

To: Music Studies Leadership

National Association of Schools of Music
International Society for Music Education
International Music Council
Society for Music Teacher Education
National Federation for Music Education
College Band Directors National Association
College Music Society
International Association for Schools of Jazz
Jazz Education Network
International Society for Improvised Music
National Association for the Study and Performance of African American Music

From: Ed Sarath

Subject: Alliance for the Transformation of Musical Academe

Date: November 10, 2019

I am happy to announce the formation of the Alliance for the Transformation of Musical Academe (ATMA).

Predicated on an entirely new era of visioning and practice, ATMA convened its inaugural gathering at the University of Dayton over the September 13-15 weekend. Colleagues from over 20 institutions and the professional world converged to engage in uniquely penetrating dialogues about artistry, pedagogy, social justice and the transformative dimensions of music.

Reflecting the organization's commitment to harnessing the richness of America's own musical heritage, an important result of that meeting is the ATMA "Declaration on the Foundational Positioning of African American Music in 21st Century Music Studies in America."

The Declaration might well be among the most provocative documents in over a half century of music studies change deliberations, and I am particularly interested in sustaining informed conversation around this statement in order that its broad and inclusive vision is adequately understood.

The following passage encapsulates the basic thrust of the Declaration:

Black American musical foundations encompass multiple improvisatory languages (tonal, modal, stylistically open), compositional languages (small ensemble, large ensemble, concert music approaches), and virtuosic performance skills, all of which are richly interwoven with rigorous grounding in harmony, melody, contemporary rhythmic fluency, aural development, musical embodiment, keyboard, orchestration, arranging, theoretical and historical analysis, and contemplative practice. Wide-ranging connections extend organically to cultural studies, aesthetics, cognition, transdisciplinary inquiry that cuts across the sciences and humanities, and consciousness/spirituality. An entirely new framework emerges for addressing a host of

change themes in music—including technology, entrepreneurship, critical thinking and self-driven pedagogy—with important ramifications for arts-driven approaches to social justice, environmental sustainability, arts-driven transcendence of ideological divides, and peace.

In a single stroke, a uniquely American cultural anchor is also recognized as the site of powerful tools that undergird a vision of artistic and human development that exceeds in scope anything the field has yet to achieve, let alone perhaps even imagine.

I was particularly encouraged by the presence of two constituencies at ATMA's inaugural gathering that tend to be marginalized in the conversation but which are seminal to the emergent vision.

One is the real-world navigator—the improviser/composer/performer whose music transcends category even as it exhibits rich cultural roots amid a broader creative spectrum.

Second is an activist voice that extends dialogue on diversity and social justice far beyond the politically-correct, academic comfort zones within which much music studies diversity discourse tends to be confined. I am talking, of course, about full-out engagement with the challenging, yet essential realms of race and black-white racial dynamics that have been central to our nation's history from its very inception.

Little commentary is needed regarding the enormity of the challenges that the latter realm poses to music studies, particularly in light of the newfound grappling with issues of race that increasingly occurs in various sites on college and university campuses and society (e.g. the NYT 1619 series).

Indeed, music studies may be brought to a virtual standstill were this conversation to fully take hold within its ranks.

Nonetheless, I view full engagement with this issue as a defining criterion of 21st century arts and arts education leadership.

The Sept 2019 Dayton gathering has provided me great encouragement about ATMA's potential to raise the bar in our collective aspirations toward this leadership.

I look forward to further conversations as this initiative unfolds.

Sincerely,



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