

EDITORIAL



Challenges to diversity and inclusivity in the music-history classroom are multifaceted and reflect the systemic nature of race and racism in society. As students, staff and institutions responded with diversity statements and diversity initiatives to the tragic loss of Black life and to Black Lives Matter protests in the United States during the summer of 2020, I decided to turn my research project (provisionally entitled *Race and Representation in Baroque Opera*) into a collaborative working group whose output could help researchers and instructors rethink how we teach and conduct scholarship in our field. Although my initial research idea was formulated for baroque opera, I realized – as racial tensions were swirling around me everywhere I turned – that the ideas I had developed for this very specialized field could be expanded and applied to any repertory or era of the Western art-music canon. After many weeks of stress-fuelled grant writing, I received support from Indiana University’s Racial Justice Research Fund to establish a research laboratory, entitled ‘Creating Real Change’. This group has several primary goals: 1. developing research-based frameworks that help shift our thinking about how we teach music either by or about underrepresented minorities; 2. collaborating on research and publication; and 3. offering workshop opportunities for instructors to try out new ideas with trusted colleagues before introducing them in classroom settings. My collaborators are all early-career scholars, at different stages of professional development: Devon Nelson, an adjunct assistant professor, Miguel Arango Calle, a doctoral student, and Deanna Pellerano, a master’s degree student, all at Indiana University.

At the core of this work is our belief that historiographical problems arise from faulty perceptions about identity and place, and that how we research and teach music history continues to have an impact on living people when we bring false or incomplete notions from the past into the classroom. For the same reason that racism is described as a system, we cannot just use one strategy to demolish it. We must design new systems. ‘Creating Real Change’ does just that.

For this project, I have developed four frameworks that simultaneously define the structural historical issues and provide interventions through research and teaching. The first, and overarching, framework, which I call ‘Origin myths and shadow histories’, defines how both historiographical and fictional narratives serve to overshadow more authentic representations of identity. My remaining three frameworks (‘From mimesis to mockery’, ‘Indigenous voices’ and ‘Like the light of liberty’) teach the analytical skills needed to reconstruct shadow histories while deconstructing origin myths to create a more ethical history of the Western art-music tradition.

Origin myths and shadow histories operate in a complex dynamic that critical race theorists commonly call ‘invisibility’ and ‘hypervisibility’. Although this concept is applied to the ways in which minorities experience identity-based microaggressions in societal interactions that either erase their contributions (invisibility) or over-police their bodies (hypervisibility), my work shows that these dynamics also exist in cultural products that represent identity through image, text or music. Opera is a particularly compelling lens for understanding this dynamic in past and present conditions, since it functions as a multimedia presentation of ideas engaging the audience’s imagination and intellect, with rhetorical strategies intended to persuade the audience of fictionalized verisimilitude. In the classroom, we can identify how origin myths present themselves in the textual and musical sources, and we can find them in modern productions; from there, we can use baroque opera as a reflective medium, a mirror that can show us both past and present forms of identity stereotypes and misperceptions.

While my use of the term ‘origin myths’ is not new, my conceptualization of how they interact with shadow histories helps us to find systematic ways to interrupt historical and modern stereotypes about identity. (For scholarship concerning similar terms, such as ‘founding legends’, ‘origin stories’ and ‘mythistory’, see



Richard Waswo, *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), Joanne H. Wright, *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), and Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.) While the idea of origin myths has been central to histories of folklore, literature and political science (as in national origin stories), it is only now gaining some traction in music history. Within early-modern studies – and eighteenth-century studies in particular – several scholars are using ‘origin myths’ in a historiographical sense, to address narrative assumptions that must be challenged. A recent collection of essays edited by Katharine Butler and Samantha Bassler, *Music, Myth and Story in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), shows how myths of all kinds, whether historiographical, literary or biblical, were foundational to the primary sources on which our histories of early music are based. With the exception of the contributions by Elina G. Hamilton (‘And in England, There are Singers: Grafting Oneself into the Origins of Music’) and Katharine Butler (‘Origin Myths, Genealogies and Inventions: Defining the Nature of Music in Early Modern England’), the book tends to identify the use of mythological narratives rather than question how early-modern authors centred their own identities in their writing. This book has caused me to be deeply sceptical in the best way, because it is so comprehensive and thought-provoking; ultimately, this scholarship has made me rethink how we should use primary sources as historians of musical culture.

David R. M. Irving has investigated the paradoxical ways in which European early-modern and especially Enlightenment musical sources simultaneously positioned Western music as a ‘modern’ inheritor of the classical past and used ancient Greek music as a yardstick for determining what were deemed ‘ancient’ or ‘primitive’ musical cultures in other locales. (See, for example, his chapter ‘Ancient Greeks, World Music, and Early Modern Constructions of Western European Identity’, in the volume *Studies on a Global History of Music: A Balzan Musicology Project*, edited by Reinhard Strohm (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 21–41.) Irving’s work provides a model for how musicology can investigate our discipline’s focus on the idea of Western civilization by exposing its paradoxes and historical inconsistencies. In many ways, this is a discipline-specific methodology similar to what Kwame Anthony Appiah proposes in his book *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity, Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture* (New York: Liveright, 2018).

Within art history, Giles Knox’ recent book *Sense Knowledge and the Challenge of Italian Renaissance Art: El Greco, Velázquez, Rembrandt* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019) questions the centrality of Italian traditions in early-modern and eighteenth-century historiography. In the first half of the book, Knox identifies origin myths in the discipline of art history stemming from the primacy of Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* in historical and modern narratives on art; he counteracts these by retracing the visual evidence of artists’ influences through networks of interaction. It is an effective model that would translate well into music history. Since I am a historian of Italian opera who teaches courses on baroque music, I am very cognizant of how the prevalence of documents from the Florentine Camerata and the Medici court have led us to tell a history of the baroque that begins with Italy and is rooted in citations of ancient Greek materials; this narrative is evident in many of the textbooks on baroque music written in English. The challenge is to find the appropriate shadow histories that allow us to provide more nuanced representations in the classroom.

Collectively, this scholarship has influenced my understanding of how baroque opera represents affinities with ancient Greek and Roman culture and philosophy to create distinctions between ‘civilized’ and ‘barbarous’ identities. In this repertory, I argue that representation of ‘othered’ identities creates a collective origin myth allowing European audiences morally to justify imperial and colonial domination. The origin myth uses the terms of Enlightenment philosophy to define ‘Western civilization’ in a hierarchical position through constructed dualities, usually positioning ancient Greek or Roman progenitors as *representatives* of values such as ‘victory’, ‘laws’, ‘reason’, ‘rationality’, ‘power’, ‘duty’; as *receivers* of ‘gifts’, ‘love’, ‘land’, ‘riches’; as *dominators* of ‘nature’, ‘landscape’, ‘beauty’; or *rejectors* of ‘madness’ or other non-normative conditions. Even though there is excellent scholarship on exoticism and orientalism in baroque opera (some principal contributors are Olivia A. Bloechl, Ellen T. Harris, Ralph P. Locke and Timothy D. Taylor), methodologies that analyse opera from these perspectives cannot always fully capture the cultural dynamics of race and



ethnicity, partly because of the ways in which exoticism and orientalism can overlap with gendered concepts. As Locke writes in his book *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), previous scholarship had neglected the ways in which male ‘othered’ identities in baroque opera often do not fit the standard paradigms of exoticism; inversely, female ‘othered’ identities often align themselves with the Enlightenment values at play within the drama in order to gain cultural acceptance. Furthermore, orientalism and exoticism as representational schemes, and postcolonialism as a scholarly discipline, are the *outcomes* of previously created origin myths, and therefore cannot be used to reveal shadow histories.

Musicology has not yet developed a critical methodology for understanding how music represents race. Although the edited collection by Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) is an important work that opened musicology more broadly to thinking about race, it uses a strategy that is more concerned with the social construction of race. In other words, the book points at and reifies race, and thereby demonstrates that its representation exists in musical culture; this approach is thus more akin to the pathway that exoticism or orientalism follows. In contrast, by applying methods of ‘transdisciplinarity’ from critical race theory, I prefer to situate baroque opera (and all music) within its full cultural contexts regarding race and representation, drawing from multiple primary sources such as art, geography, landscape, literature, maps, travel, philosophy and politics in order to show how racialized thinking influenced musical production and performance. In this way, my work is aligned with perspectives drawn from existing scholarship on African-American music and literature, such as in Guthrie P. Ramsey’s article ‘The Pot Liquor Principle: Developing a Black Music Criticism in American Music Studies’ (*Journal of Black Studies* 35/2 (2004), 210–223), or my own ‘Blues, Criticism, and the Signifying Trickster’ (*Popular Music* 24/2 (2005), 179–191). This strategy creates a critical language based on the materials themselves, in juxtaposition with other contemporary sources; I am beginning to use the term ‘culturally relevant analysis’ to describe my approach, as a parallel to ‘culturally relevant pedagogy’. Research in the field of baroque opera and musicology at large can learn a lot from the intellectual traditions of Black scholars, who have already developed sophisticated tools for analysing race and the representation of identity in societal constructs.

Other than Philip Ewell’s recent critiques of music theory’s ‘white racial frame’ (see his article ‘Music Theory and the White Racial Frame’, *Music Theory Online* 26/2 (2020), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html>, and his blog ‘Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory’ at <https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/>), there are relatively few examples of critical race theory being applied to musicology. In the autumn of 2019 several colleagues and I presented a panel at the College Music Society conference that demonstrated ways in which musicology can use strategies from critical race theory (‘Intersectionalities in African-American Music and Culture: Weaving History, Theory, and Pedagogy’, with Gabriel Solis and Kristen M. Turner, moderated by Joyce M. McCall). While my approach draws heavily from critical race theory, it does not create a one-to-one systematic definition in the way that Ewell’s project does. Predominantly, scholarly treatment of race in baroque music focuses on the ethnographic aspects of the identity of performers (see, for example, Arne Spohr, ‘“Mohr und Trompeter”: Blackness and Social Status in Early Modern Germany’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72/3 (2019), 613–663, or Emily Wilbourne, ‘Lo Schiavetto (1612): Travestied Sound, Ethnic Performance, and the Eloquence of the Body’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/1 (2010), 1–43). Others have focused on the politics and economics of slavery (see Ellen T. Harris, ‘With Eyes on the East and Ears in the West: Handel’s Orientalist Operas’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36/3 (2006), 419–443; and David Hunter’s work on Handel, slavery and the new financial capitalism). David M. Powers’s book *From Plantation to Paradise?: Cultural Politics and Musical Theatre in French Slave Colonies, 1764–1789* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014) explores the intersections between racial stereotypes and Black performance of French baroque opera in the Caribbean eighteenth century. We have not yet created a scholarly language for identifying rhetorical strategies of representation – whether



textual or musical – and the interstitial, structural and hierarchical mechanisms that embed racialized or ethnic ‘otherness’ within operatic production.

Origin myths occur not just within historical representations, but also within our scholarly discourse. One of the biggest origin myths in our field is that ‘race’ (as we know it today) was not an eighteenth-century concept, or at least that race was not a concept that affects eighteenth-century music. Two important philosophical ideas converged in the eighteenth century, however, that contributed to the societal structures of systemic racism in the modern world: the philosophy of scientific empiricism and the politics of liberalism (the basis of modern democracy). Normally, we discuss these as two separate developments. By understanding these as a dynamic system of ‘origin myths and shadow histories’ we can reveal how science, philosophy and music work together to create racial hierarchies that we are still trying to defeat today. The ‘origin myths’ narrative emphasizes scientific processes, rationalism and Enlightenment as foundational to revolutionary movements that brought about modern equality, freedom and self-governance. This ‘origin myth’ sweeps under the rug a corresponding ‘shadow history’, one that largely ignores how these concepts were explicitly tied together with doctrines of racial hierarchy.

The core tenets found in philosophical discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – by scholars including Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, Gianvincenzo Gravina and Giambattista Vico – created an empirical science based on images, observation, nature and truth. These concepts in turn supported an emerging political ideology (by the likes of John Locke, David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) supposing that these same definitions of nature, truth, reason, self and experience were intrinsically connected to European rights to possess and enjoy civility, freedom, property, governance, progress and exchange – which therefore merited and justified possession and dispossession of others who did not demonstrate the same ‘nature’. Although the first group of authors did not address race as an essentialized characteristic, the second group of authors engineered their societal principles within a racialized framework (see Theresa Richardson, ‘John Locke and the Myth of Race in America: Demythologizing the Paradoxes of the Enlightenment as Visited in the Present’, *Philosophical Studies in Education* 42 (2011), 101–112; see especially 104 and 111). Via this historical conjunction, the development of scientific principles of observation allowed for Enlightenment philosophies to assert that race-based observations were not only rational, but scientific. In the same way that activists in the USA and around the world are toppling and removing statues of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century profiteers from the slave trade, and renaming buildings such as the former David Hume Tower at the University of Edinburgh, it is also time for musicology to revisit how the same doctrines that allowed the slave trade to exist also influenced the representational frameworks found in baroque opera – not to topple or erase them, but to ensure that we understand how they functioned and how they continue to affect us today.

Opera in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created a perfect fictionalized mirror that engaged the belief of contemporary audiences through imagistic forms of verisimilitude (as I discuss in my recent book *Dreaming with Open Eyes: Opera, Aesthetics, and Perception in Arcadian Rome* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019)). By blending the approaches that I developed in that book, based on Gianvincenzo Gravina’s theories of the ‘image of truth’, with principles from eighteenth-century liberalism and modern identity-discourse studies, it is possible to identify several productive parallels. I argue that the combination of language, imagery (actual or metaphorical) and music cements the identity of subjected peoples in the audience’s imagination, now placing them into the position of representative objectivity and creating an image-idea (‘image of truth’) that is immediately recognizable and memorable.

This objective positioning in the imagination consolidates the audience’s collective identity as members of the narrative culture (Gravina’s ‘commonly held belief’, Locke’s ‘association of ideas’). In other words, as the audience views and listens to the accumulating meanings that arrive in the mind simultaneously via multiple media, every member of the audience – regardless of their own socio-economic status or political orientation – gets to see themselves as akin to the storyteller. They get to absorb, recreate and be a part of the dominant discourse. This is the fantasy (*fantasia*) that enables the gratifying sublimity (*sublime*) that arises from verisimilitude (*verosimile*) in Gravina’s philosophy. We do not see those representations that go against our own



subject positioning – and social conditioning – in the world as ‘false’ (*falso*). This would lead to the negative reaction that Gravina describes as a ‘bitterness in the senses’, when the audience does not believe in the representation. In order to believe in the verisimilitude of operatic spectacle, we must also believe in the world order portrayed on the stage. Understanding opera from this perspective gives us the capability of reading it as a social map representing race, identity, culture and society.

For the same reasons that origin myths and shadow histories are embedded in historical representation and in our disciplinary constructs, we must also consider how they shape our modern academic lives and interpersonal spaces. Origin myths have constructed our ideologies about who we believe should be the musicologists of the future – or the students of the present. If we want to have a fully inclusive academic system – and one that is also not racist – it is not enough just to bring more diverse people in, through the recruitment of students and academics, without fundamentally changing the system. Our diversity initiatives have essentially opened the gates a tiny crack, but we have done very little to improve the experiences of Black people and other underrepresented minorities once they squeeze through that tiny opening.

It is high time to stop pretending that simply ‘including’ materials *about* other cultures is enough. Although globalism is a strategy to increase cultural diversity and inclusiveness of people and musics in the classroom, it is not a solution to racism. In the USA, schools of music promote recent increases in diversity among the student population, but a closer look reveals that these initiatives mostly benefit international students (who may also be underrepresented/underprivileged minorities either at home or abroad, but not necessarily so), while African-American, Latin American and Indigenous American populations remain relatively static. Depending on the dynamics of identity and marginalization at readers’ home institutions, global recruitment may be an effective strategy for increasing racial or ethnic diversity. Having greater diversity in the classroom is a positive development that improves collaboration and exchange of ideas; to support students of diverse backgrounds, we must enhance our efforts at anti-racism. Origin myths – whether fictional, historical, disciplinary or personal – can impede the academic progress of minority students.

Why? Because origin myths impose a deep sense of ‘not belonging’ to our students who learned different musical systems before arriving in our classrooms – or even to those who learned Western art music, like I did, but are presumed to be ‘different’ for whatever reason. Let me give you some concrete examples. As a person who had by any account an outstanding training in Western art music, I am tired of people being seemingly surprised that I exist in this field. Despite being trained to be here since the age of six; despite having received high-level training in piano, cello, organ, voice, music theory and counterpoint (at Westminster Choir College, at Trinity Church in Princeton (New Jersey), at Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, and through private instruction, all before going to university); despite training at one of the most prestigious and competitive undergraduate liberal-arts colleges in the United States (where I graduated with honours in Latin and in music); despite being able variously to speak or read Italian, French, German, and Spanish in addition to Latin; and despite going on to finish my doctorate at Yale University in almost record time – there are those who still ask me, ‘How did you get interested in this field?’, ‘Did you feel forced to study Italian opera?’, and even ‘Are you a graduate student?’ Academics are meant to nurture and inspire promising young Black students, so enquiries about whether I am a student are possibly meant to ‘encourage’ or ‘welcome’ me, but somehow it is not conceivable that I would be a professor or a colleague. Why is the question never, ‘Do you teach here?’. The idea of a Black professor must make some people uncomfortable.

Mostly these questions come from people I am meeting for the first time – but the second one came from someone who has known me long enough to know better. And to make it worse, when I tell people that I have these experiences, the most frequent response is, ‘Maybe you should wear a suit to conferences’. This response is what tells me that my experiences differ from others. I was wearing a suit when all these things happened; I always wear a suit to conferences. It doesn’t matter. I was once wearing a suit when someone mistook me for the student of my friend and colleague – who was, incidentally, wearing jeans and a sweater, but somehow was the ‘professor’ in this person’s imagination. My point is not that new colleagues whom I meet at conferences or in other academic venues should magically know my academic and musical background, or my professional status in the field, but that these questions betray an illogical thought process founded



on origin myths, allowing people to assume that somehow my training or position is different from theirs because of my visible identity. When I meet new colleagues, I assume we are equals.

These huge leaps of intellectual gymnastics make no sense to me. If you are here, and are interested in this field, why are you surprised that I am here, and interested in the same field? These questions represent the problems with diversity, equity and inclusion that many people seemingly still don't understand. The systems that prevent Black people from being visibly present as a group in this field – or force them to be overly visible as individual people – are just as illogical as these illogical questions. Society at large is so acculturated to its own origin myths about race that, to some people, upholding systemic racism seemingly makes more sense than diversity. We must simultaneously teach origin myths and shadow histories; together, they give us a way forward.

To whom does Western art music, or 'classical music', belong? Whose native language is it? Western art music is exactly my native language, by design. Because that is the training that it takes to do what I do – yet somehow, there are people who think I must have an exotic story that differs from theirs. This is where my personal origin story crosses over with the elitism of Western art music, often under the guise of being a 'universal' language. When people assume that I came into the field by an alternative route, or by some kind of surprise epiphany that must have suddenly struck me at the last minute, they also erase my personal origin story and the amount of talent, training, focus, intellect and motivation that all those years involved. And money. Lots of money. More money than I can count and comprehend. And almost none of it mine.

This is where my story gets interesting. What most people don't realize – because I grew up in a wealthy town and had access to some of the best music teachers money can buy from the time I was a small child, and also because I had opportunities to live, travel and study throughout Europe – is that what makes me interesting is not my race, but the fact that I had zero money. People paid for my education. People I didn't know, and still don't know. And they didn't ask anything of me except to use that money for my own education, benefit and pleasure – and, as it turns out now, to be able to educate others and have a whole career and support my family. (And I worked a lot to help support myself, from the time I was about twelve.)

But no one who offered that money assumed, guessed or made any stipulation about my identity – or required or enquired whether I would become a professional musician. I wonder what the nameless people who offered that money would say, hearing the stories of my experiences in this field? If I were one of my own donors, I think I would be proud, and glad to have been able to make a difference. The reality is that the same origin myths that define our field – the same elitism that makes it so impossible for anyone who wants to, to enter – represent the same system that allowed me to be here. And that's the catch. Someone – likely very many someones – had to believe that Western art music *was* for everyone, in order for so many scholarships to be available to me. I know very few people in this field who came from the same economic background as me. (I will add that unless you were on welfare, received food stamps or lived in subsidized housing – or unless your mother only had \$21 in her pocket, but accidentally put the \$20 note instead of the \$1 note in the collection plate at church, and was then distressed about how she was going to buy a whole week's worth of groceries to last until payday – you weren't actually poor. It is funny now, but it was not funny then.) My ability to be a classically trained professional musician was an accident of where I grew up, and has nothing to do with me as a person. I often think of the many people just like me who could never even get started in this field because they didn't have access to the training – and the money – required.

The very ordinariness of my training, combined with the extraordinariness of its availability to me, mean that I *am* unusual here – but not for the reasons people think. And that is also by design: by design of the system. The system of origin myths and shadow histories may tell you – and me – that I don't belong, contrary to actual evidence. When I go to certain conferences, I see few if any people who *look* like me, despite the historical ordinariness of African-American excellence in Western art music. Part of this is probably because it is so exhausting to take this route. It is easier to be in a space where people believe that you exist, assume you have the skills and knowledge to do the work, and where they don't make illogical presumptions about your background or your student or professional status based on your appearance (whether it is age, race, gender, ability or the way you are dressed).



It is time to shift our collective thinking, and to create a system that supports racial equality and social justice in music – in baroque opera, in eighteenth-century scholarship, and in musicology and performance at large. Enough is enough.

AYANA O. SMITH
aosmith@indiana.edu