

Adjusting our Sails: Pursuing Opportunity for Latinx Futures in Music

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I would be lying if I said that as a young person, I willingly contributed to the Delano grape boycott and strike of the mid-1960s. I did not. In the civil rights-oriented household in which I grew up, I did not have a vote. One day, my parents informed me that we were no longer going to buy or eat green grapes out of support for César Chávez and the farmworkers movement. The U.S.-American singer, Joan Baez, talks about little victories and big defeats. Throughout my youth, I regarded our family's support of the farm-workers' strike, as a big defeat for my taste buds. From my vantage point as a ten-year-old, the support of what at the time, was referred to as the Chicano movement, meant table grape deprivation, rather than a fight for equity and opportunity, fair housing, livable wages, and safe working conditions for brown people. My father, a local civil rights leader, took his leads from the non-violent philosophy espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr., the Latin American Catholic priests at the forefront of liberation theology at the time, and César Chávez. All of these influences were to be found in alliances between Filipino and Mexican American farm workers during the [Delano strike and boycott](#), 1965-1970.

This month and co-incident with the second half of Hispanic Heritage Month, we go old school.[i] In shining the spotlight on the status of Latinx students in music, I take inspiration from a theme championed years ago by former CMS President, C. Tayloe Harding, Jr.. In 2005, as a member of the Board of Directors, I found the common topic that emerged during his presidency, "Education in Music is Every Musician's Responsibility," to be one of the most inspiring and actionable premises I had heard to date. As part of CMS's goal to become an anti-racist music society, we examine the status of Latinx students and faculty in music departments. When combined with the notion that every musician has a role to play in sharing knowledge about music and expanding the opportunity for music study, what emerges is a remix from which all concerned might benefit.

The projected demographics of the U.S. are no secret, even as discussion frequently elicits underlying racial anxiety. [William H. Fry](#), in an essay issued by the Brookings Institution, states that by 2045, the U.S. will be "minority white" with 49.7% of the population, and that the largest minority group will be Hispanic/Latino at 24.6% of the population. By comparison, Fry projects that at that point, African Americans will comprise 13.1% and Asians, 7.9% of the population respectively (with 3.8% of the total, identifying as multiracial). Fry goes on to explain that the "tipping points" for different age cohorts are different. As indicated in the above referenced essay, Figure 3 shows that the year 2027 is when white people become minorities (in terms of population) in the age 18-29 category.

In this column, I address current demographics of departments and schools of music. Even bypassing issues of social justice and ethics, it behooves us to consider how music in higher education will respond not only to the projected enrollment cliff, which as many believe, has been only accelerated by the pandemic, but to the demographics of the college attending population in the latter part of this decade. (Attendees of our upcoming CMS annual conference may wish to ask Nathan Grawe, labor economist, about the implications of demographic trends for higher education enrollments, given his highly acclaimed *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, 2018).

Music programs at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) can be rightfully proud of possible higher enrollments in music, as well as degrees offering concentrations in Latin American Music studies. For other departments and schools, outreach to and retention of Latinx students poses a challenge. Indeed, Marcela Cuellar, now assistant professor at UC/Davis, suggests that in regard to Latina/o student experiences and outcomes in higher education, the status of the institution, whether HSI, emerging HSI, or non-HSI, matters.[ii] Regardless of institutional status, we can all strive to make our classes, studios, and ensembles more welcoming for Latinx students. In reaching out in discussion with Latinx students, some colleagues might be unsure about the term to use: Is it Hispanic (a census category, generally held to relate to Spanish speaking cultures), Latino (which de-emphasizes Spanish heritage as opposed to indigenous and African heritages), or Latinx (a new term that is inclusive of the gender spectrum and used primarily in English-dominant contexts)? In a June 2020 essay that

appeared in *The Nation*, the author, [Jack Herrera](#), joins activist scholars and musicians in suggesting that Spanish speaking ability is not integral to one's identification as Latino/a/x. Scholars have also addressed in compelling terms, racism and colorism within Hispanic and Latinx communities, with often, AfroLatinx and other dark-skinned people being disadvantaged or relegated to a type of second-class status. In an editorial that appears in *Insider*, [Canda Lopez](#) shares her frank assessment of anti-Blackness in Latinx communities and popular culture. If we add to this, the often underreported instances of [police killings of unarmed Latinos](#), then we can understand some of the frustration of Latinx activists who feel that extra-judicial violence in their communities is often overshadowed by attention to the same in Black communities.[iii] All of these issues come to the fore as we consider the everyday experiences of Latinx students (regardless of race) in music, support co-curricular activities, and advise student organizations.

I will begin with a higher level view of Latinx access on our campuses and then narrow the focus to music. In a recent 40- page study, a scholar associated with the Education Trust ([#EndCollegeSegregation](#)) addresses the underrepresentation of Black and Latino students in 101 of the most selective public colleges and universities in the U.S. The author, Andrew Howard Nichols, studies college access rates, illuminating how they have changed since 2000.[iv] In particular, the author was interested in how the enrollments of Black and Latino students compared with the make-up of these groups in the general population. In an ironic twist, the title of his study, "Segregation Forever," conjures the memorable phrase from the speech that [George Wallace](#) gave on the occasion of his inaugural gubernatorial address in 1963. Over half of the 101 institutions included in the study earned D's and F's for access in regard to both Black and Latino students.

Examining Nichols' report further, we read that on page 16, for example, the author states, "only three institutions (i.e., the University of Louisville, the University of Maine, and the University of New Mexico) earned an A or B for both Black and Latino student access." My point is not that you should rush to examine the charts on pages 18 and 30 to see how your institution measures up. Rather, it is imperative that we face our collective institutional challenge head on, if any of us are to be able to speak to future generations when they ask: "What did you do to ensure equity in music education writ large for all, when you had the chance?" A suggested next step for CMS members, would be to compare the campus wide "grade" provided, with the demographics of one's home institution's music department or school. I believe that this is where, in many instances, we will find discrepancies.

Now, I turn to address music specifically. Data showing the numbers of Latinx students enrolled in college and university music programs are culled from the 2019-20 HEADs (Higher Education Arts Data Services) report. I requested Chart 61 – "Music Students by Degree level and Ethnic Characteristics." I offer a mere snapshot, given that the data is collected from only the 606 institutions that are NASM-accredited.[v]

Chart 61 reveals 101,463 matriculated students at the 606 NASM accredited institutions that submitted the data. Programs range from the associate degree through the doctorate and include also, undergraduate and graduate non-degree programs (certificates and diplomas). The chart shows that 7,246 Hispanic male students (or 7.1%) and 5,108 Hispanic female students (5.0%) are included in the total number of music students. As might be anticipated, the largest cohort is comprised of students seeking the B.M. degree (4,543 Hispanic males and 3,360 Hispanic females, or 7.5% and 5.5% respectively, of the total number of music majors at reporting institutions). As we consider the academic pipeline for the music professoriate, chart 61 reveals a total of 193 Hispanic male students pursuing the DMA or performance degree (4.0%) and 102 Hispanic female students pursuing the same (2.1%). Chart 61 reveals also, 24 Ph.D. seeking Hispanic male students (3.2%) and 15 Ph.D. seeking Hispanic female students (2.0%). (For editorial comment, see [RBG](#) discuss "women in music.")[vi]

I leave it to CMS members to consider the percentages cited above in light of a) CMS' goal to expand music opportunities for all students, particularly at the collegiate level, and b) the demographic changes that the U.S. will undergo over the course of the next decade. Illuminating also, however, is the fact that the only degree category in which the number of Hispanic students of either sex exceeds

10% is that of the associate degree. The percentage of Hispanic male students seeking the associate degree in music is 12%, whereas for females, it is 8.2%. The percentage of Hispanic male students seeking the associate liberal arts degree is 15.6%, whereas, for female students, the share is 6%. At every educational level, regardless of rank, the number of male Hispanic students outpaces Hispanic female students.

There is still another way in which the HEADS data on student enrollments are partial. In this regard, Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, associate professor of musicology/ethnomusicology at the University of New Mexico, addresses college access for undocumented students. She writes: “The demand to disclose migration status is, probably, one of the strongest obstacles for undocumented students who might otherwise enroll (regardless of nationality), or apply for assistantships. Another factor that comes into play are admissions requirements such as the GRE and TOEFL. The latter continue to present barriers for many international students (Latin American students included).”

Chart 27, “Demographic Survey of Doctoral Students who Graduated in 2018-19” provides data from the 64 institutions reporting.[vii] Of the 1,097 students total, 39 were Hispanic men and 11 were Hispanic women. The chart enumerates all music areas, from the musicologies and worship studies, to opera, instrumental studies and music education. It occurs to me that 39+11 = 50, enough to make even the audience of a small recital hall seem sparse. Perhaps a sunnier outlook is provided by Chart 28 which shows the demographic breakdown of doctoral students enrolled but who, in 2018-19, had not yet graduated. Of the 4,628 doctoral students in the 66 NASM accredited institutions reporting, there were 189 Hispanic males and 98 Hispanic females represented. Again, men outnumbered women by almost 100%. (Join me in channelling disappointment over gender parity denied, in a positive direction - the Tumbao Band's remix of Bill Withers', classic r&b hit from 1971.– [“Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone”](#) (salsa version)[viii]

Chart 60 provides a distillation of 2019-20 “Music Faculty by Rank and Ethnic Characteristics” from the 603 institutions reporting, with a total of 10,378 faculty, including all ranks. I will address precarity in employment shortly, but here are the percentages for the ranks of assistant professor through professor. Chart 60, for 2019-20, reveals 83 Hispanic men at the rank of Assistant Professor and 25 Hispanic women. There were 94 male Associate Professors and 30 female Associate Professors. Lastly, the chart shows 84 Hispanic male Professors and 28 Hispanic women Professors. The aggregated number of Hispanic men and women faculty at the ranks of Instructor, Lecturer, Unranked, and Visiting Faculty are as follows: 70 Hispanic men and 25 Hispanic women. I acknowledge that between data provided by chart 60 (faculty) and that provided by chart 27 (doctoral students), there could be overlap and that distinctions are not entirely clear. Again, however, we find 344 tenure-track Hispanic faculty at NASM accredited institutions in the U.S – enough to attend, in a medium size hall, a concert of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel, conducting.

As revealing as these data are, I find them still lacking; for all of the talk about intersectionality, these statistics don't actually provide enough information so that we can address under-representation in music with nuance. I shared my frustration about the limitations of the HEADS reports and their inability to provide a more laser-like focus on the complex of race and identity, with Michael Birenbaum Quintero, ethnomusicologist and Chair of the Musicology and Ethnomusicology Department at Boston University.[ix] He wrote back:

...The way Latinx people are counted is very complicated. Since we can be of any race, on the census and in government documents, Hispanic is an add-on. You check off your race and then check off “Hispanic.” So you can check Black and then Hispanic, or White then Hispanic or (often) Other and then Hispanic. That's why you sometimes hear statisticians talking about “non-Hispanic Whites” and the like.

It also means that it doesn't do much for actually counting diversity in the way we are looking at it in the university. This is in part because of class (an issue that I wish people looked at more carefully for all races) but also because a scholar from Latin America, well-educated in their country's best private schools, doesn't necessarily bring the same perspective on race and

ethnicity as the US-born child of a working-class immigrant. But they both count as “Hispanic” in the numbers game, which means that universities do not necessarily press very hard to make that important distinction...”

A prominent scholar of Latin American music shared with me, privately, her amplification of Birenbaum-Quintero’s point:

“This is, in my opinion, a very important point. ... “Hispanic” is not a race, an ethnicity, or anything else. I am white, of Italian descent, speak Portuguese, but I share a lot in terms of culture and education (humanistic) with what is understood here as “Hispanic.” I am not Hispanic, but I am from Latin America. Brazil has the largest number of Japanese descendent people outside Japan in the world – they share more cultural experiences with the U.S. label “Hispanic” than with anyone in Asia. Not to mention that for the Native Americans in countries like Mexico, many Central American countries and south to the Andean region (Inca country), the term “Hispanic” does not include them at all.”

Birenbaum-Quintero’s observations bring forth the significance of class background and for me, recall also, the phenomenon of “privilege,” a lens that lends nuance to the discussion of heterogeneous Latinx experience. If I have learned one thing in the course of writing this column, is that we would do well not to conceive of Latinx/Hispanic as a single homogenizing category.

Over the decades, a long line of musicians and scholars have advocated for our schools of music to become more inclusive of Latinx students. The critical interventions in scholarship and performance practice by Latinx scholars and others has propelled Latin American music studies forward, exposing students to a vast number of music cultures and familiarizing them with repertoire encompassing a wide range of musical styles and aesthetic values, from early modern to experimental music and performance art. This trend is amplified by Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, who explains: “In an effort to address the centuries of discrimination and invisibility of Blacks throughout Latin America, during the last decade, scholars have placed Blackness at the center of attention in studies of diverse music traditions.”[x]

Many change-makers are among CMS’s membership. Earlier this summer, I asked Teryl Dobbs, CMS Board Member for Music Education, to host a webinar on music education’s response to the pandemic. Dobbs responded with A National Conversation on Music Education, a panel of pre-eminent music educators, school district administrators, pre-service teachers, and recently minted Ph.Ds in music education for a discussion of both pandemics, coronavirus and systemic racism. The panel addressed nuances that a reading of HEADS reports alone, cannot provide. Topics included: “What does the confluence of the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement mean for music ed? What processes and practices need to change in music ed at the higher education level and why? How do we create sustained conversations and advocate for change for the long haul? What ideas do you have for music education moving forward? How might the CMS assist in that forward motion?[xi]

Panelists devoted attention, also, to curriculum reform. In the passage below, Associate Professor Amanda Soto, School of Music at Texas State University, responds to a question about levels of freedom, restrictions, and support she has experienced at her institution in the process of adding a Mariachi track as a parallel offering to instrumental/choral emphases in the degree:

“...Texas has a large Latino population and we have a vibrant Latin music studies area that John Lopez has been building for over twenty years (and now there are master’s degrees in Latin music performance). Faculty have seen how well our students have done...and we had thought we had gotten through a mariachi concentration... It’s frustrating that it hasn’t been passed since last year when we worked hard on it. Even with the number of [jr. high and high] schools that have full-time mariachi teachers and vibrant mariachi programs, it was still a struggle to get the concentration through and so now, one can be band/choir/orchestra (meaning choral or instrumental) and now there is the mariachi track to go along with that... This is significant in terms of who can get into the program and who decides. In the past, a mariachi student could get in but they had to go through their private lesson studio, and their audition was in classical music

and the faculty decided whether they were going to get into the School of Music or not. And so those were some of the barriers and the gatekeepers. With this proposal, this changes; the studio teachers are mariachi artists and so I'm very grateful for that." (National Conversation on Music Education webinar, 7/24/20)

The task of securing the futures of Latinx students – and faculty – in music, is not new; nor, can or should the venture be relegated to the discipline of music education alone. This is why the theme that emerged under Tayloe Harding's presidential term is significant. All barometers suggest that for music in higher education, providing access and opportunity is an all-minds-on deck enterprise.

But I get it. The deck is stacked with inopportunity fueled by increasing student debt borne disproportionately, by those who are Black and Latinx; the devaluation of the music that students play and listen to in their home environments; the underrepresentation of Latinx faculty, and a curriculum that can be described as Euroamericentric.[xii] Persons of conscience are rightfully outraged at attempts of the current U.S. president to demean and demonize Mexicans and persons of Mexican descent. Irrespective of nationality, "Mexican" is deployed as a signifier for illegality and for living while brown. Any of these factors could prompt one to lose sleep, but have I gone too far? The spirits of those who traverse the borderlands of music repertoires, music histories, ensembles, private lessons, and curricular reform take flight to say "Hell, no." Yet, in an attempt to pursue corrective action, we might think twice before lobbying for more "diversity initiatives," which, like the fancy night creams advertised on tv, "are in no hurry to make anything happen." [xiii]

In an article that appears in *Latinx Talk*, Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel, the Marta S. Weeks Chair in Latin American Studies at the University of Miami, addresses the weakness of the "diversity" paradigm: "Diversity and inclusion only allows for the assimilation of difference into the norm of U.S. American whiteness, and that is not enough... It is not enough to replace a white-centric knowledge with ethnic-, gender-, or class-centric knowledges. It is time to consider ways of transforming knowledges instead of adding more variables to a never changing disciplinary system." [xiv] An elaboration of the limits of the "add and stir" approach is found in an earlier observation of Patricia Sheehan Campbell, former CMS President, and one of the co-authors of *Redefining Music Studies in an Age of Change: Creativity, Diversity, and Integration* (Routledge 2017). Sheehan Campbell writes:

"The identification of new areas to be added to the existing model, however, is neither new to change conversations, nor is it-in-itself - adequate to the kind of change needed. What must complement this approach is the identification of new premises that help guide individuals, institutions, and the field at large toward new ways of apprehending this broader spectrum as an integrative, self-organizing whole."

Along my journey of thinking through issues related to curriculum reform and change, I have benefitted enormously from the insights of the book's co-authors (Edward E. Sarath, David E. Myers, and Patricia Sheehan Campbell). Like many faculty and administrators, I used the CMS Taskforce Report on the Undergraduate Music Major as a launching pad for our all-faculty engagement of curricular reform.

In closing, I highlight three organizations that are working to foster what I will call a "diversity that matters" in music, a goal that includes the direct engagement of Black and Latinx students in various stages of educational attainment. First, is the Sphinx Organization, dedicated to "transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts." The Sphinx Organization has a wide reach, from pre-college through the professional ranks. CMS Executive Director Bill Peltó and I met with Afa Dworkin, Sphinx President and Artistic Director, last year, about ways the Society might work with Sphinx more closely in the future. Second, is *Project Spectrum*, a graduate student led coalition that has sounded a clarion call for the elimination of racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, settler-colonialism, and other forms of discrimination and injustice. Their upcoming and free conference is [Diversifying Music Academia](#) (DMA) and so you might wish to register as soon as possible. Third, is the 2021 *Creating More Diverse Music Faculty* seminar, to be held during the summer, hosted by Dean, Judy A. Bundra and the Cleveland Institute of Music. Both Project Spectrum

and the CIM gathering, have received funding from the [Sphinx Venture Fund](#), which seeks to address diversity, equity, and inclusion through the [increased participation](#) of Blacks and Latinos in classical music.

As we celebrate the last two weeks of Hispanic Heritage Month, I recall that October 12 is also referred to, by many, as Indigenous People's Day. While history records that Columbus, like other navigators of the time, became lost at sea before indigenous people discovered him, we – meaning conductors, composers, musicologists, band directors, jazz saxophonists, music therapists, vocalists, opera directors, and so on – are not. We are not lost. Even so, we might do well to heed the words of William Arthur Ward, writer of inspirational prose, who wrote: *“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.”*^[xv] As part of CMS' goal of becoming an anti-racist, more inclusive and consequential music Society, let us adjust our sails, so that Latinx students and faculty are purposefully supported by our departments, schools, conservatories, and colleges of music.

ENDNOTES

I wish to thank Cynthia Gonzales, Brenda Romero, and Ana Alonso-Minutti, for valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this column; thanks also to Michael Birenbaum Quintero and Amanda Soto for allowing me to reference their observations.

[i] Hispanic Heritage Month is a U.S. observance, spanning September 15-October 15.

[ii] Cuellar, Marcela. “Latina/o Student Success in Higher Education: Models of Empowerment at Hispanic Serving-Institutions (HSIs), Emerging HSIs, and Non-HSIs,” Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 2012.

[iii] Contreras, Russell. “Activists: Police Killings of Latinos Go Unnoticed, Underscoring Racial History.” *Albuquerque Journal*, August 23rd, 2020. Accessed September 25, 2020. Contreras reports findings of a study that appeared in the *Washington Post*, stating that between 2015 and April 2020, Black Americans were killed by police at the highest rate in the U.S., at 31 per million residents. Latinos were killed by police at the second-highest rate, 23 per million residents. Both, Contreras adds, are disproportionate rates when matched against percentages of the population.

[iv] Nichols, Andrew Howard. “Segregation Forever: The Continued Underrepresentation of Black and Latino at the Most Selective Public Colleges and Universities.” <https://edtrust.org/resource/segregation-forever/>. The Education Trust. July 21, 2020. Accessed on September 25, 2020. [v] My appreciation to Nora Hamme of the National Office for Arts Accreditation, in Reston, Virginia, for facilitating my access to the HEADS reports, September 25, 2020.

[vi] “Ruth Bader Ginsburg on Women in Music.” The Kennedy Center. September 23, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLz9f53enKs>. Youtube clip accessed on September 25, 2020. The Supreme Court Justice is joined by the American novelist, Donna Leon for an interview with the Grammy-award winning mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato. The event, A Motion for Peace was held at the Kennedy Center, and originally filmed live, on November 10, 2019.

[vii] I wish to express appreciation to the music theorist and pedagogue, Cynthia I. Gonzales, Regents' Teacher with the Texas State University System. Her presentation on music graduate programs at the inaugural conference of Project Spectrum in 2018 inspired me to cast a wider net for the discussion of the demographics included in this column.

[viii] Tumbao Band - Ain't No Sunshine (Salsa Version) uploaded by Johnie Lopez, Jr., March 14, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPa_s55HZd0. Tumbao Band is a 7-member Latin band from Raleigh, NC. (youtube accessed on September 25, 2020).

[ix] My thanks to Michael Birenbaum Quintero, author of *Rites, Rights, and Rhythms: A Genealogy of Musical Meaning in Colombia's Black Pacific*. (Oxford University Press, 2018) for the exchange.

[x] Private communication, September 25, 27, 2020. Alonso-Minutti is Co-editor, *Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America* (OUP, 2018)

[xi] Moderated by Teryl Dobbs (CMS National Board Member for Music Education, Professor and Chair, Music Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison), the panel discussed current issues in music education with focus on the pandemic and anti-racism initiatives. Panelists included Janet Barrett (Marilyn Pflederer Zimmerman Endowed Chair in Music Education, University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign), Christian Bonner (2020 graduate in Music Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Music Educator), Constance McKoy (Marion Stedman Covington Distinguished Professor, Music Education, University of North Carolina-Greensboro), Amanda Soto (Associate Professor of Music Education, Texas State University), Tony White (Coordinator, Music and Entertainment Education - Los Angeles Unified School District-Beyond the Bell Branch), and JaQuan Wiley (Assistant Director of Bands, Asheville High School, North Carolina). The webinar was 1 hr. 15 minutes; I recommend it highly. A National Conversation on Music Education: At the Crossroads of Real Change? https://www.music.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3138:july-24-2020-a-national-conversation-on-music-education-in-higher-ed-at-the-crossroads-of-real-change&catid=231&Itemid=4342

[xii] I invoke the term “Eurocentric” after Steve Loza, in “Challenges to the Eurocentric Ethnomusicological Canon: Alternatives for Graduate Readings, Theory, and Method,” *Ethnomusicology*, Spring/Summer, 2006, Vol. 50., No. 2.

[xiii] NEUTROGENA® Rapid Wrinkle Repair® with Nicole Kidman - New Zealand. Uploaded by Neutrogena Australia and NZ, March 8, 2017. Accessed via youtube September 25, 2020.

[xiv] Martinez-San Miguel, Yolanda. “The Underrepresentation of Latinx Faculty and the Future of Higher Education,” in *Latinx Talk*, September 19, 2018. (accessed, September 25, 2020).

[xv] William Arthur Ward quotes. <https://www.wow4u.com/william-arthur-ward/>. Accessed on September 25, 2020.