

Examining Whiteness in the Royal Conservatory of Music History Curricula

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May 1, 2021

## Introduction

In the spring of 2020, organizations around the world were called to reflect on how their company practices perpetuate or dismantle racism. #BlackLivesMatter spurred a global dialogue around white supremacy, equity for people of colour, police brutality, and systemic injustice. For some organizations, research and conversation led to demand for large-scale systemic change, empowering women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized communities. As these conversations unfolded, many organizations released statements declaring their company-wide rejection of racism. Some Canadian music education organizations, like Music for Young Children and Conservatory Canada, shared black squares for #BlackOutTuesday on June 2, 2020, a massive social media movement that called for a media “blackout” to remember those who had been recently killed by police violence. While many organizations participated in this movement, they often did not go beyond this to internally reflect and release statements. The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) released an important and timely statement on June 9, 2020. It reads, in part:

We stand for equality, inclusion and dignity of all people and with those who seek a more just world. We denounce anti-black racism and do not tolerate racial injustice. We also believe that music is a universal language: one that is essential to fostering mutual understanding and connection. As a community of artists, we harness the power of music to advance those principles through inspiration of empathy and equality.<sup>1</sup>

This heartfelt statement is unfortunately one of thousands that, while denouncing racism superficially, does not address the deep-seated racism that drives so many classical music organizations. Further, such statements do not address the pervasive whiteness on which classical music education and industries are built.

Here, whiteness refers to the way that white people and their customs and cultures are upheld as a standard by which all other groups and identities are compared, the prevalence of which allows for the perpetuation of white supremacy. A statement with more meaningful potential for change would identify

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<sup>1</sup> “Statement from the RCM on Anti-Racism | The Royal Conservatory of Music,” June 8, 2020, <https://rcmusic.com/about-us/news/statement-from-the-rcm>.

plans to look inward, examining existing colonial structures within music education. As noted by Margaret E. Walker, an in depth understanding of how coloniality and whiteness are represented in music curricula is necessary before the work of diversifying can begin.<sup>2</sup> While some have rightly called for the diversification of music history curricula, the addition of women and artists of colour does not fundamentally address the white supremacist foundation of Western art music education.

This essay takes a step in responding to Walker's call by considering the role of whiteness in Canadian music curriculum. RCM's music history curriculum is examined as an example, chosen because it is Canada's most prominent in this area. Though this analysis is limited to the RCM alone, it is applicable to Western art music education organizations across Canada. Following a literature review and an introduction of the RCM, their 2016 curriculum titled *Celebrate Theory 9: History* will be examined as a case study. Through a consideration of geography and era, composer identity, and musical influences, the trends and exceptions on which the curricular foundation was built will be examined. Specific musical examples will be analyzed and language from the textbook will be examined for how it portrays pedagogical values. The essay concludes by offering some suggestions of actionable steps that would serve not only the RCM, but many similar organizations. If adopted by the RCM, these steps would help them continue to be a leader within music education, this time towards a more equitable and just curriculum.

## **Literature Review**

In the past several years, a wealth of ground-breaking research has emerged on topics of race, decolonization, and whiteness in classical music.<sup>3</sup> Of this work, that of Philip Ewell is perhaps the most influential. His 2019 presentation on music theory's white racial frame and subsequent 2020 article in

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret E Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 4.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the literature that I cite here addresses coloniality and racism in University music programs. This research is highly relevant for this project because of the structure of the RCM: with its multiple diplomas, courses, and examinations it is structured with many similarities to higher education.

*Music Theory Online* received harsh backlash and triggered widespread conversation about race in music theory. In this article, Ewell calls for “challenging, dismantling, and restructuring some of our music theory institutions” with the end of creating lasting change that disrupts whiteness and enacts anti-racism.<sup>4</sup> Ewell articulates five core and problematic beliefs that emerge from music theory’s white racial frame:

1. The music and music theories of white persons represent the best, and in certain cases the only, framework for music theory.
2. Among these white persons, the music and music theories of whites from German-speaking lands of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries represent the pinnacle of music-theoretical thought.
3. The institutions and structures of music theory have little or nothing to do with race or whiteness, and that to critically examine race and whiteness in music theory would be inappropriate or unfair.
4. The best scholarship in music theory rises to the top of the field in meritocratic fashion, irrespective of the author’s race.
5. The language of “diversity” and “inclusivity” and the actions it effects will rectify racial disparities, and therefore racial injustices, in music theory.<sup>5</sup>

These commonplace beliefs extend beyond the field of music theory; they can be applied to almost any facet of Western classical music. Understanding these five assumptions can lead to the capacity for meaningful change.

Further to Ewell’s examination of the white racial frame, Loren Kajikawa’s exploration of possessive investment in classical music offers a complementary analysis of how white supremacy is upheld in U.S. University schools of music.<sup>6</sup> Kajikawa draws on George Lipsitz’s term “possessive investment” to articulate how white people invest in white systems to maintain their status.<sup>7</sup> When this whiteness is invested in, it is not only a matter of gaining ownership, but it is also a mechanism to

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<sup>4</sup> Philip A. Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mt.26.2.4>.

<sup>5</sup> Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” 2.4.

<sup>6</sup> Loren Kajikawa, “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in U.S. Schools and Departments of Music,” in *Seeing Race Again*. (University of California Press, 2019) 156.

<sup>7</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, Twentieth anniversary edition. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 23.

withhold ownership from others.<sup>8</sup> In schools of music, Kajikawa sees this playing out through the privileging of music by white European and American male composers to the exclusion of everyone else.<sup>9</sup> Even when courses exploring popular music or music from different areas of the world are offered, they are largely considered to be elective, and not integral to the structure of the program.<sup>10</sup> This approach enacts a possessive investment in whiteness.

Foundational to this research is the work of Juliet Hess. In her 2017 article, “Equity and Music Education: Euphemisms, Terminal Naivety, and Whiteness,” Hess examines the importance of using direct language to identify structural racism by drawing on scholars of critical race theory such as Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Ladson Billings (1998), and Vaugeois (2013). Specifically, she focuses on three facets of the theory: the critique of institutional and systemic injustice, the critique of Eurocentrism, and the critique of whiteness and white supremacy as a dominant ideology.<sup>11</sup> Her 2018 paper on whiteness follows the teaching practices of four white women who teach music in public schools in Toronto, Ontario. Hess examines the complexities and difficulties that these educators face and articulates the strategies that they employ in order to have forthright and honest conversations about race and whiteness with their students.<sup>12</sup>

Two recent articles in *The Journal of Music History Pedagogy* lay further groundwork for conversations on whiteness in music pedagogy. Travis Stimeling and Kayla Tokar outline the ways that whiteness has informed music education to the extent that proximity to whiteness has been presented as a

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<sup>8</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Loren Kajikawa, “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music,” 156/157.

<sup>10</sup> Loren Kajikawa, “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music,” 165.

<sup>11</sup> Juliet Hess, “Equity and Music Education: Euphemisms, Terminal Naivety, and Whiteness,” *Action, Criticism, & Theory for Music Education* 16, no. 3 (2017): 17.

<sup>12</sup> Juliet Hess, “Troubling Whiteness: Music Education and the ‘Messiness’ of Equity Work,” *International Journal of Music Education* 36, no. 2 (2018): 128.

goal for people of colour.<sup>13</sup> Specifically, the authors examine how African American music has been pedagogically presented within narratives of resilience, while white educators have neglected to acknowledge the role of white supremacy in creating this need for resilience. The authors ultimately suggest possible pedagogical ways of introducing students to the influence of white supremacy within Western art music history.<sup>14</sup> In the same issue, Margaret E. Walker examines methods of decolonizing music curriculum, ultimately suggesting that the first step must be “to contextualize Western art music’s history and historiography firmly within a larger framework of critically and globally situated histories of music.”<sup>15</sup> She argues that in order to effectively decolonize our curricula, we must cease to examine only surface level issues and instead focus on dismantling the fundamental legacy of colonialism. She calls for educators to inform students on the history of the canon and the way that certain composers are privileged in curriculum design.<sup>16</sup>

Walker also served as co-editor of a recent issue of *Intersections*, a journal out of the Canadian University Music Society. The authors in this issue suggest how small steps can deconstruct systemic structures, focusing on two significant gaps in literature. First, they prioritize the roles of students as leaders in the work of decolonization. Second, they consider practical steps that can be taken rather than focusing on theoretical issues. This issue brings in important Indigenous voices, such as Dylan Robinson, who offers a clear call for substantive change to occur in music departments. The nine actionable steps he outlines are relevant for all music institutions, at and beyond the university level.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Travis D Stimeling and Kayla Tokar, “Narratives of Musical Resilience and the Perpetuation of Whiteness in the Music History Classroom,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 20.

<sup>14</sup> Travis D Stimeling and Kayla Tokar, “Narratives of Musical Resilience and the Perpetuation of Whiteness in the Music History Classroom,” 31.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret E Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 14.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret E Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum,” 15.

<sup>17</sup> Dylan Robinson, “To All Who Should Be Concerned,” *Intersections: Canadian Journal of Music / Intersections: Revue Canadienne de Musique* 39, no. 1 (2019): 138–141, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075347ar>.

## Understanding the RCM

This project's analysis emerges out of this robust body of literature that examines whiteness, race, and decolonization in music curricula. Specifically, it looks at the way these themes are portrayed in the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM). The RCM is a fruitful site for exploration as it is Canada's most prominent classical music curriculum at over 130 years old with millions of students around the world. The curriculum walks children through preliminary levels through to advanced diplomas in music performance, and includes syllabi for a range of instruments, including voice, piano, string instruments, and wind instruments. Music theory and history curricula supplement instrumental instruction by teaching students foundational theoretical concepts and introducing them to classical music repertoire and composers. The RCM was founded in 1886, and originally named the Toronto Conservatory of Music. The method of studies at the institute set the foundation for the pedagogical values that are still maintained today. As historian Ezra Schabas notes: "Technical studies were mandatory, the repertoire — surprisingly similar to repertoire today — was extensive, sight-reading and transposing demands were rigorous, and accompanying ability was expected."<sup>18</sup> Throughout its history, the RCM has maintained a rigorous standard of examination, one that has changed very little as the institution has developed.

My own history with the RCM began as a child when I began lessons using their curriculum. I had nothing but positive experiences with learning music, lessons, and the examinations. I found the rigorous structure to be motivating, and in general I was able to find repertoire that allowed me to express myself musically. I have a vivid memory of driving home from a music store with my mother, eagerly waiting to listen to the grade 6 repertoire CD and begin to decide which pieces I would learn. It was not until part way through my Master of Music in Piano Performance degree that I fully realized that this music education that had served me so well had in fact deprived me of the opportunity to engage the music of women and people of colour, from a variety of musical backgrounds. It is with deep appreciation

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<sup>18</sup> Ezra Schabas, *There's Music in These Walls a History of the Royal Conservatory of Music* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2005), 23.

for the work of the RCM and out of a place of gratitude that I offer these critiques and suggestions for improvement.

While an understanding of the full scope of the influence of whiteness and white supremacist influence in an organization as large as the RCM would require a much larger investigation, this paper presents findings based on one of their curricula, the *Celebrate Theory 9: Music History* (2016). The curriculum examined is required for students who wish to receive their grade 9 diploma and is shared across all instruments, making it a widely accessed curriculum. It is designed to introduce students to major composers within the Western art canon, and to familiarize them with widely recognized works. The study presented here is designed as a case study: while it is not a robust exploration of all of their curricula and syllabi, it offers a glimpse into how whiteness is portrayed and approached in their resourcing.

### **Curriculum Analysis**

The first point of examination for this curriculum relates to the geographical origins and eras that are represented. As Schabas has noted, the repertoire assignments in the earliest days of the RCM are surprisingly similar to the repertoire assigned today.<sup>19</sup> The *Celebrate Theory 9: Music History* curriculum focuses on four units: Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Modern. The assigned composers are divided between these eras, and with the exception of living composers, they are composers who have made notable contributions to the Western art music repertoire. Of the fifteen composers in the curriculum, three are from North America and twelve are from Europe. The three most recent composers are the North Americans, with no living Europeans represented in the book. This placement of composers both geographically and historically makes a strong statement about the history of Western art music: no North American composers were significant before the mid twentieth century, and no European composers were significant after the mid twentieth century. Further to this, however, is the glaring lack of composers from other continents. Not only is the lack of composers from other regions of the world not addressed, their

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<sup>19</sup> Ezra Schabas, *There's Music in These Walls a History of the Royal Conservatory of Music*, 23.

absence implies that their music was not of a high-enough standard to be included. Ewell notes the widespread belief that "... the music and music theories of whites from German-speaking lands of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries represent the pinnacle of music-theoretical thought."<sup>20</sup> While the RCM includes composers from beyond German-speaking lands, they enact this belief by maintaining a geographic exclusivity and only including composers from European and North American countries.

Beyond the origins and eras represented, the other compounding identities of the composers indicate their significance to the curriculum. Of the fifteen composers highlighted, fourteen of them are white and one is a person of colour. In this we see resonance with Ewell's articulation of the common belief that "... music and music theories of white persons represent the best, and in certain cases the only, framework for music theory."<sup>21</sup> The composer of colour, Alexina Louie, is also the only woman represented on the list. Her presence in the collection, then, is carrying an exceptional amount of weight: by making her the only woman and the only person of colour, Louie is given both the honour and the burden of representing various marginalized communities. Whiteness is established as the assumed standard in the way that she is introduced in the curriculum: while none of the other composers have their ethnic origins discussed,<sup>22</sup> the curriculum clearly highlights Louie's "Chinese heritage: daughter of second generation Canadians."<sup>23</sup> The foregrounding of family ethnic origin only for composers of colour indicates that musicians from beyond Euro-America are still viewed as an exception.

Louie's inclusion represents a display of social inclusion that does not represent the organization's values. If the RCM and other similar organizations were committed to prioritizing voices

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<sup>20</sup> Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 2.4.

<sup>21</sup> Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 2.4.

<sup>22</sup> The only partial exception to this is that it is noted that Chopin's father was French and his mother was Polish. This is written, however, to contextualize his parents work and his birthplace, unlike how it is not contextualized for Louie.

<sup>23</sup> Janet Lopinski et al., *Celebrate Theory: Level 9 History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto, ON: RCM Publishing, 2016), 131.

of colour, they would overhaul their curriculum to include the voices of the many profound musicians of colour who have been active throughout music history. The tokenism displayed in the *Celebrate Theory 9: History* textbook is an example of an action intended to deflect criticism about their inclusivity and does very little to elevate the voices of colour that remain silenced. My critique here is in no way intended to diminish Louie's profound influence as a composer; she is a highly influential figure who absolutely belongs in the music history textbooks. However, until more voices of colour are elevated to a similar status and their music is understood on its own merits, white male composers will continue to dominate the discussion. Ewell addresses this tokenism in his call for change, noting the belief that "The language of 'diversity' and 'inclusivity' and the actions it effects will rectify racial disparities, and therefore racial injustices, in music theory."<sup>24</sup> Just as simply speaking about diversity and inclusion does not incite change, nor does including one composer of colour without analyzing the remaining structures that uphold whiteness.

The overwhelming absence of voices of colour from the curriculum is made more prominent when considering the ways that the musical influences of communities of colour are filtered through the compositional techniques of white composers. Leonard Bernstein is praised because he "... forged a musical language that combined the spirit of African-American jazz with the vibrant Latin dance rhythms that were so popular at the time."<sup>25</sup> As Portia Maultsby writes about, white musicians have a long history of appropriating and stealing the music of Black artists.<sup>26</sup> To laud Bernstein for his borrowing of musical influences that are not his own without acknowledging their true source is an irresponsible way of including Black and South American musical influences. Similarly, Igor Stravinsky is noted as having an affinity for the "American jazz idiom." This fact is noted as part of what differentiates the composer's

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<sup>24</sup> Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 2.4.

<sup>25</sup> Lopinski et al., *Celebrate Theory: Level 9 History*, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Portia K. Maultsby, "The Politics of Race Erasure in Defining Black Popular Music Origins," *Issues in African American Music*, 2016, 47.

style. Both Bernstein and Stravinsky's misappropriations of African American musical influence represent the only ways that the genre is acknowledged in the curriculum.

Perhaps the aspect of the *Celebrate Theory 9: History* curriculum that requires the most unpacking is the inclusion of Claude Debussy's "Golliwog's Cakewalk" as recommended listening.<sup>27</sup> The first part of the title, "Golliwog," refers to a toy popularized at the end of the nineteenth century, "which can be traced from American slavery, to blackface minstrelsy, and to the doll, where the image of the happily enslaved black person was translated into a toy product."<sup>28</sup> Toys such as the golliwog further established commodification of Black bodies by White people. Debussy used this toy as inspiration and foundation for his cakewalk. Similar to the history of golliwogs, cakewalks emerged as dances performed on plantations by slaves, which were then adopted as a form of blackface minstrelsy.<sup>29</sup> As evidenced in the histories of both aspects of the title, "Golliwog's Cakewalk" has racist origins that do not respect the experiences or musical legacies of Black individuals. By suggesting this piece as listening for their students, the RCM is indicating that the musical contribution of the piece supersedes its blatant racist origins. The inclusion of the piece indicates carelessness, demonstrating how white educators and composers can use their privilege to harm marginalized groups.

While whiteness may not be directly addressed in this curriculum, its influence is prominent throughout. The homogenous geographic origins, ethnicities, and race of the composers create an unwritten hierarchy of location, which elevates Euro-American voices. The tokenization of Alexina Louie's voice indicates that while some efforts are made to appear inclusive, the majority of the Western art canon should not be reconsidered. The celebration of white composers misappropriating the music of Black cultures indicates that musical elitism is prioritized above the work of anti-racism. Further, the

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<sup>27</sup> Lopinski et al., *Celebrate Theory: Level 9 History*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth de Martelly, "Signification, Objectification, and the Mimetic Uncanny in Claude Debussy's 'Golliwog's Cakewalk,'" *Current Musicology*, 2010, 12.

<sup>29</sup> de Martelly, "Signification, Objectification, and the Mimetic Uncanny in Claude Debussy's 'Golliwog's Cakewalk,'" 19.

optics of a writing team made up of six white people raises questions around whether incorporating Black voices into the curriculum development process was a high priority. These compounding factors indicate how the RCM *Celebrate Theory 9: History* enacts possessive investment in whiteness as Lipsitz sees it.<sup>30</sup> By neglecting to bring in voices of colour and by elevating the already widely recognized white composers, this curriculum, and so many other Canadian curricula, invests in its own whiteness as a means of preventing the development of other groups.

While the arguments presented here about *Celebrate Theory 9: Music History* curriculum cannot equally be applied to all of the RCM's curricula, the overall approach and values presented are similar throughout other curriculums. For example, the *Celebrate Theory 10: Music History* curriculum guides students through the Renaissance to Classical eras, highlighting fifteen white, male composers from Europe. The ARCT music history curriculum highlights 23 composers, all of whom are white and only two of whom are women. It is clear, then, that while the conclusions drawn about *Celebrate Theory 9: History* are specific to that textbook, they represent the larger approach taken by the RCM in the rest of their music history curricula.

### **Next Steps**

As Tamara Levitz and Margaret E. Walker have argued, the work of diversifying cannot begin until whiteness is understood. This analysis of the RCM's *Celebrate Theory 9: History* has indicated some of the ways that whiteness is foregrounded throughout the curriculum, despite being unacknowledged. Ultimately, many scholars are calling for a rewrite of these colonial curricula, and I add my voice in support of theirs. However, until such a rewrite can occur, there are tangible steps that can be taken to promote anti-racism in music history education. While this analysis has focused on the RCM curriculum, the critiques and suggestions forward are relevant and valuable for most Western art music history curricula. As one of the leading music curricula providers in Canada, the RCM has the opportunity

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<sup>30</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

to act as a model for other curriculum to follow, charting a new, more equitable path forward in music education.

Walker calls for the first of these steps to be the contextualization of Western art music within a global understanding of music through location and time.<sup>31</sup> The RCM is one of many institutions that frames the music it teaches as universal, without indicating how narrow a scope the curriculum takes. The only place this is addressed is in the introduction to the book, through stating that the curriculum "... serves as an introduction to the history of Western music."<sup>32</sup> Even this claim, however, is weak as there are hundreds of musical styles and genres that belong to Western music that are not addressed. A statement that acknowledges the global context from which Western art music emerges and that clarifies the scope of the music being examined is necessary in order to appropriately contextualize the curriculum.

Furthermore, a history of the Western art music canon is necessary to inform students of how the composers and repertoire represented were gathered. Various scholars across multiple disciplines have noted the prevalence of white exceptionalism, a process we see clearly at work in the Western art music canonization process. Walker connects this exceptionalism in music to human relationships, stating that "As long as the message that the legacy of Europe and thus Western Art Music remains comparatively 'great' and 'distinctive' is not examined and unpacked from its colonial baggage, its barely concealed message that European people are probably superior to other peoples will continue."<sup>33</sup> Students who are able to grasp the nuances of Western art music history are also able to comprehend the process by which this music was elevated to a superior status. Because many of these students are exposed to a wide range of non-classical music in their daily lives, they understand that Western art music is not the only music worth listening to and they deserve to be informed of why it is the only music they are required to study. Ewell notes the belief that "The best scholarship in music theory rises to the top of the field in

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret E Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," 15.

<sup>32</sup> Lopinski et al., *Celebrate Theory: Level 9 History*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret E Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," 14.

meritocratic fashion, irrespective of the author's race."<sup>34</sup> This same belief holds for the process of canonization: the best compositions rise to the top, unrelated to the author's race. A curricular unit on the process of canonization and the reasons behind the homogenous nature of composers examined would offer students an understanding of the limits of the Western art canon. By examining the harsh and white supremacist processes of canonization, students can begin to understand just how important whiteness has been in the history of the Western art canon.

In his open letter on decolonizing music education, Robinson calls for music institutions to consider how they interact with the communities that surround them. He encourages institutions to invite — and pay — Indigenous people to provide their expertise to students on how music programs should change. Robinson names the importance of listening to Indigenous people as they share the stories of the land that institutions are built on, and of welcoming Indigenous voices to share their music and sonic knowledge. When this happens, it is integral that the voices that are shared are respected and honoured for their contributions.<sup>35</sup> From a pedagogical standpoint, these stories could be integrated throughout the curriculum, and especially highlighted when Canadian work is examined.

Of course, a final step to addressing whiteness in this curriculum is to work at diversifying the canon to include the voices of a diverse group of composers, including people of colour, women, indigenous voices, LGBTQ+ people, disabled artists, and so many more. Within the study of Western art music, composers such as Florence Price, Clara Schumann, and Scott Joplin would add considerably to the curriculum, to name just a few examples. Beyond the study of Western art music, Indigenous artists such as Tanya Tagaq and Sheryl Sewepageham offer robust opportunities for holistic education. The work of scholars such as Leah Claiborne and Olivia Adams provide scholarship and syllabus suggestions for how to include more diverse repertoire. However, until the work of understanding how whiteness and

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<sup>34</sup> Ewell, "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame," 2.4.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, "To All Who Should Be Concerned," 140.

coloniality are present in the curriculum is completed and rectified, these additions will not have the intended lasting impacts.

### **Conclusion**

The Royal Conservatory of Music is a world-renowned music education organization that has had a positive impact on the lives of thousands of students. Their curricula and syllabi are thoughtfully curated with obtainable learning objectives in mind. As with most Western art music curricula, however, the curricula must be reimagined in order to be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. This analysis of their *Celebrate Theory 9: History* curriculum found that while not addressed by name, whiteness and ideals of white superiority were pervasive throughout. The narrow span of locations and eras represented, the tokenization of one woman of colour, and the use of musical influences that appropriate other cultures are examples of how outdated and damaging ideals still influence the curriculum. While this paper has only examined one curriculum as a case study, the approach taken in this curriculum reflects the broader institutional values of the Royal Conservatory of Music, values that are shared by many of their fellow Canadian music education organizations.

The recommendations offered by Walker and Robinson are hopeful suggestions for how to integrate anti-racist practices into the curricular development. Walker notes her own belief that grappling with the colonial origins of this music should not render such music unusable,<sup>36</sup> a sentiment that is similar to Kajikawa's assertion that the work of decolonizing does not mean that Mozart and Beethoven are never performed.<sup>37</sup> As such, this analysis does not indicate that all of the white composers in the music history curriculum should be disregarded. Rather, it indicates that in order to respectfully elevate voices of colour in music education, it is necessary to first understand the process and influence of whiteness. As the damage of colonial thinking that elevates only white voices is undone, the work of bringing in diverse voices can begin. When all voices are respected, honoured, and elevated in music education, students will

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<sup>36</sup> Margaret E Walker, "Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum," 14.

<sup>37</sup> Loren Kajikawa, "The Possessive Investment in Classical Music," 157.

be able to more fully understand the rich musical history from which their music studies emerge, with all of its diversity.

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