

# Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum<sup>1</sup>

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In the concluding pages of his 1994 monograph, *The Canon and the Curricula: A Study of Musicology and Ethnomusicology Programs in America*, E. Eugene Helm wrote the following:

The essential shape of American musicology as it became more or less established by the [nineteen] fifties and sixties is still intact as the century comes to an end, if university curricula are any indication. ... [T]he creations of dead white males are, for the moment, only being supplemented (enriched, cheapened, reinforced, diluted, broadened, narrowed) rather than being extensively replaced by the products of alternate value systems.<sup>2</sup>

Now, a quarter of a century later, in spite of strong turns in musicological scholarship towards cultural theories, critical frameworks, and diverse repertoires, the Eurocentric canonic curriculum seems still very much entrenched in required music history survey and “appreciation” courses in post-secondary degree programs in both Canada and the United States. To be fair, undergraduate core academic courses in recent decades have often included a mandatory “Music and Society” or “Music and Listening” course that includes music cultures and contexts beyond the expected Western Art Music composers and works. Furthermore, there are many individual professors who have spent sincere time

1. I am immensely grateful for the research opportunities provided for me by Katherine Schofield and Reinhard Strohm as many of the thoughts in this article arose from my experiences as a member of their respective team projects. I am also grateful for funding from the Queen’s University Research Office, Centre for Teaching and Learning, and Faculty Association in addition to helpful comments from my colleagues Colleen Renihan, Robin Attas, and the anonymous reviewers.

2. E. Eugene Helm, *The Canon and the Curricula: A Study of Musicology and Ethnomusicology Programs in America* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1994), 95. Helm’s intention in this volume was to study and report on current university music history study in (North) America rather than to argue for or against the inclusion of “the products of alternate value systems.”

and effort revising their music history courses with attention to representation, diversity, inclusion, and alternate modes of delivery and assessment.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the value system that underlies many of Helm's arguments—that the musical inheritance of Europe is part of “the greatness and distinctiveness of Western civilization”<sup>4</sup>—seems still to underpin most of the choices made in post-secondary music courses, textbooks, and performance requirements.

Helm never mentions colonialism in his mini-history of music and musicology, although he emphasizes that “it has been for centuries part of the very fiber of Western culture to study and absorb the rest of the planet's cultures.”<sup>5</sup> In the current environment of increasing calls to “decolonize” higher education, however, the role of colonialism in the history and historiography of Western art music and its pedagogies is worth serious attention.<sup>6</sup> At the very least, we need to reflect on the role that European colonial power structures and extracted wealth have played in the creation of universities and academic scholarship, and re-examine our pedagogical content and methods, questioning their re-

3. Pedagogies addressing diversity and equity in music history teaching have been presented at the annual Teaching Music History conferences of the American Musicological Society Pedagogy Study Group and can be found in this journal as in, for example, Louis Kaiser Epstein, Taylor Okonek, and Anna Perkins, “Mind the Gap: Inclusive Pedagogies for Diverse Classrooms,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 9, No. 2 (2019): 119–172. <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs>. Earlier publications include, among others, Marcia J Citron, “Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 8 (2004): 47–60; Gavin Douglas, “Some Thoughts on Teaching Music History from an Ethnomusicological Perspective,” in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2010), 27–43; and Ralph P. Locke, “What Chopin (and Mozart and Others) Heard: Folk, Popular, Functional, and Non-Western Music in the Classic/Romantic Survey Course,” in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Navtig (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 25–42.

4. Helm, *Canon*, 28. Helm, it must be clarified, was arguing for the integration of musicology and ethnomusicology, a re-examination of music criticism, and most of all, for a closer connection of musical performance to liberal arts study in undergraduate music curricula. Many of his points are compelling and not as dated as they might seem; nonetheless, he perhaps purposely presents an unashamedly Eurocentric bias.

5. Helm, *Canon*, 28.

6. In Africa, Europe, the United States, and other parts of the Americas, calls to decolonize universities and colleges are largely a result of the #RhodesMustFall movement, which dates from 2015 and focuses on anti-black racism. See, amongst other publications, Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, eds., *Decolonizing the University* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatshemi and Sephamandla Zondi, eds. *Decolonizing the University, Knowledge Systems and Disciplines in Africa* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2016). In Canada, on the other hand, such calls are almost invariably linked to the rights of indigenous peoples and the Calls to Action arising from the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf).

relationships to this larger context.<sup>7</sup> For example, if music history, music theory, music lessons, or music programs are presented without qualifiers, it is normally assumed in North America that they are predominantly the history, theory, lessons, or programs of Western Art Music. University music study still means largely Euro-American “classical” music, as much to us in 2020 as it did to Helm in 1994, and thus university music history means largely the history of European art music. What is worth pondering is not only the assumption that rigorous university music study must be centered around European elite music, but more crucially that this belief is so embedded in our institutions that it is often invisible.

To read that the standard history curriculum of most post-secondary music programs is Eurocentric is surely not a revelation to many readers. Furthermore, in spite of the addition of diverse content in some parts of the curriculum, to point out that learning a Eurocentric canon is still seen as a crucial educational foundation for music majors offers nothing new either. Yet, as conferences dedicated to curricular reflection and reform, such as the Guildhall School’s “Reflective Conservatoire” or the College Music Society’s two “Summits for 21st-Century Music School Design,” submit post-secondary music curricula to analysis and critique, ideas about music history reform often remain comparatively reserved.<sup>8</sup> The most common suggestions for revision include expanding the canon to include marginalized composers or geographical areas, taking a thematic or topical approach instead of a chronological one, or subjecting canonic repertoire to critical analysis through theories of gender or race. While increasing the number of voices and stories in our music history classes or departing from the narrative of eras and works can be understood as types of decanonization, is it accurate to also see these initiatives as characteristic of decolonization? It is surely a great stretch to describe them as steps towards indigenization, an objective that often accompanies calls to decolonize.<sup>9</sup>

7. I use the pronouns “us” and “we” in reference to a fairly homogeneous community of university music professors with the recognition that this will not include all readers (some of whom may appropriately translate my use of “we” to “you people”).

8. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, England, hosts the Reflective Conservatoire Conference every three years “to address key issues in Higher Education within music and drama,” [https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about\\_the\\_school/research/whats\\_on/reflective\\_conservatoire\\_conference/](https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about_the_school/research/whats_on/reflective_conservatoire_conference/), and the College Music Society in the United States has hosted two Summits that combine presentations, workshops, and collaborative curriculum redesign focused on American curricular requirements, <https://www.music.org/events>.

9. The nuanced differences between decolonization and indigenization are fluid and often contested. The Queen’s University Centre for Teaching and Learning, however, offers a useful definition. “If decolonization is the removal or undoing of colonial elements, then Indigenization could be seen as the addition or redoing of Indigenous elements,” <https://www.queensu.ca/ctl/teaching-support/decolonizing-and-indigenizing/what-decolonizationindigenization>

I nevertheless continue to wonder whether decolonizing existing university music history courses is even possible or whether the only way to decolonize is to decenter the Western art music canon so radically as to rewrite music history entirely. I confess to finding this type of deep, structural change immensely attractive on many levels, but I also worry that the resultant disconnect with the core Bachelor of Music courses in Western music theory, musicianship, and performance would create a clash of value systems (to borrow Helm's phrase), potentially irresolvable for first- and second-year undergraduate students. An obvious solution is to advocate that the whole Bachelor of Music be radically rethought, decanonized, decolonized, and perhaps indigenized. Some institutions might well embrace this, but others might very likely react by connecting even more resolutely to their European conservatory-style roots, resulting in an even further siloed and exclusive approach. An increase in the division between "the West and the Rest" is surely not the answer, however one approaches the tangle of questions surrounding decolonization.

But why should North American university music history courses be decolonized, or even decanonized, at all? Perhaps more crucially, for whose benefit should such changes be made? Although the question of decolonizing higher education has in some ways exploded into the Canadian academy's consciousness in recent years due to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigation into Canada's notorious residential schools, universities and colleges in the United States have been generally more concerned with racial and economic disparities facing African Americans. Both contexts are inextricably linked to settler colonial histories, but does attempting to address these types of fundamental inequities in the music history classroom become *de facto* decolonization? Indigenization is even more difficult, and, as Monique Giroux has argued, can easily become a catch-all phrase for over-due improvements to teaching.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as in other academic disciplines, there is still a body of knowledge that remains an expected part of a good university music education. If we do try to decolonize by decentering this knowledge base, might we unintentionally end up preventing current music students from accessing necessary knowledge and skills that we take for granted? Is decolonizing about omitting material, altering delivery methods, changing assessment, or all of the above?<sup>11</sup>

10. Monique Giroux, "If 'Indigenizing' Education Feels This Good, We Aren't Doing it Right," *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/if-indigenizing-education-feels-this-good-we-arent-doing-it-right-87166>, accessed 30 December 2018.

11. In his presentation for a *Think UDL Podcast*, Andrew dell-Antonio linked the recommendations for delivery and assessment of Universal Design for Learning with decolonization issues such as addressing hegemonic norms and silenced voices. <https://thinkudl.org/episodes/decolonizing-the-music-curriculum-with-andrew-dellantonio-at-the-big-xii-teaching-and-learning-conference>.

Can we decolonize and retain what is currently considered valuable? Or must the academy indeed be rebuilt around alternate value systems?

To begin by trying to answer any of these questions is to begin in the middle of the story. Before considering how music history teaching can be decolonized, or whether one should even embark on such an enterprise, one needs first to ask more pointedly what decolonization itself means, and particularly how it can interact with higher education. Decolonization, however, presupposes colonization, and the interaction of Western art music and colonial history is a story that is rarely included in undergraduate education. This is perhaps not surprising, as the familiar historical narrative and its canon of composers and “masterworks” were developed through the mid-nineteenth century and disseminated during its last decades, a period which also saw the apogee (or perhaps more accurately the nadir) of European colonial occupation and empire. Only after firmly placing Western art music history in this historiographic context will it be possible to return productively to questions of why and how to decolonize.

I assert strongly, however, that working towards a decolonized university music history curriculum is a necessary endeavor and should be embraced by North American schools of music. This ought to be the case whether one wants to address the continued inequities that arise from the legacy of plantation slavery or from the ongoing appropriation of indigenous lands and culture. Yet, just as decolonization is a process, many of the ideas presented here are in process and, like decolonization itself, without a clear and knowable end. Nevertheless, it is my hope that the collection of thoughts and data I present here may contribute constructively to the current discussion on decolonization in higher education, and specifically in music programs.

## Decolonization

“Decolonization is not a metaphor,” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang defiantly declare in their influential article that begins the first issue of the journal *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*.<sup>12</sup> The article is a challenging one for anyone of settler background, not in the sense of being theoretically or syntactically dense, but because of the unrelentingly “unsettling” ideas, claims, and counter-claims the authors present in order to “bring attention to how

12. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40, <https://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.

settler colonialism has shaped schooling and educational research in the United States and other settler colonial nation-states.”<sup>13</sup> Central to their argument is the claim highlighted in the article’s title, that decolonization is “a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects” and “not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our schools and societies.”<sup>14</sup> While other scholars, such as Marie Battiste, Shelia Cote-Meek, and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, et al.,<sup>15</sup> approach the history of injustice in the education system, including its hierarchies, exclusions, and unexamined Eurocentric foundations, through a broad critique of ongoing violences they accurately identify as part of coloniality, the legacy of colonialism, Tuck and Yang consistently pull the focus back to settler occupation of stolen Indigenous land.<sup>16</sup>

This tight focus on Indigenous sovereignty is crucial in the context of settler states like the United States and Canada where the transplantation and nationalist adoption of Western art music are part and parcel of settler colonial history. Yet, the difficulty in seeing practical, feasible ways to alter post-secondary teaching in this context sits at the core of the unsettling message in Tuck and Yang’s article. If decolonization is not a metaphor, can adding indigenous or other diverse content, exploring alternate methods of delivery and assessment, or dismantling hierarchies by “flipping the classroom” really assist in decolonizing university teaching?<sup>17</sup>

Although focused on the embedded coloniality of scholarly societies

13. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization,” 2.

14. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization,” 2–3.

15. Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Purich Publishing, 2013); Sheila Cote-Meek, *Colonized Classrooms: Racism, Trauma and Resistance in Post-Secondary Education* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2014); and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Cash Ahenakew, and Dallas Hunt, “Mapping Interpretations of Decolonization in the Context of Higher Education,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, No. 1 (2015): 21–40.

16. The concept of “coloniality” as opposed to “colonialism” is perhaps best set out by Nelson Maldonado-Torres: “Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (“On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): 243). See also Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America,” *Nepantla: A View from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580 and Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

17. An instructional strategy that emerged in the mid-2000s, the flipped classroom decenters the authority of the professor by focusing on problem-solving and discussion with peers rather than receiving knowledge through lectures.

rather than university music teaching, Tamara Levitz, in her 2017 address to the Society for American Music, offers thought-provoking examinations of similar questions.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with a recognition of the desire of many scholars “to confront structures of inequality and white supremacy in the society,” and arguably in the academy more broadly, Levitz proposes ten actions that unrelentingly pull wider concerns about social justice back into the context of American settler colonialism and ongoing coloniality. All are worth deep thought, and many, such as her insistence that we rigorously examine what we mean by “American” music and her declaration that courses including indigenous music as a topic of study must address questions of repatriation or engage directly with Indigenous musicians and scholars, are easy to link to questions of curricular reform. Central, however, is her exposure of the structures of Eurocentrism and white supremacy, which underlie not only our musical scholarly societies, but also the academy itself and thus music programs and pedagogies.<sup>19</sup> To be a champion of diversity, Levitz argues, without critically investigating white and Eurocentric structures, may only serve to reinforce the legacy of settler colonialism.

Yet, the history of European colonialism is a history of world-wide violence, “a massive multinational campaign... that spread over the face of the earth.”<sup>20</sup> We, who teach in institutions that sit on Indigenous lands, cannot “[remain] silent on settler colonialism while talking about colonialisms.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot begin to think about decolonization in (Eurocentric) music programs without considering how European global colonialism shaped what we teach and how we teach it. Marie Battiste uses the metaphor of a keeper or rip current to represent the unseen yet “powerful Eurocentric assumptions of

18. Tamara Levitz, “Decolonizing the Society for American Music,” *The Bulletin of the Society of American Music* XLIII, no. 3 (2017): 1–13. Levitz’s speech also gave rise to a number of carefully worded rebuttals in the subsequent issue of the *Bulletin* XLIV, no.1 (2017): 5–10, which are worth reading for their elucidation of the Society’s history and prior introspection regarding colonialism and whiteness.

19. It should be clarified that identifying white supremacist structures does not mean labeling musicologists or music professors as white supremacists. As Levitz explains, it is crucial “for people to understand the distinction between *judging individuals and personal prejudice*, and *investigating the structural injustices and inequalities of white supremacy*” (Levitz, “Decolonizing,” 9; emphasis in the original).

20. Ali H. Abdi and George Richardson, “Forward” in *Decolonizing Democratic Education: Trans-Disciplinary Dialogues*, eds. Ali H. Abdi and George Richardson (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2008), vii; see also Proma Tagore, ed., *In Our Own Voices: Learning and Teaching Toward Decolonization* (Winnipeg: Larkuma, 2006) and Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

21. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization,” 19. See also Ricardo Roque and Kim A. Wagner, eds., *Engaging Colonial Knowledge: Reading European Archives in World History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) for their emphasis on the heterogeneity of global colonial discourse.

education, its narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy [and] its establishing culturalism or cultural racism as a justification for the status quo.” If, as she argues, “decolonization is a process of unpacking the keeper current,” decolonizing music history must start with a critical and uncensored look at the historiography of music history as a field of study.<sup>22</sup>

### Western Art Music, Modernity and Colonialism

In university core music history classes, it is rare to teach about modernity in the Foucauldian sense of a period reaching from the late 1500s to the end of the twentieth century even though this period encompasses the emergence of tonal harmonic principles that define Western music.<sup>23</sup> Most of us instead teach the expected and canonic narrative of musical eras—Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and so on—teaching modernism (not modernity) as a post-tonal rupture in the language of the Common Practice. But if modernity in music, as in literature and philosophy, had its genesis in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, then the musical works, composers, and stylistic genres we connect to the elaborate artistic and architectural styles known as Baroque, ought also to be placed in the global context of voyages of “discovery,” cartography, emergent trading companies and early colonies.<sup>24</sup> In *Out of Time: Music and the Making of Modernity*, Julian Johnson argues that the advent of printed scores marked not only the entrance of music into the world of print capital, but also facilitated a psychological and ontological shift as music became conceived of spatially rather than experientially. Published music, he asserts, was mapped onto a horizontal and vertical axis and thus found “its longitude and latitude at much the same time as these were developed in navigation.”<sup>25</sup>

Johnson’s assertions regarding such conceptual shifts in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries build on the earlier work of Timothy Taylor, who associates the advent of both tonality and opera with early modernity, discovery, and the beginning of colonialism. Taylor’s larger intention is to problematize and historicize the concept of exoticism in music, but his thoughts about the beginning of Common Practice are worth contemplating. In a nutshell, Taylor “situate[s] tonality in discourses and ideologies of the ‘discovery’

22. Battiste, “Animating,” 107.

23. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2005).

24. Julian Johnson, *Out of Time: Music and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

25. Johnson, *Out of Time*, 118.



of the New World,” connecting the concepts and language of tonal harmony to the concepts and language of travel and exploration (home key, remote chords, arrival points, and so on). The binary of home and away, or in tonal harmony, the binary of tonic and dominant, maps onto the equivalent and arguably more powerful binary of “self” and “other.” Taylor links the rise of opera at the same moment in history to a similar necessity for “representational systems that allowed [Europeans] to manage a world in which they placed themselves at the center and others at various peripheries.”<sup>26</sup>

Taylor’s argument and the examples he offers as proof are difficult to sum up adequately in the body of this article, and I urge both intrigued and skeptical readers to seek further clarification directly from his work. His intention, however, is not to postulate direct cause and effect, but rather, following Foucault, to ask how and why these two arguably revolutionary aspects of Western Art Music both arose when they did.<sup>27</sup> His and Johnson’s insistence that the study of European music should not ignore the effects of colonialism on sixteenth and seventeenth century European cultural construction can also be applied to the entire intellectual legacy of early modernity. In his sweeping history, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*, global historian Peter Frankopan accentuates the effect of “discovery,” trade, and colonization on Europe’s economic culture by asserting:

The Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, the progression towards democracy, civil liberty and human rights, were not the result of an unseen chain linking back to Athens in antiquity or a natural state of affairs in Europe; they were the fruits of political military and economic success in faraway continents.<sup>28</sup>

The links between such “economic success” and the opulence of the Baroque are surely obvious, but I know I am not alone in having taught music and politics in the court of Versailles without any mention of the wealth from North America and the Caribbean that funded Louis XIV’s extravagant use of music and dance.

The problem is, of course, that we have all learned a history that excluded this context. The nineteenth century scholars who wrote the history of Western music we still study did not include the impact of the rise of European

26. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 210.

27. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 27. Cited in Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 5. See also Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 25 and 29.

28. Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 197–8.

nations as conquerors and eventual world powers after 1500 and certainly never considered possible connections between trading companies, slavery, and commercial exploitation on the one hand and Western art music on the other. To borrow Taylor's words: "The fact that things change is, one would think, elementary, yet it is striking just how little historicizing work gets done, as though [music history itself] is a fixed entity without a history."<sup>29</sup> Yet, the field of music history, and by extension musicology, with its narrative of great works, master composers, and evolution of style, is an epistemological framework that began to take form in the first half of the nineteenth century and became both codified and institutionalized in the last three decades of the 1800s.<sup>30</sup> Historical studies entered the very influential Paris Conservatoire in 1871 and the Bachelor of Music examinations at Oxford were revised in 1872 to require "a critical knowledge of some classical scores" and "some knowledge of history of music."<sup>31</sup> As the newly-founded conservatories spread across Europe in the mid-nineteenth century and took root in North America in the 1880s and 1890s, they replicated the Conservatoire's required performance study, large ensemble participation, theory, *solfeggio*, and history.<sup>32</sup> It is crucial to emphasize at this point that undergraduate curricula in most post-secondary music programs in North America today essentially adhere to this same set of core courses. Expansions to include twentieth and twenty-first century repertoire, technological developments, and fields such as music education and ethnomusicology have not altered the foundational structure inherited from nineteenth century institutions.<sup>33</sup>

The study of music history as a legitimate academic field emerged during these decades, which saw what Kevin C. Karnes identifies as "the radical transformations in musical thought that accompanied the institutionalization

29. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 210.

30. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 3; see also Edward Lowinsky, "Musical Genius: Evolution and Origins of a Concept," *Musical Quarterly* 50 (July 1964): 321–40, and "Musical Genius: Evolution and Origins of a Concept, II," *Musical Quarterly* 50 (October 1964): 476–95, and Sophie-Anne Leterrier, "L'archéologie musicale au XIXe siècle: constitution du lien entre musique et histoire," *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 1, No. 14 (2006): 49–69.

31. C. F. Abdy Williams, *A Short Historical Account of the Degrees in Music at Oxford and Cambridge, With a Chronological List of Graduates in that Faculty from the Year 1463*, First Published London: Novello, Ewer and Co., 1893 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41.

32. D. Kern Holoman, "The Paris Conservatoire in the Nineteenth Century," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, ed. Alexander Rehding (<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com>, 2015) and John Kratus, "The Role of Subversion in Changing Music Education" in *Music Education: Navigating the Future*, ed. Clint Randles (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

33. The Royal Conservatory of Music in Canada, founded as the Toronto Conservatory of Music in 1886, and its national examination system also remain remarkably embedded in Canadian university music programs, particularly in entrance audition and performance jury requirements.

of musicology in the second half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>34</sup> In his 1885 article “The Scope, Method and Aim of Musicology,” Guido Adler built on the work of Philipp Spitta, defining the emergent “scientific” field of music study, and separated “historical musicology” (the study of Western art music, composer biographies, and musical works) from “systematic musicology” (including what we now call ethnomusicology, but also pedagogy, acoustics, cognition, and more).<sup>35</sup> Compilation of the *Monuments of Music* and complete works editions began in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first appearance of Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* dates from 1879.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, histories of music containing the standard historical narrative also emerge from this same period. One example worth examining is Emil Naumann’s *Illustrierte Musikgeschichte*, published in German in 1885 and subsequently translated into English as *The History of Music* around 1886.<sup>37</sup> Beginning with the history of “ancient” music, a section that also describes contemporary practices of non-Western cultures, Naumann’s subsequent chapters continually present European musical history as evolutionary and European music as unique. From “Book II: The Development of Music in the Middle Ages”:

And although music was the youngest of the arts, and was now but in its embryo state, the works of the composers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even down to the time of Sebastien Bach, were all the outgrowth of this religious era. Again, the introduction of harmony (polyphony), by which means music could alone become free and emancipate itself from the other arts, was also ow-

34. Kevin C. Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21.

35. The implied hierarchy in this division remains foundational in curricular decisions to this day.

36. *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians (A.D. 1450–1559): by Eminent Writers, English and Foreign, with Illustrations and Woodcuts*, edited by Sir George Grove (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1879–1900).

37. *The History of Music* by Emil Naumann, translated by F. Praeger, edited by the Rev. Sir F. A. Gore Ouseley (London: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1886?). [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL24402360M/The\\_history\\_of\\_music](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL24402360M/The_history_of_music).

Naumann’s work, of course is only part of a larger story about the writing of Eurocentric music history through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Earlier histories of music include the massive five-volume history of music in English by John Hawkins from 1776 and the more contemporary volume in German by Franz Brendel first published in 1852 but revised and expanded in 1875. See Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music, by Sir John Hawkins. In Five Volumes* (London, MDCCLXXVI [1776]). Eighteenth-Century Collections Online <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online>, and Franz Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik in Italien, Deutschland und Frankreich von den Ersten Christlichen Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart Fünfte Neu Durchgesehene und Vermehrte Auflage* (Leipzig: Verlag von Heinrich Matthes, 1875). <https://archive.org/details/geschichtedermus1875bren/page/n10>.

ing to the influence of Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

What is striking when reading *The History of Music* is not solely its documentation of the teleological or evolutionary narrative of Western elite music history, nor its contemporaneity with the establishment of the conservatory curriculum. It is the extent to which its content—composers, works, and stylistic compositional techniques—remain foundational in our current history courses.

Global historical accounts during these same decades paint a much grimmer picture. Jürgen Osterhammel, in *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, marks the shift from eighteenth-century cosmopolitan critiques of European ethnocentrism to the mid-nineteenth century's "simplistic view of the world that divided humankind into an active history-making 'West' and the passive, ahistorical 'rest.'"<sup>39</sup> Increasing prejudice and judicial violence accompanied this intellectual shift. European and Euro-American colonial discourse in the second half of the nineteenth century documents legal interference with and criminalization of sexuality, the culmination of educational and social reforms intending to civilize the "natives" through Eurocentric education and religion, and some of the most overt statements of Western and white superiority and scientific racism. These include, among many other examples, the Indian Penal Code 1862 with its criminalization of homosexuality, the 1869 Indian Act in Canada, which was followed soon after by forced attendance for aboriginal children in Canada's notorious residential schools, and anthropological manuals categorizing skull types, eye shapes and nasal indices to facilitate the identification of a hierarchy of "races." If context is as important as many of us argue in our research, how can we dissociate the creation of the field, the curriculum and the narrative from these larger historical and discursive moments?

The claim that Western art music and its historiography are linked to colonialism and ideas of white/European supremacy may seem immensely harsh to some while simultaneously long overdue to others. Radical critiques of the academy and pointed condemnations of musicology stand in striking contrast

38. Naumann, *History of Music*, 171. The editor, Oxford music professor Gore Ouseley, appends the following footnote to this statement:

"Our author does not appear to take cognisance of the fact that harmony seems to have arisen in the first instance among the northern tribes of Europe, and it was not for several centuries after they had freely adopted it for secular purposes that it was admitted into the music of the Church. For this reason it is open to more than a doubt whether the introduction of harmony can truly be attributed to the influence of Christianity."

39. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, translated by Robert Savage (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 506. See also pp. 66–94.

to both scholarly and pedagogical material that does not engage with issues of power, race, or colonialism at all.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as historians, we cannot refuse to engage at the very least with the context of modernity and the impact that it had on European culture and thought. The relationship between the concepts of “Europe and non-Europe” or “self and other” and the growing belief in European exceptionalism through the long nineteenth century is worth serious thought, and the influence of this belief on post-secondary music study demands careful evaluation. Moreover, the potential impact on the intellectual development of all our students through revealing and critiquing the embedded concept of the superiority of Western art music brings us back to one of the questions that opened this article: Why should we engage in decolonial processes at all?

### Unpacking European Exceptionalism

As I illustrated above, the Common Practice period, which still largely marks what we know, study, and perform as “Classical” music, is framed by early modernity and colonialism on one end (c. 1600) and the institutionalization of a teleological narrative assuming European musical superiority on the other (c. 1900). I think we need to think deeply about this context and invite our students to think deeply about it too. We need to ask seriously if to teach a history of music dating from late nineteenth century Europe without examining its origins is indeed to deliver a covert message of white superiority, however distasteful it may be to consider such a possibility. To return to Helm, when he asserts that ‘the greatness and distinctiveness of Western civilization has stemmed since the Renaissance not from insular perpetuation of local beliefs and customs, ... but from the revived spirit of the Argonauts, the eagerness to sail away from familiar shores across unknown seas in search of the unknown,’ he is not only reinforcing the idea of Western “greatness,” he is also referring to exploration, trade, and ultimately, colonialism.<sup>41</sup> This is not to cast undue blame on Helm; indeed, he addresses some of the same questions that I am asking and his focus on the musicological curriculum in higher education is to

40. See, for example, de Oliveira Andreotti, et al., “Mapping Interpretations;” Sandy Grande, “Refusing the University,” in Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang eds, *Toward What Justice: Describing Diverse Dreams of Justice in Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018); Tamara Levitz, “Decolonizing” and Levitz, “The Musicological Elite,” *Current Musicology* 102 (2018): 9–80, in comparison with the discussion of alternate names for “The Baroque Era” in Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music College Edition*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 194–5.

41. Helm, *Canon*, 28.

be commended as it contrasts with other similar examinations of musicology solely as an academic field.<sup>42</sup> He even, somewhat paradoxically, acknowledges that the dominance of the West has been dependent on extracted resources, stating that “the genius of Western society would be profoundly poorer” without “its exploitation of the non-West.”<sup>43</sup> Yet unexamined statements like these are examples of the “keeper current”—to borrow Battiste’s term above—the narrative of Western exceptionalism that arose from the colonial experience and remains embedded in our discourse.

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. I recognize, of course, that this is surely not something any of us consciously or overtly teaches. Nevertheless, the impact that this covert message potentially has on our students deserves our sincere attention. For white settler students of north and central European descent, the message of exceptionalism can reinforce an unexamined or unconscious sense of cultural superiority and entitlement. For students who are non-white or who do not identify as white, the result can be much more insidious and reproduce other experiences of injustice or trauma.<sup>44</sup> Even when this is not the case, the constant privileging of a Euro-American narrative bundles all alternate musics and cultures into a single, seemingly unimportant or ahistorical “other,” erasing both historical diversity and the ongoing process of cultural exchange. Presenting European art music, its history, theory, and notation, as not only more worthy of study than other musics, but also as unique and inimitable, positions white culture as a pinnacle of human achievement rather than one of many various, equally valuable, and often entangled global artistic practices.

I do not believe, however, that grappling with the colonial origins of the canon and the narrative should lead to a rejection or refusal of Western art music or its performers and audiences. I remain unconvinced that it is the “music itself” that supports coloniality, but believe that it is rather the narrative of evolution and consequent privileging of Western composers, works, and analytical tools that delivers this message of superiority. Yet, reversing the

42. Examples include Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), and David Greer, ed., *Musicology and Sister Disciplines: Past, Present, Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

43. Helm, *Canon*, 29

44. The experiences of non-white students in the music history classroom is very poignantly expressed in David Chavennes and Maria Ryan, “Decolonizing the Music Survey: A Manifesto for Action” (2019). <http://www.dchavennes.com/read1/2018/6/15/rygmnk175vgepbyn29p0zn0imrzs9r>.

message of exceptionalism and presenting Europe as exceptionally greedy, exceptionally violent or exceptionally intolerant cannot be the solution as this still leaves the binary of the West and the Rest intact and allows the continuation of the myth of European uniqueness. It is, in the end, this entrenched idea that European music stands out amongst all other musics in the world, even other elite or “classical” musics, that is enough to argue that unpacking the narrative is crucial for our students, if not also for ourselves.

The first step, therefore, must be to contextualize Western art music’s history and historiography firmly within a larger framework of critically and globally situated histories of music. I am not alone in this interest, happily, and the recent surge of interest in global music history is perhaps laying a foundation for this type of pedagogical change. The American Musicological Society, the International Musicological Society, and the International Council for Traditional Music all have new study groups on global music history, and the Society for Ethnomusicology has a Section for Historical Ethnomusicology. Katherine Schofield’s European Research Council funded “Musical Transitions to European Colonialism in the Eastern Indian Ocean” and Reinhard Strohm’s Balzan research project “Towards a Global History of Music,” two recent international research projects, both brought together large teams of musicologists and ethnomusicologists interested in historical work reaching far beyond Europe.<sup>45</sup> Recent publications include *Studies on a Global History of Music* and *The Music Road* as the first two edited volumes from Strohm’s project, and *Towards a Global Music History*, a monograph by composer and theorist, Mark Hijleh.<sup>46</sup> The colonial encounter looms large in these efforts, which ideally will encourage the type of “post-European historical thinking” about music envisioned by Strohm for the Balzan project.<sup>47</sup> Central to this approach to the history of music is moving beyond what Taylor explains as the “classical music ideology” that privileges the “idea of transcending the time and place in which a work was written.”<sup>48</sup> The history of (Western) music may then be understood as the result of what Hijleh describes as “multivariate” streams “in the midst of an Old World/New World/Global continuum” rather than a series of progressive

45. *Musical Transitions to European Colonialism in the Eastern Indian Ocean*, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/music/research/proj/mutran>; *Towards a Global History of Music: A Research Programme in Musicology—2013–2017*, <https://www.music.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/past-projects/balzan-research-project/>.

46. Reinhard Strohm, ed., *Studies for a Global History of Music: A Balzan Musicology Project* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Reinhard Strohm, ed., *The Music Road: Coherence and Diversity in Music from the Mediterranean to India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Mark Hijleh, *Towards a Global History of Music: Intercultural Convergence, Fusion, and Transformation in the Human Musical Story* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

47. Strohm, *Towards a Global History of Music*.

48. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 4.

stylistic changes marked by canonic works.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, we continue to teach the canonic works and the teleological narrative. As part of my ongoing research on post-secondary music history pedagogy, I am undertaking a survey of “core” or required, history courses in North American undergraduate music programs.<sup>50</sup> Within a current total of over 200 universities and colleges in nine provinces and eight states, the vast majority continue to require two or three courses covering canonical Western art music history. There is variance, of course, as outlined at the beginning of this essay. Some schools include required courses in World Music or Music and Society before moving to the standard history. Others address embedded Eurocentricity by adding in diverse repertoire or requiring courses in alternate cultures or genres while yet other schools have created courses that approach Western music history through socio-cultural themes rather than composers and works. Nevertheless, Helm’s comment that began this essay is still by and large true. Furthermore, if, as I have argued, beginning the process of decolonizing music history means addressing the embedded narrative of European exceptionalism and supremacy, these revisions, although admirable, intelligent, and often courageous, more often address current surface-level issues of diversity rather than tackling the fundamental legacy of colonialism.

### Conclusions?

Given the complexities involved, not only of simply defining what decolonization is or might be, but also of deciding what it should or could look like in post-secondary music programs and most specifically in music history, it is not surprising that one of the solutions put forward has been to dispense with music history altogether.<sup>51</sup> Given the difficulty of finding material that does not reinforce the teleological narrative, or perhaps the seeming impossibility of imagining a non-evolutionary history of Western music, curricula that focus on critical theory and current social themes such as race, gender, and power structures rather than history are an understandable way forward. Yet, as I

49. Hijleh, *Global Music*, 64.

50. My current project “Unravelling Colonial Narratives in Music History Courses” is funded through Queen’s University by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Institutional Grant. My ongoing research into music history pedagogy has been also supported by grants from the Queen’s University Faculty Association and the Queen’s University Centre for Teaching and Learning.

51. A music core curriculum without any music history was one idea that arose during a Roundtable on “Sustainable Curricula” at the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Albuquerque, New Mexico, 15 November, 2018.



argued strongly above, the evolutionary history that arose during the height of European colonialism in the nineteenth century is also deeply embedded in how we teach music theory, aural and analytical skills, and performance. Moreover, as decolonial scholars such as Battiste, de Oliveira Andreotti, and Levitz all assert, post-secondary institutions and the academy more broadly are also products of late colonialism and remain sites of embedded coloniality. Omitting the study of history will not erase colonialism's traces or remove its consequences; rather, it will obscure and thus embed both even further.

So what can we do? Is it possible to teach Western art music history without addressing questions of colonialism and its effect on music? Perhaps, I believe it will become increasingly intellectually and ethically irresponsible to do so. More specifically, can we teach North American (whether framed as "American" or "Canadian" music) or South American music history and avoid addressing colonialism? I argue very strongly that this should never be considered again. Courses on United States or Canadian art music that do not dig into the settler colonial history and current contexts of coloniality will, in fact, contribute to racism through erasure. History and culture in the Americas are shaped by a triad of indigenous-settler-enslaved peoples and music history does not somehow float above this triad.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, to teach music of the Americas and focus only on elite music by composers of European descent cannot avoid reinforcing the colonial narrative of European exceptionalism.

Counteracting this history of European inimitability, which also connects to hegemonic ideas about musical evolution and universalism, is therefore the first, crucial step to moving towards a decolonized history of music. We need to address this idea of Western uniqueness actively and overtly by "ethnicizing" Europe and European music, including art music. We should also place the music of 1500–1700 firmly into the context of early modernity, including "discovery," early settlement, and trade. Whether or not one agrees with Taylor's theory of tonality, what we now teach as Renaissance and Baroque history needs to include the influence of the global exploration, extracted resources, and slavery on music in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I am recommending, in a nutshell, that as far as possible we teach all music history as global, or at least as globally connected. Medieval music history might be a very fertile place to start through expanding beyond the usual emphasis on Paris and the Netherlands to include the music of the Arabic and Andalusian worlds. Additionally, if we drop the teleological account of the evolution of notation and polyphony (which only allows focus on a tiny part of the musical life of Europe at the time), we can begin to disrupt the narrative at its foundation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must include the historiog-

52. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," and Levitz, "Decolonizing," 6.

raphy of the canon and the privileging of masterworks by master composers as part of music history and openly address the narrative (overt or covert) of European/white supremacy that the canon delivers. To claim that although our canonic history of Western art music was created during this period of high Imperialism, it somehow remained untouched by this context is similar to the positivist claim that Western art music itself is untouched by its social and political contexts.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, to omit this historiographic context and thus keep one's students ignorant of the origin of the history they are learning is to be complicit in its narrative. Yet, perhaps like much of what I have asserted here, this idea is not unique. As Robin D. Moore and his team state in one of the essays in the collection *College Music Curricula for a New Century*:

Scholars recognize that all histories generate canons; rather than assume students will understand our selection criteria or that of a given textbook, we would do well to make our selection criteria explicit and transparent. We must teach not only music history but also music historiography across art, popular, and traditional idioms.<sup>54</sup>

Deborah Bradley is even more blunt in her essay on “Decentering the European Music Canon” in the same volume:

The cultural amnesia of whiteness may make it difficult to recognize that our affinities for noncanonical musics emerge from the history of colonial conquest. ... [Furthermore,] our colonial heritage and assumptions about what counts as “good music” reify music schools as cultures of whiteness that nicely “provide space” for the study of other cultures and other musics, without changing any basic operating premises. Changing foundational assumptions represents the greatest challenge facing the curricular reform movement.<sup>55</sup>

Bradley's assertions not only connect musical curricular reform to the more radical calls for change cited above, but also, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, to Helm's observations that began this essay. It is possible that “chal-

53. Teaching historiography and the creation of the canon, who “made it” into the canon and who did not can also lead to a discussion of coloniality through addressing who makes it into undergraduate music programs and who does not.

54. Robin D. Moore with Juan Agudelo, Katie Chapman, Carlos Dávalos, Hannah Durham, Myranda Harris and Creighton Moench, “Progressive Trends in Curricular Change” in *College Music Curricula for a New Century*, ed. Robin D. Moore (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 264. (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017) DOI DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190658397.003.0013.

55. Deborah Bradley “Decentering the European Music Canon” in *College Music Curricula for a New Century*, ed. Robin D. Moore (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 211–12. (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017) DOI 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190658397.003.0011.

lenging foundational assumptions,” like the narrative of great works and European genius, may indeed lead to the replacement of the “creations of dead white males” with the products or more accurately the processes of “alternate value systems” and lead to the type of deep structural change I alluded to in my introductory paragraphs. Nevertheless, I do not insist that replacement is inevitable, or even necessary, for change. Rather, I hope that these first tentative steps towards decolonizing university music history curricula can lead to a more intellectually responsible and rigorous approach to historical study for both our students and ourselves. It is the teleological narrative, the European supremacist narrative, that binds us, rather than the musics we choose, and it is here we must start. We cannot decolonize without knowing about colonialism, and we cannot know about colonialism without engaging vigorously with its history and, for us, its musical history.