

November, 2021

Gratitude

CMS' 64th National Conference in Upstate New York was bookended by a Thanksgiving Welcome by the Seneca people that acknowledged - through song, poetry, and dance - America's past with systemic genocide and a biographical account of present day lived experiences with racism - as told through music, film, and narration - by world-renowned pianist, Awadagin Pratt.

Music expressing unspeakable truths.

In a keynote delivery, *xwélmexw* artist and Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson (who holds the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts at Queen's University, Ontario), unpacked the complexities of structural colonialism and offered a path towards reconciliation (or "creative conciliation"). The presentation toggled with ease between the voice of a seasoned scholar and the dance of a spoken word poet.

Pauline Oliveros suggested that the goal of her "Sonic Meditations" was "expanded consciousness" and "healing." So it makes good sense - as the College Music Society imagines a more equitable future and sets a course, envisions relevant change and leads, promotes creativity and transdisciplinary engagement and offers a platform - that a performance of Oliveros' "We Could" would prove central to a conference that was as much about hope and healing as it was about academic exchange.

Led by [Committee on Cultural Inclusion](#) chair Leila Ramagopal Pertl, the meditation challenged the audience to reflect on our past and make reparations, acknowledge the struggles we face today and offer comfort:

We Could be kinder

We Could be more generous

We Could forgive

The meditation followed Melissa Ngan's keynote address, "Cultivating Creative Music Communities in a Digital World." The newly minted President and CEO of the American Composers Orchestra spoke about "the indispensable role that technology can play in fostering a more connected and creative world." In the words of CMS past president Tayloe Harding, the Founder of the Fifth House Ensemble "has been a unique leader and empathetic musician for many years, but her recent work and engagement throughout the spectrum of our profession is actually extraordinary. She has so many compelling and authentic things to say and to show us all now, as her experience has begun to catch-up with her skills, intellect, and passions—the results of this are amazing and are distinguishing her as a major figure in understanding and acting on the potential for positive influence of music on societies."

The final keynote—an amateur podcast cum concert-length, multi-media performance—emerged from newfound time amidst the COVID-19 shutdown and a sense of outrage in the wake of the public murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and nearly 200 more Black and brown people. Infusing original still and moving pictures by filmmaker Alrick Brown, music performed by Awadagin Pratt and an all-Black ensemble of Eastman student and faculty musicians, and a Pratt-authored and delivered narration, "Awadagin Pratt: Black in America" captured the complexities of America's original sin by chronicling the life of Awadagin Pratt from his time as a music student at the Peabody Conservatory through his ascent to international acclaim through graphic accounts of police stops for Driving While Black. Brian Pertl, dean of the Lawrence Conservatory of Music said about the performance, "This is a performance that everyone needs to hear, see, and especially feel. The power of Awadagin Pratt's message and the depth of his artistry create an urgent call to action that speaks directly to one's soul."

Perhaps, however, the value of gathering as a community was best captured during the informal and quieter moments of the conference: like when Mr. Pratt asked that the audience not applaud at the end of the performance so that we might hold our emotions in silence as we left the hall. Or within the exchange of stories and insights about navigating academic life over a shared meal, as affinity group members extended their support for one another. And during the new student luncheon that brought together future leaders from North Dakota to North Carolina and beyond to think about the important voice they have in shaping the future of music in higher education. And through the discussion pods, led by co-chairs Eileen Hayes and Teryl Dobbs and facilitated by Jeff Magee, Michael Stepniak, Eric Hung, Brian Chin, Amanda Soto, Leila Pertl, and Jason Geary, that called us into our responsibilities of becoming agents for positive change.

Being together was about the exchange of academic discourse. It, too, was about holding each other up amidst the weariness of the past 20-months, the past 400-years and finding solidarity in knowing that music and music professionals have an important voice in shaping a more equitable world. We saw this embedded within the inspiring panel discussions, research presentations, workshops, and poster sessions, with programming that included: "Supporting First Generation Students in the Applied Studios," "Voice Masculinization and Voice Feminization: Vocalise for Trans and Gender Expansive Singers," and "Challenging Oppression Musically: Activist Music Education."

Music is often cited as a universal language. If this is true, then we should lift our voices to address the challenges of our day. No movement has ever been won without an anthem. Let our anthem be one of hope, inclusivity, justice, and civility.

Christopher Small coined the term "musicking" as a means for expanding the ways in which we see and celebrate the often-invisible contributions required to bring an event like this to fruition. Here are some of the folks who did not take centerstage, but who were instrumental in bringing our conference to life.

Tracy Cowden (Chair) and the expertly populated Program Committee comprised of Eric Hung, Alisha Lola Jones, Tabitha Easley, and Shawn Okpebholo.

Presidents come and go, but the anchoring contributions of the CMS Executive Staff - Peter Park, Beth Mast, Shannon Devlin, Julie Johnson, David Schafer, Candice Davis, and Jennifer Nannenga - are immeasurable.

The Eastman School of Music's generosity of vision, space, and talents set a new standard for future partnerships. Our deepest gratitude to Jamal Rossi, Rachel Roberts, and their team of onstage musicians and front of house professionals, lighting crews and sound engineers, those who ushered us into your historical halls and those who cared for these beautiful spaces after we left.

Meaningful change demands visionary leadership. I am pleased to announce CMS's newly elected Board Members, who will begin their service on January 1, 2022. They are:

Bonnie Sneed, Treasurer
Alisha Nypaver, Board Member at Large
Suzanne Hall, Board Member for Music Education
Courtney Blankenship, Board Member for Music Industry Studies
Sarah Chan, Board Member for Performance
Aaron Flagg, Board Member for Jazz/Commercial Music, and
Michael Stepniak, President-Elect.

Thank you to those who were able to join us in Rochester. The College Music Society will hold its [65th National Conference](#) in Long Beach, California, September 22–24, 2022. Submission Deadline for the [Calls for Participation](#) remain open until 12 Noon Mountain Time on Tuesday, November 30, 2021. I hope to see you there.

And as always, thanks for joining the conversation.

Mark Rabideau

President, The College Music Society

Associate Dean for Faculty & Student Affairs, College of Arts & Media, University of Colorado Denver