

## JEFFREY SYKES, DMA

### Diversity Statement

Classical music was born in a culture and a time that practiced many forms of racism and exclusion, many of which continue today. Rooting out these problems requires long, hard work from all of us. In order to remain a relevant part of contemporary society, classical music must commit to improving in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Classical music performers and educators need to play a part in healing these rifts that leave our society as a whole weakened and vulnerable.

In my work as a performer, teacher, and curator of classical music performances, I choose to make positive contributions to diversity, inclusion, and equity by several means:

- **By performing music by women and composers of color:** I regularly seek out and perform classical music by composers of diverse genders, gender identities, races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Recent and upcoming performances include major works of Fanny Mendelssohn, Ethyl Smyth, Lili Boulanger, Rebecca Clarke, Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, Gabriela Lena Frank, Chen Yi, Undine Smith Moore, William Grant Still, Scott Joplin, Robert Owens, Shawn Okpebholo, Bright Sheng, and Carlos Guastavino.
- **By teaching music by women and composers of color:** I encourage students to look beyond the boundaries of traditional repertoire to discover the riches that lie beyond the horizon of the “canon.” Recent student performance projects I have supervised have included art songs by Black American women; Fanny Mendelssohn’s great piano cycle *Das Jahr*; the piano quintet of Amy Beach; the Suite for violin and piano of William Grant Still; and piano rags by Scott Joplin and Eubie Blake.
- **By programming music by women and composers of color:** Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society, the chamber music festival I founded and co-direct, provides a setting in which I can prominently program music by women and composers of color. This season we have a whole week of concerts devoted to the exploration of Black American ragtime and its influence on the classical “mainstream.”
- **By being encouraging and supportive of all students, whatever their race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender identity, or gender expression:** According to CollegeFactual.com, the student body at California State University-East Bay is in the top 5% for racial/ethnic diversity in the US. From my 14 years of teaching there and at the University of California-Berkeley, I have significant experience working with students from highly diverse backgrounds. I relish the opportunity to learn from perspectives that are different from my own.

I value the contributions of composers, performers, and students of diverse genders, gender identities, ethnicities, and cultures not just because it’s the right thing to do, but also because it is the *artistically interesting* thing to do. This is true not just of our present moment; it has been true for all time, though it has seldom been acknowledged. Art benefits from the cross-pollination of diverse cultures and perspectives. Let us work together to facilitate that cross-pollination in classical music today.