you probably don't need access to anymore because you either have them or have gotten all you need and want out of them. It's the same reason why somebody will send me an opportunity and I'll say, oh, well, this is not for me, but let me share it with a bunch of other people for whom I think this would be career-changing. I tell people all the time that there's enough pie for everyone. You shouldn't go around trying to eat flavors of pie that you don't even want just because you want pie. There's pie for you. It's just in the back in the kitchen, they're making it.

Lyon: A couple more questions from the Array call. What musical approaches should be given more attention and what is Black computer music?

Baker: Black computer music is anything made by a Black person. Same answer I have for me, Black music. We honestly have this thing, I'm laughing because I've heard it from both white people and Black people, "Elizabeth, your music's not Black." I'm like, I'm a Black person making music, so by virtue of those two definitions, it is Black music. I think one hierarchy is at the root of racism and really all oppression in the world, so we should not be trying to label anything for any reason. We should just be allowing people to do what makes them feel fulfilled as an artist, as a human. If they happen to be Black, it's Black computer music. I feel like when you try to put rules on things and create rules of what things are, you're going to leave out a lot of people who have some really unique and beautiful expressions and it's just not worth it.

Lyon: How diverse is computer music today and in different places?

Jackson: I feel like I don't even know how I would have the data to know the answer to this question. I have no idea.

Baker: It's very diverse, but it's not all in the same place. Thinking back to Africa, a lot of people still feel like Africa is a very backwards place, but they have more Wi-Fi than we have over here. It's one of the most connected continents in the world. So this idea that "far off " places don't have computer music is a complete backwards idea. They have computer music. They might not have the distribution channels to get it into the faces of these folks, but it's there. It's definitely a very diverse community. I'll go on SoundCloud or Bandcamp and I am always amazed at the diversity of sound palettes that you get from across the world. So I don't really think it's a problem of not having diverse sounds. I think it goes back to what we've been saying from the beginning, it's probably access and distribution.

Jackson: I was just going to say also an identity. Because again, people don't necessarily want to identify with computer music in a similar way that some people don't necessarily want to identify as a composer because that's a weighted word and it has certain associations which people do not want to

be a part of. I think we should reclaim the word to be more inclusive. It comes down to remembering that computer music, like all other musics, is a social activity influenced by personal connections and identity, and how someone sees themselves relating to other people who are doing whatever this musical activity is.

Lyon: I was just at the virtual SEAMUS 2021 Conference. During an online conversation there, I pointed out that there were almost no Black artists at SEAMUS nor have there been for the many years that I've attended the conference. I also observed that the electroacoustic music field seems generally allergic to music with a beat and suggested that if SEAMUS became more welcoming to beat-oriented music, we might see greater diversity at SEAMUS. One participant responded that beat-oriented music is pop music that already has an audience, and that if SEAMUS opened up to that style of music, there would be less room for the kind of "classical" electronic music currently being programmed. Another participant shared the view that SEAMUS tends to avoid beat-oriented music specifically coded as Black. There was general agreement that this topic merits further discussion.

An extraordinary concert was presented at SEAMUS shortly after that, which programmed primarily the work of Black artists. This concert was curated and there were beats everywhere in the music. The audience adored the concert, but it was clear that in order to introduce this diverse programming into SEAMUS, it was necessary to be proactive and use a different approach than standard peer review.

Cox: One needs to remember the way that beats or rhythm is used to mark a primitiveness of African or Indigenous people. One of my favorite composers, Stockhausen, said something in an interview, and that shows what some of the founders of this computer music, the wide computer music mythology or whatever this is we're thinking of, said. He said something like, "I really appreciate all these producers, but they're too much hung up with post-African rhythms." There is this underlying idea that this is not high art. This is why it's so important to think about the history of computer music because there are these racist ideas that are baked into it. Another important point is something

that Joey mentioned very early on: aesthetics. This includes the way that certain aesthetics are trying to be seen as the ideal for sonic production or music-making. We all know the work concept and how it has been used as a way to endorse the colonial project. Relatedly, in computer music, I've rarely heard a discussion about the fact that how sounds sometimes are isolated is attempting to recreate a way of listening that ignores the eyes and ignores a lot of factors to make a certain claim about sound. That also is part of the colonial or coloniality.

Jackson: Just to go back to part of your question, Eric, in and around 2016, I attended seven electroacoustic/computer music and experimental music concerts in, I think, five different countries. Most of the music sounded the same. If it's peer-reviewed, that's a problem with curation. Secondly, the problem is why does everything sound the same? I suspect it's because you have a generation of students just mimicking their teachers instead of learning to express their own voice or that the expression of individuality is suppressed at some point in this system. Again, this pattern was observed over multiple events in different countries (in North America and Europe), and everything just sounded the same.

Baker: I've got a response to that. Everyone uses the same sound libraries. That's part of the reason why everything sounds the same. Because people are not going out and making their own samples. They're just using the same sound libraries and so everything, of course, is going to sound the same. I also want to point out that Afrofuturism doesn't necessarily have to have a beat. I have issues with these conferences that say "we're going to do a concert and it's all Black music." That is literally separate but equal, and I have such a huge problem with these concerts. We're going to make Blackness or Indigenous identity the theme of the concert. I understand that it's done with the best of intentions but it's problematic from the beginning. Nobody wants to be tokenized. We want to be seen for what we do and put on the same playing field as everyone else. When you're moving forward and you're trying to diversify your programming, you don't have to go to someone and say, "I'm looking to do a concert of music by under-represented composers." You can literally just

say, "I like your music, I would like to program it." I think that these are very important intentions that need to be had at the beginning of trying to make change, versus trying to put the diverse people in a box and we'll just look at them like they're in the zoo. That feels really wrong and horrible to me.

Guidry: I just think everyone who does not like hip hop, or everything hip hop has influenced is anti-Black. There's people who look at hip hop and they say it's aggressive, it's too harsh, it's too loud, and those are the labels they put on it. I don't understand why they're so afraid of grooves. When people hear electronic music with beats (I also agree Afrofuturism does not have to have beats) they don't see this as art, they see it as entertainment because a lot of times Black artists are not considered artists, we're considered entertainers. It's just so rooted in worldly anti-Blackness but especially in this country. But it is such a shame because it's the aesthetic of contemporary art and electronic music and composition. Contemporary to me means music or art of our time and that includes R&B, it includes dancehall, it includes all of these things. White people just don't want to admit that it is very hard to write a really amazing verse and then put that on top of a beat. It is just beyond frustrating to me and one of the answers exactly what Elizabeth said, the curation of it. Don't have a concert of under-represented composers, just have the concert. Then people will see these are Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and it's awesome. It doesn't have to keep this label because when you slap on that title of emerging, we're getting paid less because of that emerging or under-represented title instead of just seeing us as the whole artist we are.

Cox: The idea of the primitivity of rhythm and of the Black, they're entangled. There's this idea that rhythm is this very primitive thing. This includes a misunderstanding of African music and Afro-diasporic music, and of course of what that entails in terms of rhythm and beats. As Halim El-Dabh points out, much African-music has been a form of electronic music for hundreds of years because they do all this synthesis of sounds in those musics and with those instruments.

There's this problem that I'm glad came up here again—this boxing of Black artists into the Black space that is other (whether it be via genre markers or

otherwise). Similarly, Black critical theorists have pointed to the fact that often what Black thinkers or artists do seems to be put into a box so that it is apparently only relevant to Black people but it's actually not the fact. Instead, what really is the fact is that this work is relevant to our times, and to what is happening in the world. This is one of the ways in which racism is bad for white people, in the sense that some will disregard the reality that is at play at the moment.

Guidry: Everybody wants to be Black until it's time to be Black. They steal so much from us with rhythm and just the type of music, fashion, everything, culture, slang, and they can never do it properly. It's why it sounds bad. Whenever I go to a dance club, pre-Corona, I would just be like when does it change, when does it drop? What is happening? Just because of anti-Blackness in these clubs, they don't play rap and hip hop because they're afraid people are going to get too lit. At the end of the day, I think within whiteness, we do say white people don't have a lot of culture, but there is white music out there and some of them, it's really cool. The rhythm that is naturally there is really cool. Instead of stealing and just making it a very watered-down version, take what you have and make it something that means something to you. Explore the possibilities of your artistic expression from your ancestors. Then if you want to take that collaboration with an indigenous or a Black or Latinx person, do that and see what it sounds like together, and you'll probably learn that your ancestors stole things from Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people as well. But it's just such a lack of education being done on a personal level between white artists and the craft that they're stealing because there are some rappers that use white beat makers and it's really good, but you can tell that they have a very close natural relationship with the artists they work with instead of just going to one or two sessions, take it home and think they can just do everything because if it's Black that means it's not as good. Again, there's so much God complex, and just looking down on everything that is Black.

Baker: I remember a session that I did many years ago. It was a session where I did a version from Kool & the Gang, and then The Fresh Prince, and then my

version of "Summertime." There was a white rapper in the class, he was like, "Let me get a few bars on this" and then we had to go mix it. I sat with that, I'm not kidding, for days. I used every trick, Auto-Tune, Elastic Audio. I tried to do everything to get it on the flow and then also in tune and nothing worked. I ended up having to get a trombone professor to do a '70s style trombone solo over that section because you could tell even when you were in the booth that this was a person trying to be something that they were not. It didn't translate, it didn't make the track better, but the '70s trombone solo worked. It was great.

Jackson: When Joey was talking especially about rhythm and stealing rhythm, I was thinking about computer music and technology being used to steal these rhythms. Not just from sampled recording, but also with drum machines that make it easier for people to borrow and profit from rhythms from the African diaspora. I was reminded of Evan Williams' article "The African American Male Voice in the Electroacoustic Works of Steve Reich and Jacob ter Veldhuis," where he addresses Steve Reich's "It's Gonna Rain" and sampling of the Black voice.

Baker: Reading about how Steve Reich feels about those particular individuals that he sampled is also the grossest thing ever. He feels no financial obligation to them. He feels like this was something he himself discovered. Steve Reich's only really done one thing his entire major front-facing career, and that is, take from African American, and African culture and just recycle it with a white name, and that's the thing. It's so frustrating.

Guidry: Also, I hated "It's Gonna Rain" being played in music history and contemporary class because people make fun of it. White and non-Black POC make fun of it cause he's using it to make fun of Black voices. If anyone else in the class doesn't care, don't play this anymore. But with these composers, they get so much clout for such mediocrity. I just can't tell you how many times I've seen "Music for 18 Musicians" programmed. For what? What is the point at this point? It's very long, it's very uninteresting. The concert was supposed to be before Corona and that school prides itself on diversity. David

Mannes opened with the phrase, "This school is for Black people." But the concert actually let go of all these statements and everything was Philip Glass and Steve Reich. It's just like they get programmed all the time for, I'm not going to say bad music, but not the most interesting thing on the face of this planet. It's just all stolen, like Bartok. Just so much is stolen from Blackness and it's at the point where until there are Black people, Indigenous, and Latinx in positions of power in every institution on earth, these people are still going to get programmed. The reason I'm bringing up academia is because unfortunately we live in this structure. We want it to be different, but this is just how it is. It can change, but it's not going to change until we just dismantle academia. I believe Black people, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, Asian and Pacific Islander, all these people, we can make our own massive community. We still will not have the funding because, again, capitalism rules all of this. Until we get more people as deans, as provosts and presidents of universities and heads of departments, it's just not going to change. But that's also going to take 50 years to happen. I think so much of the change for the present and just more respect of Black artists is continuing the support from other Black to Black artists, and then from there, building relationships to other non-Black POC and Indigenous people, and getting rid of the problems between our intersections, and then we all support each other. Because at the end of the day, we are going to have to make our own structure, because white people are never going to look at us outside of just, "That's a nice beat. Okay, go on the street." We just have to keep showing support because that is what I've seen the most in this last year of white people freaking out and having to figure out how to do food stamps, how to do unemployment. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people definitely struggled this last year, but we didn't have to relearn any systems. I feel like that's why some of us really were just okay. We're not on the same playing field, but things are a little different right now. But the amount of support I've seen my friends show me and just our community showing other communities support throughout this last year, it's amazing, especially in the art world, and that just absolutely needs to continue. People have to also know what is their place in this support. Some people are grant writers. Some people are great public speakers. Some people are good at curation. Some people are good at being stagehands. When we're

creating our own structures of support and organizations, we also have to know these things. But at the end of the day, we have to go to therapy to learn that we are valuable. We created this music and we are the root. Until that is instilled and somehow someone makes a pill to get rid of impostor syndrome, I will buy 50 of them, 50 million pills. It's such a long road. It's a very possible road, but it's going to be interesting.

Baker: I love everything about that. I want to circle back to sampling because this is such a big issue. You have to honor the people and things that you're sampling. I treat that issue of sampling a human without their consent and using it for your own musical purposes as basically the same thing as the people that go outside and say, "I'm going to notate a bird song." Well, man's notation system can never truly get the essence of bird song. You can write some pitches down and some rhythms, but that's never going to capture the essence. For me, we all have to unlearn hierarchy. It's like when you go into a space and people will say, "oh, what's your favorite thing?" Why? "Favorite" implies that all the rest of the things mean nothing. We have to start learning and teaching the youth to talk about things. Why they like things. How they came to like things, and not placing these weird hierarchies on trivial matters. A color doesn't need to be lifted up. It's a color and that's great. It has value as a color and we should recognize that value. Once you learn that in your everyday life, all of these other situations, these hierarchical systems like racism are in your mind, you're starting to break them down even more and more because nothing is better than anything else. It's not even all about equal, it's just everyone has something that's a little bit different about them that makes them special and can be celebrated, and there's nothing wrong with them, but they might have some weaknesses that you can help them with. When you view the world in that way, and when you reconstruct your systems in that way, it's a much better world mental health-wise for everyone, and also, I think people can become their true selves in that world where it's not about who's better. We just have to stop oppressing everyone and everything, and we've got to do that by stopping this idea that something or anything is better than something else.

Lyon: That is an important distinction. Academia often engages in judgments without always investigating the biases that might lie behind those judgements. The other thing I've been wanting to say for a while, Joey, regarding your mention of hip hop is how gigantic hip hop is in music today. To somehow ignore it in academia strikes me as completely unreasonable. And yet lots of people are doing a great job of ignoring hip hop in the musical academy. So I'm really curious what you think about that.

Cox: To me, there's nothing exceptional about hip hop in this regard. What about dancehall? Maybe this relates to American exceptionalism? Maybe it's relatable with what happened with jazz. We also have to remember nations and what is their project and their involvement in this whole global capitalism. Because there's no reason that we should include hip-hop but not include, for example, dub music, or bubu music, etc. So, I would like to utter some caution. There is much Afro-diasporic work that deserves to be part of the discussion no matter how much it sells or not. I think the main issue is again, to me, racism and coloniality.

Guidry: A lot of Black people I know recognize everything you said - that this is all extremely valid and amazing music. Putting different forms of Black music into opposition the same way as every one of the Black people against each other or the hierarchy really is still just whiteness and then thinking hip hop is the end-all, be-all. I do think hip hop is exceptional because I think all of them are exceptional. But because it's so intricate and dancehall is also so intricate and because my family's Creole I grew up on Zydeco and that shit's crazy. But it's just been so tokenized to only focus on hip hop because that's the only thing that white people have tried to venture into and it really has made this hierarchy of Black styles of art with a beat that we didn't ask to be a part of their list or structure to begin with.

Baker: I think it's also interesting to see how hip hop has gone into K-pop and how K-Pop and C-pop involves American producers living in China and Korea that are driving these fields. It's exceptional in how it has crossed borders and become appropriated with being led by Black people. The appropriation into

an assimilation into these other cultures is very interesting. I know that it has to have happened with other musics. But in particular, just how it survives and thrives in places where you wouldn't necessarily expect it being Korea and China. But it seems like you have racism in Korea and China against Black people. But they love that sound, embracing that sound as much as can be. So I don't like to put anything in the hierarchy, but I do consider it to be really interesting for that ruggedness of hip hop.

Cox: Why even draw a line between dancehall and hip hop, or between bebop and hip hop, or between avant-garde and the last poets? This is a particular articulation of the world with its own aims, which are entangled in racism and coloniality, as well as American exceptionalism (which infuses discourses around Black too). When we talk about how hip hop, or Jazz before that, moves (economically and ideologically), Matthew D. Morrison's work on *Blacksound* comes to mind in relation to how it comes to Europe or Asia. The question for me is, where does it become a Blackface-like practice? There's also the possibility gained from a sincere, and I think this is maybe the important part, a sincere engagement with—learning from, practicing of, and working with—musical practices of Black subjects versus a superficial one. Superficial meaning here where borrowing, practicing, or listening becomes a place to re-perform racism. Part of this includes that Black life (as opposed to only blackness) should be welcome, and another part is that Black life should not be controlled and managed for profit.

Baker: I think there should be no labels. Any music made by any Black person is now Black music, that's the definition.

Guidry: I agree with that. I think we have to be careful not to erase the cultural differences that exist in the diaspora. So it is Black but dancehall is made differently from hip hop, just different roots from the Caribbean; the same way as we look at food, there's southern soul food and then there's also Creole food and those are not the same. They're from the same region, but they're still culturally different, they're so beautiful. We don't have to see lines how white people have made us lines. But see it as how they complement and

how they have been made from each other and still get respect from the ancestors and elders who founded this music.

Lyon: If you were the president of the ICMA, what would you do? What policies or projects would you initiate to improve that world?

Jackson: Does “improve” that world mean to increase diversity, equity, inclusion?

Lyon: Yes, exactly that.

Jackson: You can invite people and that could mean reaching out to organizations that are working with Black youth like the Willie Mae Rock Camp where its director LaFrae Sci has been introducing young women to analog synthesis, or the For the Daughters of Harlem: Working in Sound project. So you could work with organizations to let them know that you exist and let them know that people are welcomed and communicating the types of activities, but don't be upset if people aren't rushing to change their ways of doing and being.

Guidry: I think I would shut the ICMA down for a couple of years. You have to bring it down and just completely rebuild because I think I said it earlier, you can't take this structure and try to make it fit Black, that's when it was never made for Blackness, and Asian, Latin, it just wasn't made for any of us. So you'd have to start all the way from the bottom and make whole new structures of how people are represented. I do think applications should be blind. That will show that there was no tokenism happening. Just finding new structures, finding new ways to do funding, finding new ways to do education. What does outreach look like? Making sure that the people doing outreach match the demographic of the place where you're doing the outreach, and speak the language. Make sure they can get to know the community because they will be a part of that community. Just things like that, but shutting down for at least one year and just restructure everything, and maybe even change the name.

Baker: I'm for shutting it down too. I'm also for not having a conference of white papers because I find a lot of times when you are writing about these things in this academic way, it's like a lens, it's like putting a camera in front of your face. You're removed from the subject and you're removed from the practice, and I often would say to myself, as a person who is a practitioner, what can we do to create more opportunities to actually do stuff? So I'm in favor of shutting it down probably for more years than Joey, and getting people to go out and interact with other people outside of their circle, outside of their bubble and really understand what is computer music in this world today, and not just sit in an ivory tower and pontificate on what computer music is today.

Cox: What is the point of an organization that puts on conferences or journals? It's to create a space for people to meet. These people can be members or not, because it's an open public conference, a public journal where everyone can submit. So that's the first point. I don't think shutting it down would help because what if no one changes who is working for it or none of the values change in that time? Some of my values would be to make it truly a democratic place in the sense that it has to be decolonizing for it to be a really democratic place. It has to practice a type of education for its members to know what kind of systems they are in. To make informed members or citizens who are actually fit to decide on things, who can articulate questions of racism, etc. That requires knowledge, so that needs to be part of the goal. I personally, everything I do, part of my value is to decolonize. If I were president, that would be part of the core values of what this specific computer music organization does. To me, this is maybe a very personal answer, but I couldn't get out of that, it's impossible.

Lyon: As a longstanding member of the ICMA, I and some other members who have been in this organization for decades have asked ourselves if the ICMA is still relevant to today's music technological practices, which have changed so profoundly since the 1970s. A decolonization process may be necessary for the ICMA to maintain its relevance in the future. Part of that would be to better understand how the ICMA functions within larger social

patterns of structural racism. What else would a decolonization process require?

Cox: There are a couple of particular points. One point is the people who run it, the administrative people, the editorial committee or whatever the ICMA organization calls that, diversify all of that, the very structure of the organization. The next part to me is the by-laws and all of that stuff so basically the values and meanings behind the organization. Another part is, how is peer review practiced and by whom? If peer reviews are not practiced by a diverse set of people, then you'll basically just reproduce all the problems. So there are these multiple levels of accountability to me, and this is why I started with the organization, even the very core values, because even that, it is a form of accountability when you do something against the organization. You come in as a new vice president or president, you have to make sure that you continue what the organization needs. This means if we want to change what the organization needs/wants then we have to change its core values. If that doesn't happen through practice, as in the historical practice, then it has to happen through a set of new laws—change the laws.

Lyon: Any last thoughts before we wrap this up?

Baker: I wanted to say this earlier on when we were talking about sound libraries and were talking also about rhythmic things. Native instruments are doing a not-so-good thing when they put pre-programmed rhythms into their products, and so many people fall back on these stock things. With software and drum machines, specifically, newer made electronic devices, these appropriated sounds and rhythms are already programmed into your device, and so it's very tempting and super-easy to use them, even though you might not have any relationship with them. I think that a call has to be made from an organization like the ICMA to go to software manufacturers, and drum machine manufacturers and say, "We need to stop this because it's not ethical." It's nice to hear them, but I don't feel that belongs in a sound library and it goes back to where Yvette was asking the question of, why does it all sound the same? This doesn't speak to the diversity of membership, but is more an

ethical call to action to say that sound libraries need to be diversified and they also need to be revised in such a way that they're not appropriating from any culture.

Jackson: Which requires an end of capitalism. Borrowing from Black culture is very profitable.

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