

Music, Race and Human Rights in North America since 1948

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Submitted by Jessica Gienow-Hecht, j.gienow@fu-berlin.de

Chair: TBA

Sounds of Rights: The Declaration of Human Rights Concerts since 1949

Jessica Gienow-Hecht (Freie University Berlin), confirmed

Identifying Classical Music's Racial Inequity: An Afro-American Perspective

Brandon Brown (Berlin), confirmed

This interdisciplinary panel seeks to offer a critical reflection of the interplay of music and human rights in North America since World War Two. To celebrate the UN ratification of the *Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), in 1949, U.S. composer Aaron Copland published "Preamble for a Solemn Occasion" (<https://www.aaroncopland.com/works/preamble-for-a-solemn-occasion/>), a short yet solemn instrumental piece combined with narrative excerpts from the UDHR that draws on ideas of both pain and hope in a world seeking justice. Since then, hundreds of musicians, from Leonard Bernstein to Queen Latifah, from Yehudi Menuhin to Bruce Springsteen, from have cited music's potential to lobby for justice, freedom and human rights. At the same time, musical productions and musicians across all genres, from classical compositions to pop, experienced human rights violations, bans, incarceration, and torture the world over. American musical activists and human rights organizations, composers, concert halls, and conservatories, have all played a particularly important role in this scenario yet to be uncovered and analyzed.

Moving the focus from political actors and activists to cultural representation, the panel seeks to examine the notion of 'human rights' in the musical arena. Possible topics include human rights festival and galas, UN and US efforts to contribute to the "soundscape" of human rights, as well as efforts on the parts of musical artists to protest against human rights violations by way of composition, concerting, and outright political activism. "Human Rights," have always been consistently formulated and reformulated in the form of political and cultural practices and its meanings evolved on a par with historical processes such as (de)colonization, globalization, and transnational activism. The panel seeks contributions showing the extent to which musical actors developed their own set of visions of 'human rights,' in word, song, play, and deed.

Diversity statement: The panel as planned features Afro-American activist and renowned conductor Brandon Keith Brown as well as female historian Jessica Gienow-Hecht. We'd be thrilled to welcome a diverse and international group of contributors.

Jessica Gienow-Hecht's examines the U.S. input to the U.N. human rights concerts organized since the first anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, at Carnegie Hall, in 1949. These concerts kicked off with the first anniversary, held in New York's Carnegie Hall and staffed by a melée of American and European celebrities straight out of a *Who's Who* in film, music, and politics: Leonard Bernstein. Eleanor Roosevelt. Laurence Olivier. Yet, as the paper shows, the make-up, sound, and setting changed radically over time, anticipating the popularization of the human rights debate by a decade. How do we make sense of this story in the context of human rights, music and international relations?

Brandon Keith Brown's paper is based on the premise that while the exercise of music is a human right, white supremacy has consistently impeded that right to Western Classical music. He examines the effects of meritocracy, neoliberalism, diversity, discrimination, representational programs, and tokenism on the US-American Western classical music scene, particularly with orchestras. While solutions are offered, he finds that often, they are but a spring board to launch further discussions on Acceptance, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (AEIB) in Western classical music. Brown argues that It is now time to make space for Afro-American musicians, and require reflection from Western classical music's white hegemony.