

## **ALLIANCE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF MUSICAL ACADEME**

### **AFRO EURO SYNAPSE**

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Afro Euro Synapse is a framework for sustaining an entirely new level of conversation and visioning about the roles of two key musical lineages—Black American Music and the Eurocanonic tradition—in the racial justice/artistic justice imperative.

While there is no dearth of rhetoric from institutions across the nation about anti-racism commitment, there is remarkably little substantive inquiry into the roles of these two seminal musical legacies in this process, let alone how they, and their respective constituencies, might interact.

I find the words of Christopher Small particularly inspiring on this account:

*The confluence of African and European traditions is among the most fruitful developments in the history of the world's music.*

While one need not look far for tastes of this fruit over the past century or so, I believe—and assert this forcefully in my book *Black Music Matters*—that we have yet to see anything near the full blossoming of Small's wisdom.

I am not talking about superficial exchange between the legacies, nor am I talking about a coming era where cross-stylistic melding obliterates what we know and love of these musical treasuries. We can have the best of both worlds—deep, creative synthesis and deeply intact traditional manifestations. In other words, there will always be a place for Monk, Mingus, Mozart and Machaut in intact forms along with robust boundary transcendence.

Nor am I—as I am sometimes accused in music studies progressive circles—initiating the conversation to appease conservatives in the field. I trust that the substance of my commentary situation and articulation of future pathways dispels such concerns. The foundational positioning of Black American Music will be a key development in the Afro-Euro Synapse.

To be sure, this may seem counterintuitive—that ATMA's deep diagnostic and healing commitment in response to systemic musical racism might be compatible with parallel efforts to find celebratory unity with the very Eurocanonic tradition that has relegated BAM to the margins. However, there is a much bigger story to be told here, one that does not in any way compromise the activist thrust (I believe it deepens that thrust) yet at the same time opens up new evolutionary pathways for both Afro and Euro lines.

Key will be improvisation as a connecting thread, and that the disappearance of this primordial creative epistemology in Eurocanonic practice, including the manifestation of that tradition in the academy (which arguably deviates from the very European tradition to which the academy claims homage) lies at the heart of the systemic racism that permeates music studies, with the restoration of this core process central to healing efforts.

(To be continued....)