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Music Diversity Policy Proposal

Queensland University Music Society (QUMS)

For discussion at the 2024 QUMS Annual General Meeting.

Overview

Proposers: Guillaume Lemay-Yates (Musical Director), Ella Barthelot (Secretary), Cassady Swinbourne, and Executive Committee

Proposal: To instate a “Music Diversity Policy”, with the wording as follows:

Music Diversity Policy

1. QUMS commits to increasing its repertoire and performance of music by diverse composers. Here, “diverse composers” is taken to mean composers or arrangers who are not white cisgender European (including European American and European Australian) males (i.e., composers who are female, gender-diverse, or BIPOC persons).
2. To achieve the aims of clause 1, QUMS targets performing in its two major Semester performances:
 - a) a minimum of 40% diverse composers based on minutes performed, in a year where QUMS does not perform a large work/s.
 - b) a minimum of 20% diverse composers based on minutes performed, in a year where QUMS performs large work/s.

NB: A “large work” is taken to mean a multi-movement work of magnitude which comprises a significant component of or the entire repertoire for a semester performance; for example, Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor or Mozart’s Requiem in D minor.

3. Each year, QUMS must compile the data of the music performed in its two major Semester performances;
 - a) make those statistics publicly available on the QUMS website by the date of the Annual General Meeting (AGM), showing the percentages of diverse composers performed per year based on minutes performed (from 2019 to present); and
 - b) report this data to the general membership at the AGM, during the President’s Report, or elsewhere as the Executive Committee sees fit.
4. The data described in clause 3 may also be distributed on relevant social media accounts as QUMS sees fit.

5. Other data about the music performed (such as the composer's names and the number of works performed) may also be included in AGM or public reports as QUMS sees fit.
 6. This policy and targets must be reviewed by the general membership at each AGM, and amendments to increase or strengthen targets may be proposed as the members see fit.
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Proposal Objectives

1. To increase the amount of music performed by QUMS by diverse composers/arrangers.
2. To increase the diversity of composers in QUMS' library, in a financially sustainable manner.
3. To increase transparency on the level of diversity in choral music selection within QUMS.
4. To generally promote the performance and knowledge, in Brisbane and Australia, of music by diverse composers.

Background and Rationale

In the Meanjin/Brisbane choral scene and more broadly the classical music scene, there is an overwhelming prevalence of music from the Western canon. This music is almost exclusively composed by deceased white European men and a few deceased white American composers (e.g. Barber, Copland). There is a strong presence of Australian composers in musical programming; however, the focus is still on compositions by white men (e.g. Jarman, Twist) and little consideration is given to music composed by diverse composers. Talented composers and their exciting works are often overlooked in favour of overperformed white male composers such as Mozart and Beethoven. Our definition of diversity is thus very broad by exclusion of the over-represented demographic. Women are therefore included in our diversity definition, regardless of other aspects of privilege. This showcases the dire need for more diversity in classical music. For example, Chineke! Foundation found that 98.8% of repertoire for ABRSM exams across 93 countries were by white composers while only 10.39% of pieces were composed by women¹.

¹ Griffiths, A. (2020) *The ABRSM Syllabus: an analysis of the pieces up to Grade 8 in fifteen orchestral instruments on July 10th 2020*. Found at: <https://www.chineke.org/research> (Date accessed: 2/10/2024)

What has QUMS done up until this point?

Over the past 6 years, there has been an effort by the QUMS musical directors and executive to include more music by composers from underrepresented groups. This effort was first spearheaded in 2019, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, with a concert titled *And She Shall Have Music*, featuring music from women composers and arrangers.

Following the success of this concert, the idea of a concert featuring underrepresented composers of colour, referred to loosely as a "BIPOC composers" concert, was suggested. The concept of this concert was discussed over a number of years, before being put on hold indefinitely. We are conscious of the fact that to do a BIPOC concert properly would require a bigger budget to allow for commissioning, guest conductors etc. Without such financial investment, a BIPOC concert would be tokenistic.

Instead, it was agreed that a general commitment to increasing diversity in the music we perform and that sits in our library would be a better strategy. It is believed that this policy will have a more lasting and long-term impact, and could be managed in a more financially secure way. By adding music to the library gradually, this allows for more sensitivity in the music chosen and performed, and for avoidance of cultural appropriation.

The Executive and Music Director already aspire to program diverse composers in QUMS' concerts. Examples since 2021 include:

Semester 1, 2021 <i>Lost & Found</i>	Semester 1, 2022 <i>Bangers & Mash</i>	Semester 1, 2023 <i>Bona Fide</i>	Semester 1, 2024 <i>Songbirds</i>	Semester 2, 2024 <i>Anthology</i>
Imogen Heap Joni Mitchell Saunder Choi Christian Gante	Sally Whitwell Ruth Elaine Schram Christian Gante Carly Simon Imogen Heap Ysaye Barnwell Lydia Adams	Tiffany Ha Moira Smiley Jennaya Robinson Christian Gante Skip James	Juliana Kay Morgan England-Jones Sally Whitwell Inge Dekker Christian Gante Thelma Plum	Samuel Coleridge-Taylor André van der Merwe Eleanor Daley Fanny Mendelssohn
% of QUMS performance minutes		44%	52%	68%

In the years 2021-2023, Semester 2 performances were large classical works by white male European composers, often performed as part of the Western European Art Music Canon. In these cases, the year's overall "diversity percentage" is more difficult to achieve, hence the suggested sub-clause 2b). This policy does not seek to eliminate those types of works from the QUMS's repertoire but rather to extend repertoire to also

include composers from groups underrepresented in classic music and choral performances.

Considerations, Recommendations and Future

To the knowledge of the Committee, no other choirs around Brisbane have a music diversity policy or a commitment to music diversity; therefore, this policy has been designed specifically for QUMS given our size, financial capabilities, and existing music library collection. It has been designed as a baseline policy, off which future revisions can (and should) be made.

While the percentage thresholds presented in this initial policy (20%, 40%) are small, especially since women composers are counted towards the quota in this initial iteration, the Committee believes that these are achievable goals for QUMS under our circumstances. It is intended that the Policy and the percentage thresholds be revised yearly, with an aim to increase the diversity of composers, both in our library and in our performances.

This policy's intention is to cement, in a tangible demonstration of commitment (through our repertoire), a culture of inclusivity within QUMS. It is intended that the diversity of composers be considered throughout repertoire development, rather than as a retrospective metric or "to fill a quota". In the event that the targets laid out in this policy are not met, this would have to be justified to the general membership at the AGM. Ultimately, this policy aims to ensure QUMS is, and remains, an inclusive and welcoming space for its members, present and future.

Key Terms

- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, People of Colour
- **Diverse composers:** composers or arrangers who are *not* white cisgender European (including European American and European Australian) males. For example, female, gender-diverse, or BIPOC persons.
- **Large work:** a multi-movement work of magnitude which comprises a significant component of or the entire repertoire for a semester performance, for example Hiawatha's Wedding Feast by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor or Mozart's Requiem in D minor.
- **Minutes performed:** the total estimated minutes (rounded to the half minute) of music performed by the choir in semester performances, excluding fundraising performances such as carolling. This includes both instrumental music without singing and singing without accompaniment.
- **Semester performances:** concerts occurring during the University of Queensland semester 1 and semester 2. The policy therefore does not cover other projects such as Mahler's 8th symphony in 2018 or the concert with Brisbane Regional Youth Orchestra (BRYO) in July 2024.