Diversity within the Piano Repertoire
An Exploration of Piano Major’s Experience with and Perceptions of Music by Women Composers and Composers of Color

By Jenna Klein

The repertoire studied by classical pianists throughout their development is largely dominated by the compositions of White, European men. While the “core” repertoire composers are homogeneous in nature, present-day students are not (Brown, 2007). Additionally, students benefit from exposure to works by composers with whom they can relate (race, gender, lived experience) (Hackett et al., 1989; Thornton et al., 2008). To better meet the needs of present-day students, present relatable role models (Thornton et al, 2008) and promote a learning curriculum that welcomes and supports all (Campbell, 2002), teachers must be prepared to teach music by diverse composers that fall outside the established Eurocentric framework.

While pre-service teacher’s confidence to teach repertoire by diverse composers has been explored in other musical contexts, this topic has yet to be formally explored in the piano field. The purpose of this research was to examine potential relationships between piano majors’ experience learning, opinions related to and confidence in teaching piano repertoire by diverse composers.

Participants were undergraduate and graduate piano majors at south-central colleges and universities. Questionnaire prompts related to three topics: (1) exposure to piano repertoire by diverse composers, (2) beliefs related to repertoire by diverse composers and (3) confidence teaching repertoire by diverse composers. Prompts asked respondents to list previously studied diverse composers and indicate their level of agreement with 48 Likert-scale prompts related to the three topics.

Findings indicate a strong correlation between respondents’ experiences learning works by diverse composers and their confidence in teaching diverse repertoire. Findings also indicate differences in confidence, experience and ability to name diverse composers related to the respondent’s gender and race. Regardless of race or gender, participants indicated that inclusion of piano works by diverse composers in the curriculum is important and valuable.

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**Introduction**

- The “core” piano repertoire is not demographically representative of or relatable to some present-day piano students (Campbell, 2002; Brown, 2007).
- Exposure to role models may provide a tangible ideal of success, improve confidence, and increase the likelihood that students will pursue music study (Lockwood, 2006; Thornton et al., 2008).

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**Purpose of the Study**

To examine the relationship between piano major’s experience with and opinions related to teaching and learning piano repertoire by female composers and composers of color and their perceived ability to teach diverse repertoire.

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**Method**

Participants
- N = 48
- Current BA, MM, PhD, and DMA piano majors enrolled at institutions in the south-central U.S.
- Women =24, Men =23, Unspecified =1
- Age range =18-28; Mean =21.79; Median =22
- Asian= 11(22.9); Black or African American= 3 (6.3%); White= 25 (52.1%); Other= 9 (18.75%)

Data Collection Tool: Online questionnaire

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**Results**

- Piano majors felt more confident teaching standard repertoire (M= 8.07, SD= 1.57, median= 8) than repertoire by women composers (M= 6.55, SD= 1.95, median 7) and composers of color (M= 6.21, SD= 2.14, median = 6).
- Respondents were able to name significantly fewer women composers of color (72.08% of answers were left blank) than women composers (29.58% left blank) or composers of color (39.17% left blank).
- Female piano majors had more experience and higher beliefs related to diverse repertoire. Male piano majors were more confident in their abilities to teach diverse repertoire.
- Black piano majors had the most experience with, the highest beliefs of, and most confidence in teaching diverse repertoire.
- Asian piano majors had more experience and equal belief levels with White piano majors.
- White piano majors were more confident in their teaching abilities of diverse repertoire than Asian piano majors.

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**Discussion**

- More experience = more confidence. If students gain more experience teaching repertoire by diverse repertoire, they may become more confident teaching said repertoire.
- Respondents expressed that while they believed teaching diverse repertoire was important and necessary, they did not feel equipped to do so. Future teachers should be exposed to more experiences with diverse repertoire through their degree programs requirements.
- When asked to name five women composers of color, most respondents named one or less composers. Low response rate may indicate the need for greater exploration of these composers and conscientious effort to avoid tokenism when introducing students to underrepresented composers.

**References**


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*Images and figures are not provided as text.*