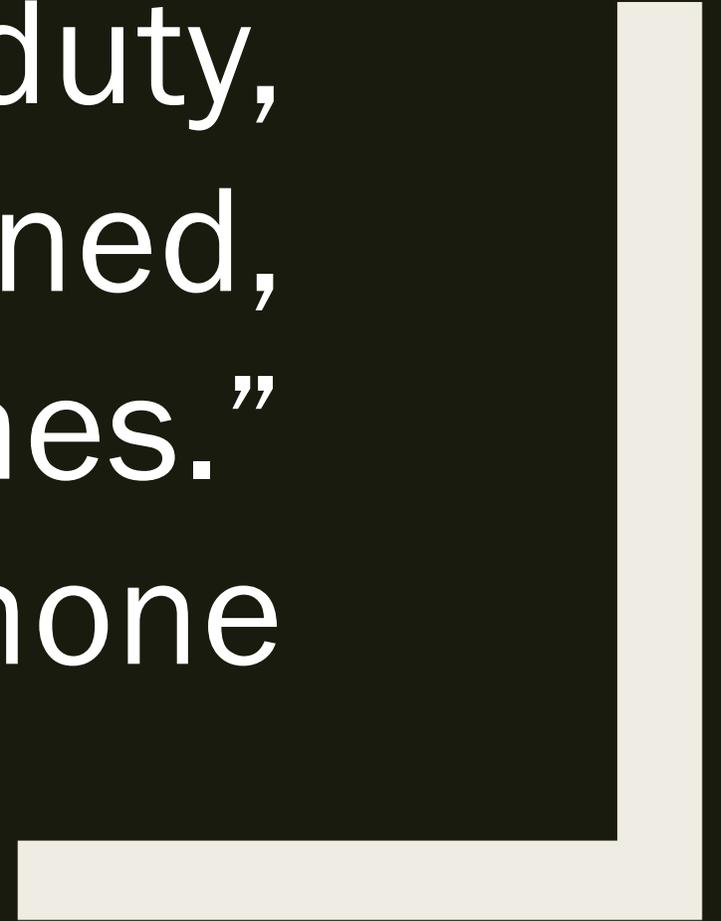


“It’s an artist’s duty,
as far as I’m concerned,
to reflect the times.”

-Nina Simone



THE EMPATHY MACHINE

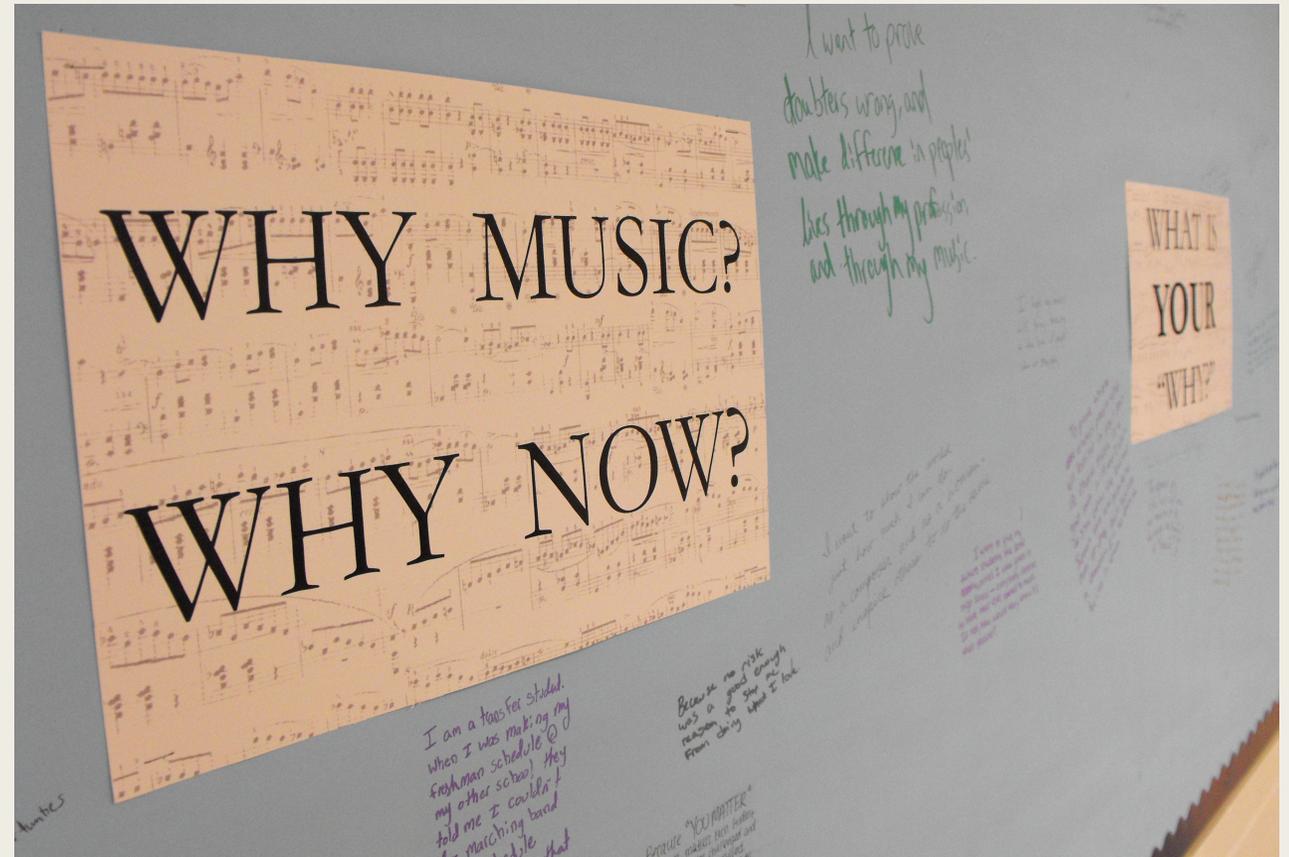
LESSONS FROM A YEAR OF SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS
CONCERT PROGRAMMING

DR. JOSEPH HIGGINS | ROWAN UNIVERSITY

CBDNA 2019

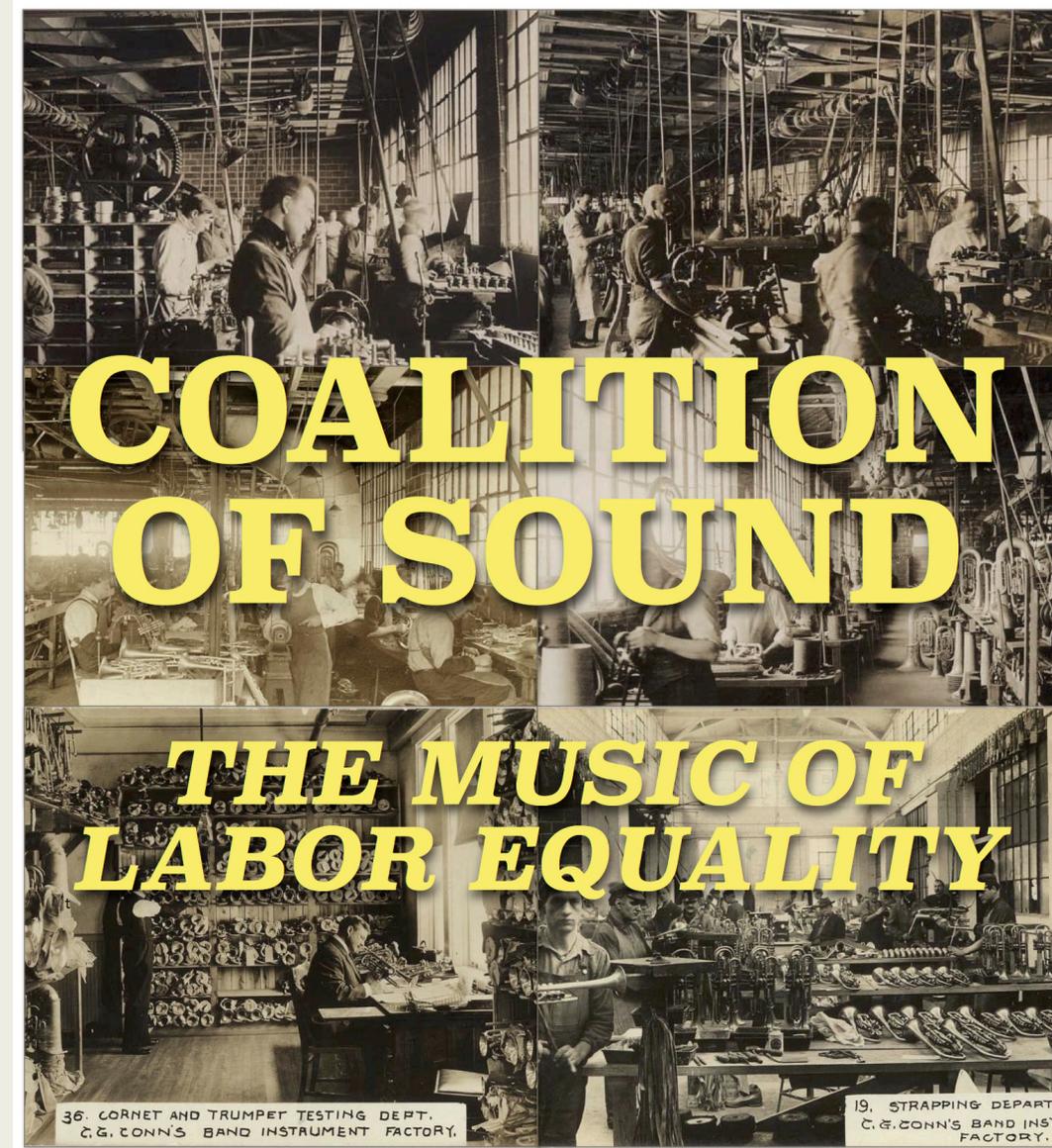
Socially Conscious... Socially Aware... Socially Responsible Programming

- Strong desire to make a difference as an artist (not just as an educator)
- Programming as a reflection of values (not just repertoire selection, but concert design)
- Encourage responsible artist-citizenship
- Cultural competence: for myself, colleagues, students, audience, community



1) ALLOW SPACE FOR MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION (AND UNEXPECTED ARTISTIC OPPORTUNITIES WILL ABOUND)

- Provide a broad avenue for collaborators (colleagues and students) to initiate where they are most comfortable
- Unexpected: “Coalition of Sound” with percussion ensemble
- Take advantage of all related campus entities
 - *Office of Social Justice, Inclusion, and Conflict Resolution*
 - *Women’s Center – Women in the Art Month*
 - *Center of Genocide/Holocaust Studies*
 - *School of Earth & Environment*
- Projects take on a life of their own: “Let Your Voice Be Heard” and student recitals

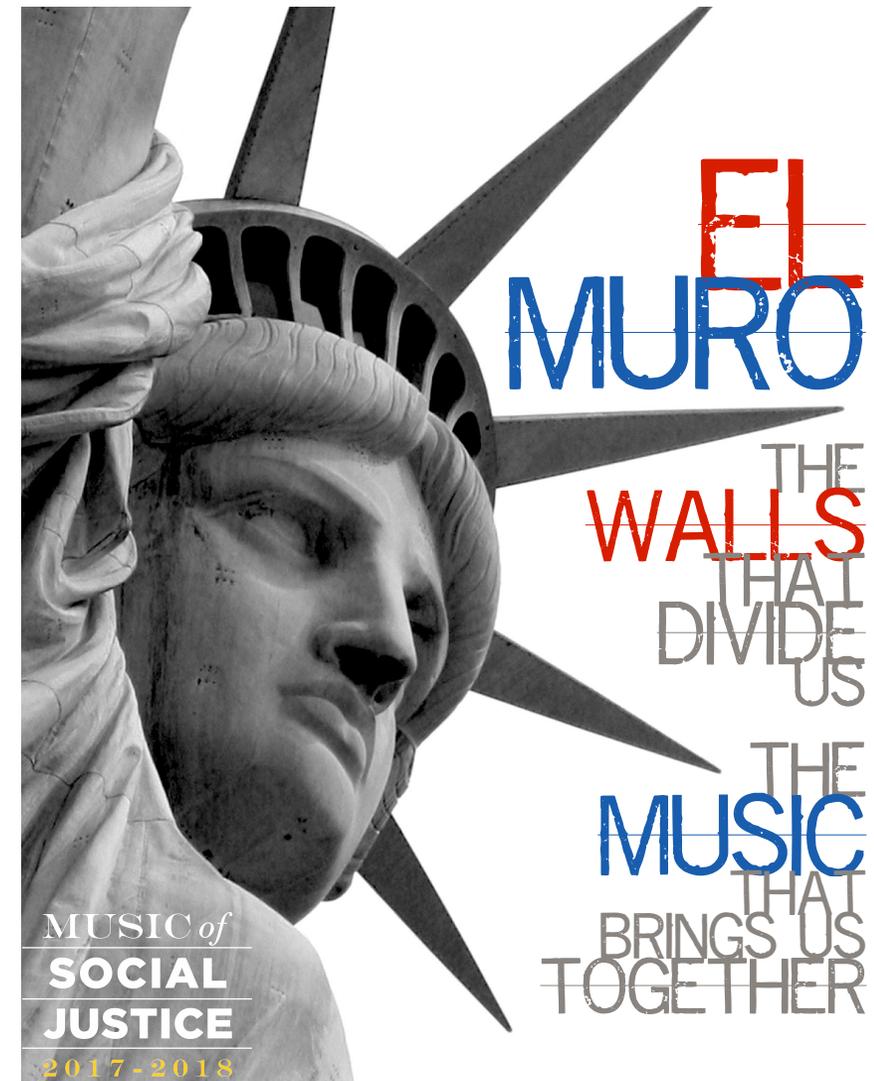


2) CREATIVE CONCERT CURATION IS AN ACT OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION – AND CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

- TRUE: there is valuable immediacy to music written explicitly “about” a social issue:
 - *newer works that express the world around us (familiar and unfamiliar)*
 - *works that transport us to past worlds*
- BUT ALSO:
 - *Powerful connections and carefully considered themes bring new life and relevance to familiar repertoire*
 - *Create powerful contexts for classic literature by embracing a modern perspective*
- From student performer: “We did not perform the piece to honor a composer or because it is standard repertoire, we performed because there was a story relevant to today that needed to be told.”

3) DON'T FEAR THE POLITICS

- In all challenges, there exist opportunities for teaching and learning (AKA “communication”)
- Meet negative responses with a warm invitation to be a part of the conversation
 - *Usually a negative response is an ideological or visceral one, uninformed (but not necessarily uninterested) about what you the real goals are*
- From student performer: “Topics of social justice in the past have often made me uncomfortable. I don’t particularly like when politics get involved in music making, because to me, that is not what music about, and in a liberal-dominated field, opinions and thoughts that are shared often seem extreme and one-sided. However, I [appreciate that we didn’t make] this concert about politics and that the series’ focus was on the people. You have opened my mind to the idea that social justice does not have to be a vicious topic, and I am grateful for that.”
- **CIVIL RIGHTS CONCERTS HAVE VALUE OUTSIDE OF FEBRUARY AND DON'T NEED TO INCLUDE A MOVEMENT FOR ROSA**
- Embrace controversy by making it *about* the controversy
 - *After all, it's a school*



Pfleeger Concert Hall at Rowan University
Dr. Joseph Higgins, conductor
Dr. Rie Suzuki, clarinet
Andrew Rueblinger, trumpet
FREE for Rowan Students & Faculty
www.rowan.tix.com

THE ARTS AT ROWAN

ROWAN UNIVERSITY
WIND
ENSEMBLE

MARCH 5 | 8:00PM

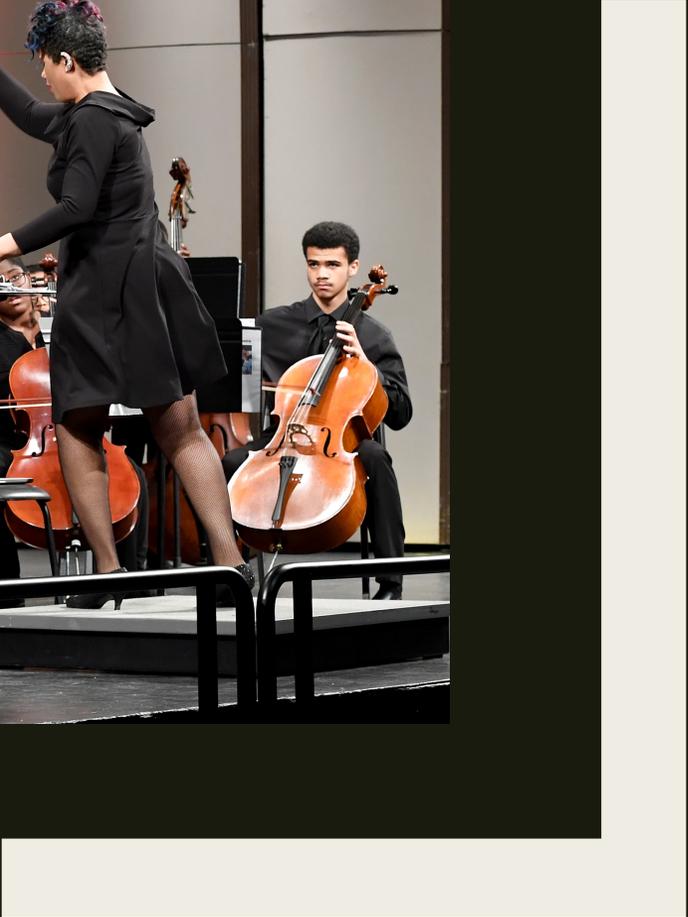
4) WANT TO CREATE CHANGE? BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.

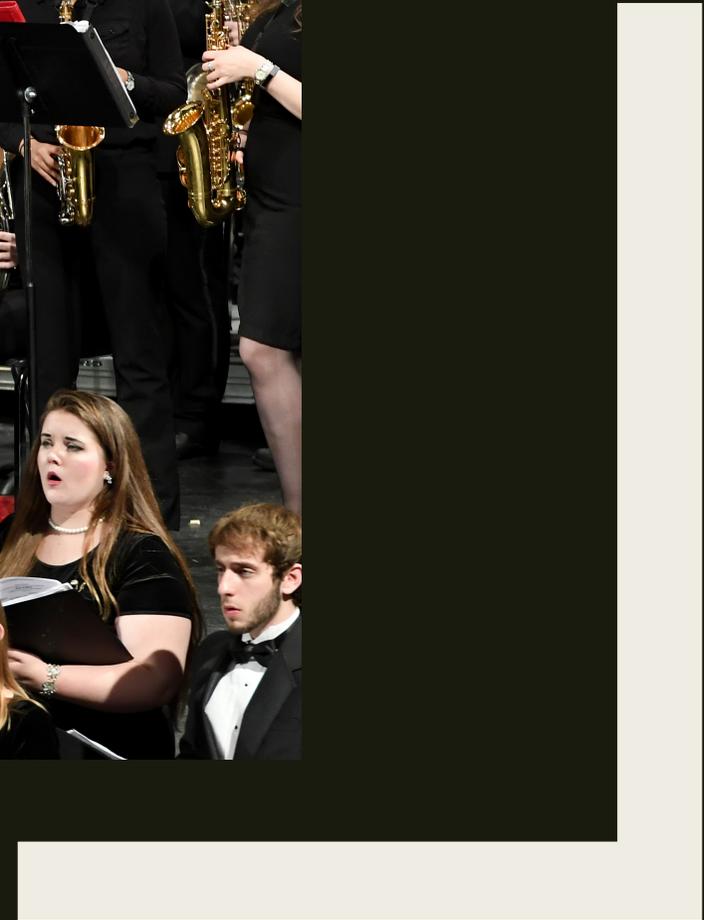
- “Service learning” → Community engagement pedagogies
 - *“Community benefits of student engagement” must be the #1 goal*
 - *Community partners must lead initiatives, must be involved at every step of the process*
- Tangential connections: Symphony for a Broken Orchestra
- Long-term relationship with “Play On, Philly”
 - *Listen more than you speak*











5) LASTING EFFECTS: MY PROGRAMMING WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN

- Even with limited rehearsal time, allow the space for discussions, diverse guests, and experiences that may not explicitly connect with a piece on the program
- Approach every aspect with **artistic intent**
- “Balance the day, not the meal.”
 - *Program the year (or the two-year cycle), not the concert*
 - *When every concert looks and feels the same, it is difficult to do something innovative*
- “So, WHAT’S NEXT?!?!”
 - *No going back!*
 - *SOUND PLANET: role of artists in responding to climate change*



- From student performer: “As a musician onstage, it's really easy to think that every performance you do means something... but it can be hard for an audience to connect strongly, which is where [these concerts] were different... Leaving, I *knew* I had really impacted people in a very positive way.”
- From student performer: “During this concert series there was a moment when I realized that, through music, I am part of something bigger. Sometimes when I get a new piece of music I'm so focused on notes, rhythms, dynamics, and not ‘messing up’ that I forget to take time to think about what the music means to me - and how it relates to the world. Seeing all these young musicians perform about uncomfortable-but-important topics with direct contact to people who are personally involved in these situations brought out emotions in me that I didn't even know I could tap into and therefore showed me other ways of touching people's lives through music. If I can perform in a concert and make one audience member feel just a glimmer of what I have felt, I will be content with my life.”

music of
social justice

concert choir & wind ensemble



Thank YOU for the inspiration!



higgins@rowan.edu