Rituals of Choral Togetherness in the Tanglewood Festival Chorus:

Discourses of ‘Diversity’ in a Sacralized Musical Tradition

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A Senior Honors Thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology

Tufts University, 2022.

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Introduction

It was May of 2019, the end of my first year in college. And in my email inbox arrived what felt like the opportunity of a lifetime: an audition to sing with the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Festival Chorus, one of the most elite choral groups in the Northeast. I had seen them perform before with the orchestra, and it felt surreal that I might be able to join them onstage and be a part of such a polished, resonant sound. I had been singing in choirs for a decade, but wasn't sure it would be enough to prepare me: I spent weeks rehearsing my audition piece, asking anyone who would listen for notes and recording myself over and over again until, finally, the audition deadline came. A week or so later I got the email that I had been accepted, and cried tears of joy. I was thrilled to be included in a group which I considered to be a pinnacle of choral and musical excellence, accompanying one of the finest orchestras in the world. It felt like a dream.

The experience of rehearsing and singing with the TFC was everything I had hoped for. The choir had an amazing sound, expansive and warm. I felt my own voice performing better, resonating more clearly on the higher soprano notes and blending more seamlessly with the singers around me. James Burton, the director, was charming, funny, and a talented conductor, holding the choir's attention easily and shaping their sound with his direction. I was sometimes lost, but mostly felt able to keep up with the vocal agility and high levels of musical theory knowledge that everyone around me seemed to have. After a few months of rehearsals, we performed on the stage of Tanglewood with the orchestra, directed by Andris Nelsons, in front of thousands of people. I kept the concert program, and it's still on my parents' fridge with my name circled in the list of sopranos.

My father, a lover of classical music, taught me to worship his canonical favorites from a young age: Beethoven symphonies, Brahms piano concertos, Chopin nocturnes. I am very

influenced by his tastes and intellectual philosophy about classical music: that a real appreciator should not just listen but study and seek to understand the music. We went to classical concerts together and I enjoyed the propriety of the concert space: it felt like dress-up, like playing pretend for grownups. I studied piano from a young age, and joined a choir as soon as I could.

Choral singing quickly became my favorite musical outlet. I became hooked on the feeling of singing in harmony with others, feeling their voices operate beside my own and creating something more complex together than any of us could create alone. I listened to choral music all the time and sang it as much as I could. Four years of middle school choir, four years of high school choir, and countless auditioned festivals later, I had internalized the idea that the more elite or exclusive a choir was, the better, and wanted to get into the best choral spaces I could. So being accepted into the TFC a year later was meaningful not just because of the uplifting musical moments that it allowed me to experience, but also because of the validation of my talent and commitment to choral singing that it imparted. I felt that I had been imbued with some of the prestige of the institution, and the cultural meaning that it held.

In the next three years, I received an undergraduate education in anthropology and began to reconsider the culture of elite classical music spaces like the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood Festival Chorus, and what my positionality was within them. By learning to examine cultural systems more broadly, I took a critical eye to my own for the first time. I began to see some of the rich performativity of many of the rituals that were part of the culture of classical music spaces that I knew well. I found myself becoming frustrated, rather than intimidated or impressed by, the powerful role and overblown egos of many ensemble conductors compared to their choristers, the snobbish exclusivity of many musical spaces and institutions, and the competitive culture of proving one's knowledge about the traditional canon of music. All of the

knowledge I had accumulated about classical music and the rituals that I had for elevating it, like following concert propriety and teaching myself to love and understand a particular group of composers, did still feel like a genuine manifestation of my love for classical music but also participation in a classist fantasy of highbrow culture. I started to notice that going to concerts at the BSO did actually feel like less fun if my Dad and I couldn't go out for a nice dinner beforehand, or if people weren't dressed well. It wasn't just about the musical performance onstage, but also a performance of class, wealth, and cultural capital by the audience which made the concert ritual exciting and fulfilling. The way I was engaging with this music, and how good it made me feel, were antithetical to what I thought my values were. The intellectual elitism which I had been steeped in from a young age was exposed, and I was staring its artifice in the face.

This realization made me want to further explore the cultural world of the Western classical tradition in the US. I was balancing my personal and emotional investment in the music and many of its traditions with a desire to critically examine them, especially the parts which most manifested the racist and classist legacies of American cultural hierarchies. How, I wanted to know, had classical music become a symbolic tool of the white socioeconomic elite, and how did its systems of exclusivity reflect legacies of conflict over cultural and political power in American society? I was curious what exactly led the BSO, and institutions like it, to encourage specific communities, namely white, upper-middle, and aspirationally middle-class people, to enter their space while making it so difficult for others to. I also wanted to know more about how the musical mechanisms of classical music, like ensemble and rehearsal structures, pedagogical techniques, and systems of musical understanding like Western music theory created experiences of shared reality which promote white intellectualism as the baseline expectation against which all other cultural or musical behaviors might be compared, and as a result, exclude those without access to these

requirements. These barriers, within a space which likes to consider itself a source of the "highest music" in society, send distinct messaging about how that music should be made, who is qualified to make it, and what that means about their societal and moral value. I used this thesis project to reckon with the whiteness, intellectual elitism, and socioeconomic exclusivity of musical institutions and traditions which I had grown to love by exploring their rituals and semiotic systems, how those rituals uphold the perceived superiority of white, "highbrow" culture, and the power that this perception holds within spaces like the BSO and society more broadly.

Of course, this investment in critiquing a tradition for which I had great fondness was rife with internal confusion, conflict, and reassessment of my own identity. I felt an obligation to criticize and work against its exclusive and discriminatory power structures, both from my own sense of morality and from my desire to improve the traditions and institutions that I loved so they they could continue. Even as I scourged classical music in my conversations and school papers, I still sang in the school choir and it was my favorite class. How, I struggled, could choral singing, as a phenomenon, be a bad thing? Singing with other people had always felt like a pure force for healing, joy, and connection. There always seemed to be something rather inscrutable about the emotional and physical experience of collective singing; how it can both individually empower and collectively unify. I never felt more connected to my body and my musical intentions than when I was singing with a group, especially one that I felt a social bond with, and I continued to gravitate toward the question of what exactly choral singing was, what it did for people, and what it was capable of. The issue must be with the structures and institutions, I thought, not the music itself.

But still, the relationship between choral singing and the predominantly white and wealthy institutions which most commonly housed it was one that I could not reconcile. Expectations of

sonic unity and blend to create the traditional choral sound and behavioral conventions of "professionalism" required conformity from choristers which had racial, cultural, and class-based implications. Methods of learning and communicating, like knowledge of Western music theory and voice lessons, were often expensive and inaccessible to large groups of people. But I had also witnessed the ways that homogeneity of educational and vocal experience streamlined a rehearsal, because everyone could refer to a shared system of musical communication and expectations. The mechanisms of choral singing itself, not just the institutions or people that structure it, prioritize certain identities over others to contribute to expectations of homogeneity and a narrative legacy that reinforces a cultural, and thereby political and racial, hierarchy in Western music, while also structuring a musical practice which was profoundly fulfilling for and even central to the identities of countless singers.

Exploring Diversity

In exploring these questions, I frequently encountered a term in conversations about predominantly white musical institutions: "diversity." Institutional discourses appeared to fetishize the concept: how to achieve it, what it would represent, whom it would benefit. I found myself beginning to center my ideas about choral singing and Western musical institutions around it. What does it mean that Western choral ensembles are now not diverse, and what would it mean for them to become so? Beyond the superficial ways that it is often conceived of in corporate settings, what would diversity in an elite choral space entail, what would it look and sound like? Was this even a possible or useful concept to be so fixated on, and in the name of what?

These seemed like important questions to investigate for a few reasons. My personal experience with choral singing predisposed me to invest in better understanding how it functions as a shared musical ritual and phenomenon. But beyond this, in a time when choral and musical

institutions across the US—like other predominantly white organizations and projects—are newly prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, it seems more important than ever that there be thoughtful investigation into what exactly the potential significance is of that work within the Western musical tradition. I saw fundamental aspects of choral singing which seemed to prevent the creation and sustenance of a diverse musical community, and also those that would nourish it. I felt strongly about the importance of increasing variety in the identities and backgrounds of choir members both because of the great potential of choral settings to help people to relate and connect to one another, and also because I know that choirs work the best and are most fulfilling when the choristers are able to relax and feel totally comfortable. Given that many elite musical institutions in the US are predominantly white, wealthy, and abled, and the mainstream conventions of performing Western classical music are foundationally white supremacist, classist, and ableist, increasing the numbers of nonwhite, low-income, or disabled people in these spaces would be challenging but important, and allow the few who are already there to find a greater sense of communal experience. However, even while I saw the potential value in these kinds of changes, my research also sought to problematize and expand this conventional conception of "diversity".

In and of itself, the use of diversity as a goal by predominantly white and historically colonial institutions has also been widely critiqued as performative and counterproductive to the transformative justice it is meant to bring about. While in theory it might seem like a good thing to pursue, Rinaldo Walcott describes the use of terms like diversity for unchanged and unchallenged colonial or racist institutions to be "appropriations of language invented to produce transformative change [that] work to keep white supremacy intact even if it is an understated white supremacy." (Walcott 399) Even when coming from a place of genuine intention, diversity initiatives in institutions like the BSO can be ineffective, counterproductive, or even harmful.

Through this project I hoped to further articulate what "diversity" might mean within an elite Western choral ensemble: what the institution is attempting to do to support it, what interlocutors imagined it might look and sound like, and whether they saw it to be a useful goal at all.

Methods and Fieldsite

I was fortunate that the BSO and TFC was an accessible fieldsite through which I could explore these issues. I was by no means an insider of the institution, but I had gotten a useful view into it internally when I sang with the TFC for a summer. This afforded me what felt like an appropriate amount of proximity, in experience and perspective. The TFC, as one of the most elite choral ensembles in this region of the US, seemed to reflect many of the musical values and systems that I was excited to examine both in terms of choral singing as a phenomenon and as an institution in which it is housed and nurtured. The diversities, or lack thereof, in the TFC were especially interesting to me. In addition to the general barriers to diversity and inclusion already noted, the TFC is a volunteer-only choir which requires significant time and effort, in and out of rehearsals and performances. This establishes an explicit barrier to access for those who do not have the money, resources, or extra time to devote to such a pursuit even if they were able to obtain the often expensive training and experience to qualify for it. As such, I felt that the TFC was an ensemble which I could relate to but still had some distance from, with interpersonal and musical dynamics which I found interesting both in and of themselves and as they related to broader questions I was exploring.

While singing with the TFC in the summer of 2019 I became friends with a few members of the choir, who I had either sat close to or who had been particularly friendly toward me. Through the course of the rehearsals I had become friends on Facebook with many of them, which enabled me, two years later, to reach out to ask if they might be interested in being interviewed. Everyone

I contacted agreed, and I completed the interview-based portion of my research with the Tufts Summer Scholars program in the summer of 2021. I conducted two interviews each with six TFC choristers, including people with a variety of ages and racial, gender, socioeconomic, and ethnic identities. Each of the twelve conversations lasted between 90 and 150 minutes. I spoke only with BIPOC choristers, as I wanted to specifically focus on BIPOC experiences singing with the chorus and felt that my own white experience would take up enough space as it was.

I interviewed six choristers: Sam, a Black man in his 20s; Wayne, a Black man in his 60s; Sarah, a Black woman in her 50s; Lucy, a Korean-American woman in her 50s; Celia, a Korean-American woman in her 20s; and Maria, an Argentinian-American woman in her 50s (all names are pseudonyms). In my initial search for interlocutors I specifically sought out variety in race and age, as aspects which I found easier to identify before interviews. However, I spoke with each interlocutor about their ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds and found that there was more variety than I'd expected. Reflecting the fact that TFC is a volunteer chorus, there were none who currently identified as low-income, though many had low-income backgrounds. Maria was an immigrant herself and both Lucy and Celia were children of Korean immigrants. Some had Western music degrees; others did not. All had extensive experience in Western style choirs, and all three of the Black choristers had received their earliest choral training in predominantly Black church settings.

While I feel confident that I gained insight into the paths that people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences had taken in order to get into and stay in an ensemble like the TFC, of course there are gaps. Though I was able to take a good sample size of the current BIPOC community in the choir, I wasn't able to speak with any former members who had left voluntarily or involuntarily – those who the systems and expectations of the choir may ultimately have

excluded. Conversations with these former members would have elaborated and clarified the systems of exclusion more directly. This study addresses the experiences of those BIPOC members who remain in the choir despite the barriers they face, which speaks to either their privilege or commitment to the music and tradition, often both.

The two-interview structure was intended to isolate two aspects of choral singing: individual belonging and collective belonging. The first interview was meant to focus on interlocutors' background and experience in choral singing and Western music, so I could better understand what made them as individuals feel the strongest sense of embodiment, comfort, and belonging in a musical and choral space, and how that relates to Western music. The second interview focused more on their perceptions and experiences of the TFC as an ensemble: its sound, musical endeavors, and values, how they relate themselves to the ensemble and institution, and whether or not they feel a sense of collective belonging within it interpersonally, musically, and culturally. Through the two interviews I tried to hear the stories they wanted to tell of their lives through a lens of music, and hear their opinions about diversity within Western choral music.

I also reflected about my own experiences and education in Western choral music, asking myself many of the same questions that I had asked in interviews. Through this I hoped to gauge my own positionality as the practitioner of this research, as a lifelong choral singer with a particular intersection of identities as a white, upper-middle class, college-educated, cisgender American woman, and as a past chorister within the TFC. I wanted to understand why I had considered participating in the TFC to be the honor and highlight of my musical experiences, why I considered some music to be so much more valuable than others - I wanted to understand my musical ideologies and where they came from. This felt important to do both so I could better understand my own perspective and biases going into the interviews, and to identify an example of white

participation in the chorus. I knew I would better understand the stories of others if I first took the time to examine my situated experience within the broader landscape of choral music.

To supplement these interviews and reflective analysis, I researched the history, demographics, and power structures of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Tanglewood Festival Chorus. Interlocutor recollections of their time with the choir provided firsthand accounts to many of the recent changes in the administration, with Wayne, who had 44 years in the choir under his belt, even remembering the conditions in which the choir was conceived. I also considered Boston as the regional site of the institution and what Western classical music came to culturally represent within this specific historical and regional context.

Theoretical Tools

From the outset, the project presented different threads which I struggled to relate to one another: the racial and socioeconomic power structures of Brahmin society in Boston, how they translated into classical music culture and systems of meaning, the depth and processes of the music itself, and what it might mean to "diversify" that world. I could feel that they were all related, and that there was a story in their midst, but needed help from theoretical tools to piece it together.

One useful concept was what Paul DiMaggio (1978) called "sacralization of art", and Lawrence Levine (1988) later termed the "sacralization of culture." These terms refer to the cultural process, in late 19th century American cities like Boston, of placing "high" cultural artifacts and practices at the top of a hierarchy of virtue and morality which, through this association, came to be revered as sacred and fundamentally superior to other forms of cultural or artistic expression within upper-class circles. This "sacralization of culture" served as a tool with which the elite classes in many American cities could gain some cultural leverage at a time when their political, economic, and social power was being challenged by new immigrant groups and

others. Using religious rhetoric to analyze and situate this music allowed for it to take hold as a moral symbol (and indeed this musical tradition and repertoire holds strong cultural and historical associations to Christian religion and morality). This was a general cultural trend which manifested differently in specific places, and I explored its impact in Boston in particular.

Another theoretical tool which I found helpful was to read as semiotic the BSO's institutional and interpersonal expectations, such as the language registers of the space, the generally shared knowledge and use of Western music theory, specific musical expectations of performers, and the behavioral conventions of the musicians, staff, directors, and audience. This enabled me to articulate the ways that microaggressions can be worked into the communicative fabric of an organization, serving as reminders of the orchestra's racialized and classed cultural system. There is great symbolic power in these behavioral registers: they act as tools of exclusivity and validation for those seeking sociocultural confirmation from the space, a barrier to access for those who do not enact that performance, and a cultural corset for those who can perform but whom the space is not designed to validate or welcome. Jonathan Rosa and Vanessa Díaz used the term *raciontologies* to describe the "fundamentally racialized grounding of various states of being" (Rosa & Díaz 1) in relation to institutions. I use this concept to help illustrate how white, highbrow cultural values are represented, alluded to, and embodied within the space, acting as example, metric, and mediator of the constructed realities and fantasies upon which the whole validity of the BSO's cultural exercise is based. As such, the semiotic systems of the BSO are not a byproduct of its cultural structure, but rather one of its central and vital components.

I interpreted the different kinds of participation in these systems within Victor Turner's theory of ritual process, finding particularly useful his concepts of structure, anti-structure, liminality and communitas. According to Turner's theory, ritual processes have a dialectical

relationship with social structure and an ability to create what he calls communitas. Communitas is a feeling of togetherness created within shared ritual experiences– and especially through moments of liminality or "in-betweenness" – which contains powerful potential because it binds people to a group of society, acting as a kind of social glue that can create cohesion and sometimes offset or challenge hierarchical distinctions. As such, a continual interplay between structure and anti-structure exists as a possible source of reinforcement, polishing, or change to the hierarchies and systems of those social structures, and reflects their characteristics and tensions. (Turner)

In the context of my project, the "structure" is the sociocultural contexts of the TFC: of American/Bostonian society, the Western classical tradition, and the institution of the BSO. This structure manifests in the BSO and TFC in its musical traditions, behavioral conventions, and semiotic systems, for which my project's interlocutors seemed to harbor both great affection and frustration. The "anti-structure" represents the forces which seek to challenge and even transform those structures, on the broadest levels of American discourses about race, power, and hierarchy and in the quietest thoughts or conversations by a TFC chorister. Communitas, as it is experienced in all the performance rituals of the symphony space, therefore has a crucial role to play in these dialectical processes as not just a feeling of togetherness which holds the institution together but a potential channel for the anti-structure: a source of potential for transforming processes of identity, power, and change around and within it.

From the inside of the choral ensemble, Turner's ritual structure takes another form. The pedagogical, theoretical, vocal, and behavioral rituals of the choral space and process allow the ensemble to form communitas among themselves as well as with the broader musical tradition, creating complex vectors and layers of exclusion and connection. Through ritual participation, choristers become better connected as a community of singers as they all simultaneously create

and experience a shared sonic landscape, and yet experience reinforcement of certain delineations of difference and exclusion within and around the ensemble, especially for BIPOC choristers. Indeed, that communitas is a vital element of a Western choral ensemble's ability to function, and therefore makes it a process with great potential for transformation, connection, and both collective and individual embodiment.

Some components of the choral process, like using advanced Western music theory as a means of musical communication, act as what Paul DiMaggio calls "rituals of inclusion" (DiMaggio 152). The study of Western music theory is typically inaccessible to those without wealth, so making it a foundational element of participation in the ensemble acts as a barrier to access as well as confirmation of the perceived social status of those who are able to enter the space, perpetuating stratified systems of cultural education and classical music's association with white wealth and power.

At the same time, choral musicking has the potential to be what Julia "Jules" Balén calls a "counterstorying practice", using the communitas that can be formed and embodied through choral singing to "hold ourselves and each other in valued identities while letting go of damaged ones" (Balén 30). In this way, she argues that choral singing can uniquely connect, heal, and even be a force for social change, especially for identities that have sustained cultural violence. Balén illustrates how choral musicking, in and of itself, helped to change the way that people understood their own identities through singing together. I was curious how the ability of choral singing to form these kinds of "ethical subjects" might apply or relate to the potential of the TFC's singing practices. Balén is writing about adult queer choirs, which are very different spaces from the TFC: togetherness across boundaries of cultural, racial, or ethnic difference both offer and risk different things in these very different contexts. However, I do think there are ways that supporting people

to find choral togetherness both with those who share parts of their identity and across difference, especially when living within broader structures which might oppress, stereotype, or divide the group, can be meaningful and powerful. I also think her argument connects deeply to Turner's ideas of liminality and communitas, and reflects his theory about the potential they hold.

Choral singing is a complex and varied practice which, through the deep togetherness that it fosters, is capable of redefining identities and social relationships, co-constructing shared cultural spaces, and even creating – or resisting – social change. As a practice, it unifies and charges a person's physical, emotional, and mental faculties. It fundamentally asks for vulnerability from its participants. In the TFC, it is emotionally political and politically emotional, bringing people great joy and fulfillment even as it complicates their relationships with themselves and their identities.

Intentions

At the core of this paper I seek to center, accurately render, and contextualize the experiences of the six members of the TFC who generously shared their stories with me. As people and musicians who I greatly respect, and with whom I will share this work, I have sought to hold myself accountable to their meanings and the intention behind their words, and will describe them as "interlocutors" throughout this paper: voices in a conversation which I hope to explore and uplift. At the next level, I seek to understand their experiences as BIPOC members of the TFC through the lens of race and identity, and also address my own positionality within and around it. To provide institutional context, I articulate and contextualize the ritual structures and semiotic systems of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, understand how they came to be, and what classist, ableist, or racist impact they have. To situate this institution, I explore the layers of context, historical, cultural, racial, musical, and regional, which have formed around the TFC and the implications they have for its current members (especially those who are BIPOC). More broadly,

I seek to articulate how choral singing works as a phenomenon and ritual, and what possibilities lie in the meaning and connection it forges. In this context, this project also explores diversity as a conceptual, abstract, and applied goal, where it comes from, and what it does and can do within the BSO today. And coming full circle, through this work I also seek to critique, inform, and reorient my relationship with classical music and the culture of my roots, reflect on the power and privilege that they and my identity represents, and seek to better understand the role of the joy and connection that I feel to a cultural form that has defined beauty for me and my family.

The paper unfolds in a three-part structure. Chapter one explores the historical and cultural contexts for the creation of the BSO and the values it represents, breaking down some of the mutually-reinforcing rituals, conventions, and power structures which have come to define the BSO in the past century and a half since it opened. The second chapter conveys the ways that what I call "choral togetherness" exists in the TFC, and in Western choral singing practices more broadly. This chapter elaborates the types of meaning that are collectively created within the ensemble, and how they function to unite or divide the choir within overall institutional structures that are often experienced as divisive and oppressive. The third chapter analyzes how diversity, as a concept, goal, and/or process, acts within the ensemble, institution, and musical tradition, to both uphold racialized power dynamics within the institutional culture and to challenge them. I explore the complicated and conflicted feelings which TFC members shared about diversity, and ask whether and how diversity fits into the futures that they see for the ensemble and musical tradition.

By finishing with an exploration of diversity, in particular, I will be able to connect the narratives of exclusive whiteness in classical music institutions and the interpersonal and emotional power of choral singing to consider the limits of an organization like the BSO, the systems of meaning-making and identity within the TFC, and what potential lies in both in the

future. From this research and conversations with interlocutors, I will ultimately conclude that diversity, when co-constructed as a transformative process rather than a static goal, has the potential to contribute to dialectical processes of change in the ritualized performance practices of the TFC, BSO, and the Western classical genre more broadly.

Chapter 1: A Changing Boston: Sacralizing Classical Music in the 19th Century City

To begin to understand the impetus to change that exists in the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its ensembles today, it is important to revisit the time when it was created, under what conditions, and why. Many of the conventions and ideologies that seem intrinsic to symphony life today were actually conceived for a specific social purpose in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the context of cultural spaces especially, "our thinking is governed by a set of principles that we too often take for granted. But when we place these assumptions into historical perspective, their hollowness will become more apparent" (Broyles 3). By presenting the way in which the rituals of classical music and concert society emerged in 19th century Boston, we can better understand their legacy, role in society, and historical and cultural significance.

The task of providing regional, historical, cultural, institutional, and theoretical context for the rest of this paper's analysis is complex, as these five elements are all related yet are also distinctly important. To this end, I will use Thomas Turino's "metaphorical notion of context as an ever-expanding series of concentric rings with pathways that cross and connect them" (Turino 400) in order to give proper attention to each contextual element, and understand their interrelatedness without conflating them. As such, I will discuss the **regional** particularities of Boston as a **historical** site, the **cultural** changes which occurred there and their relational political, religious, socioeconomic significance, the BSO on an **institutional** level, and briefly introduce the Tanglewood Festival Chorus as an ensemble. I will finish by articulating the legacies of these layers of context, explaining the rituals and traditions which were constructed by 19th century elites, how they have (or haven't) evolved since, and their impact in classical spaces like the BSO and TFC now. Turino asserts that "Every historical act is 'diversely unified' with multiple layers of determination, and in order to approach the concrete historical complexity

of a given practice or event, we must reconstruct the determinations that constitute it" (407). By identifying my "concentric rings" and the pathways that exist between them, I will seek to approach the complexity of this "reconstruction" and of the history itself.

Elite Bostonian Society in the 19th century

An important component of comprehending the formation of cultural hierarchy in Boston is understanding the role of the city as a locus of regional, historical, and cultural change within broader cultural shifts in the US. In his book *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston*, historian and musicologist Michael Broyles explains the musical manifestation of American and Bostonian historical trends:

> American musical culture, in spite of its close ties to Europe, developed a distinctive profile as a result of certain cultural forces, intellectual traditions, and political developments whose evolution was unique to America. These are Puritanism and its offspring, Evangelicalism, psalmodic reform and its progeny, the singing school; the frontier and the reaction that its life-style had in the East; and attitudes toward class and democratization. (Broyles 12)

Colonial legacies of power and expansion, a changing political landscape in the accelerating industrial economy, religious and class-based ideological systems, and an ambivalent fascination with European cultural objects manifested in increasingly hierarchical cultural systems and tensions between elitism and populism which still exist in Boston today. Conflict between perceptions of music as entertainment versus as a moral or intellectual object both reflected and deepened socioeconomic and political tensions.

Religion and class were related in early 19th century Boston, though not exactly congruent, and layered sets of political, cultural, and religious ideologies separated the upper classes from the middle and lower ones, manifesting in the choices of music favored by each (Broyles 12). In addition, Boston, and especially its elite "Brahmin" class, played a significant

role in the development of origin-myths of the American nation-state and the white, Protestant, Euro-American culture surrounding it. Institutions like Harvard were closely linked to these ideologies and the narratives behind them, as were movements like Transcendentalism, which celebrated the purity and moral power of the American landscape. Many new and existing cultural institutions backed by the Brahmins, like the BSO, were closely associated with these narratives, and became more and more important to the maintenance of the elite's social and cultural influence.

The gap between the upper and lower classes became increasingly tense and complicated as the 19th century went on. A drastic influx in immigration to Boston in the mid 1800s, mostly by Irish fleeing the famine, dramatically changed the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Boston and posed a threat to the influence of the Bostonian "aristocracy." At the same time, as historian Robert Allison (2004) shows, the city's economy was exploding with industrialization, creating both job opportunities for the new immigrants and sharper ethnic, religious, spatial, and social hierarchies within the rapidly-growing city. Brahmins viewed allowing this large new group to acquire social or political power as a risk of losing their grasp on the cultural values of the city, which were, in part, used to justify and structure their socioeconomic dominance. The mostly-Catholic Irish were challenging traditions and social boundaries, making quick and steady inroads on political influence after the Civil War and leading to a push and pull of power which made the Brahmin elite increasingly anxious.

"As long as these strangers had stayed within their own precinct and retained their own peculiar ways, they remained containable and could be dealt with," Lawrence Levine relates. "But these worlds of strangers did not remain contained; they spilled over into the public spaces that characterized nineteenth-century America" (Levine 177). Though the elite tried to "shut the

doors to economic power to these newcomers" (Allison 75), by the late-nineteenth century "Gilded Age" many immigrants had found ways to advance through the law, literature, sports, and notably through politics. The elites actually retained a great deal of power in the city, but in their own eyes, as reflected in an account by nostalgic Anglophile intellectual (and Tufts professor) Martin Green, "All city politics had been taken out of the hands of the old Bostonians by the Irish pretty completely" (Green 102), and

> What was left was a gentlemanly class with considerable wealth, leisure, and culture, but with relatively little power or influence. This class was the public and patron of…cultural institutions…. One sees immediately the weakness of a type that kept the manners and aspirations and prejudices of an aristocratic class without being able to retain its authority…. It inherited from the Puritans a certain solemnity and high intent… From the founding fathers…a set of intellectual commitments and civic concerns. (Green 104)

Concerned that they had lost the power to impose any of these sociocultural values on the city using political means, the upper classes created new cultural spaces like the Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Public Library, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra and promoted them as universally good and moral cultural institutions to assert their own values. By deepening the foundations of a cultural hierarchy of which they placed themselves on top, they envisioned a more sustainable future of cultural power.

Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, classical music in Boston and elsewhere increasingly became an elite, intellectualized practice. This came from a legacy of musical hierarchies which Broyles explains:

> A high culture-low culture distinction has existed for centuries in Western music. Usually the contrast was political and economic: court music differed from the music of the marketplace, cathedral music differed from the music of the parish church, aristocratic opera differed from folk play. These distinctions were recognized, and the merits of different types of music relative to their settings were accepted. In late nineteenth-century America the distinction became ethical, although with political (specifically class) implications. The cultural hierarchy was redefined principally through a new set of moral associations attached to high culture. High culture came to stand at the apex of a pyramid of cultural types because it was morally pure and edifying. (Broyles 2)

In this time, the gap widened between professional and amateur musicking, and the category of amateur musician came with this era – the classical canon was to be played at the highest level, and it was even fashioned to be unethical, even sinful, to mistreat such a fine cultural art.

This elitist ideology about classical music-making was complicated for the upper classes as it revealed their ambivalence for the democratic ideals many of them purported to inherit from their founding fathers. Some of the elite class genuinely seemed to see the arts as a socially unifying force or a meaningful source of social morality. However, on the whole they invested in institutions which separated them from the rest of society, and in which "membership and privileges were tightly controlled, and conformity in thought was demanded" (Broyles 98). Many of those most invested in these institutions even saw democracy as the enemy of their cultural goals, as it dragged down the standards and authority which was "required" for truly refined culture. America's "leveling, practical tendencies" (Levine 215) opened the door to unwelcome dissenting views, preventing the most skilled or intellectual individuals from defining social cultural ideals. By believing that society should support the talented, "worthy" few rather than the "mediocre many", the elite rejected the "intellectual and aesthetic communism" (Levine 215) which would stand as a barrier to their perceptions of cultural superiority. To those who espoused it, this separation was not only natural but justified, as it was in the service of improving the cultural quality of the city and country as a whole.

With this ambivalence about democratic values came an embrace of the special intellectual and moral potential that they imagined a particular canon of European music offered society. They justified the "cultural stewardship" of institutions which had claimed, sacralized, and worshiped this music for its indisputable superiority and potential to improve the culture (and

therefore morality) of the greater public, though some of these newly elevated composers had actually been heard and enjoyed in more "low-class" settings previously. Edward Baxter Perry, a noted pianist and musical interpreter in Massachusetts at the turn of the 20th century, spoke and wrote that the artist's vocation is (or should be) that of religion, acting as "high priest in the temple [of] the beautiful, and that his "devout fervor" should lift his audiences above the "trivial, petty phases of mere sensuous pleasure or superficial enjoyment to a higher plane of spiritual aesthetic gratification." (Levine 135) With notions of morality grounded in religious ideologies, the sacralization of the classical canon was a key element of its hierarchical establishment. As Broyles notes,

> In the early 19th century the notion appeared that some types of music were enriching and morally superior. From that a canon or pantheon of composers and compositions developed. Orchestral music occupied a special place in the pantheon, and Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven came to be revered. The pantheon has grown since then, and it has been challenged. But the fundamental idea has remained. For good or ill, the presence of a cultural hierarchy based on it is an ineluctable fact of American musical life today. (Broyles 1)

Another significant historical source of this musical doctrine came from Theodore Thomas, who founded and began directing the Chicago Symphony Orchestra shortly after the BSO. Putting into practice the intellectualism and moralism of the highbrow, classical music discourse of the time, he "refused to listen to vulgar talk, go to 'questionable' plays, or read immoral books, for fear of poisoning his mind and rendering himself unfit to interpret the music of the classic masters." (Lewis 134) He told his wife that he avoided "trashy stuff" because:

> Otherwise, when I come before the public to interpret master-works, and my soul should be inspired with noble and impressive emotions, these evil thoughts run around in my head like squirrels and spoil it all. A musician must keep his heart pure and his mind clean if he wishes to elevate, instead of debasing his art. And here we have the difference between the classic and the modern school of composers. Those old giants said their

> prayers when they wished to write an immortal work. The modern man takes a drink. (Lewis 134)

As a result of these kinds of high-class, “morally superior” associations, highbrow cultural artifacts came to be seen by the laborer classes as symbols of the elite’s snobbery and hoarding of wealth and resources. Lawrence Levine argues that “Workers were being taught to regard ‘works of art and instruments of high culture, with all the possessions and surroundings of people of wealth and refinement, as causes and symbols of the laborer's poverty” (Levine 204). This further deepened the social divide caused by this cultural symbolism, and the tension between populism, elitism, and well-intentioned efforts by upper classes to “uplift” disenfranchised communities which lives on in American cities like Boston today and defines large portions of its politics and cultural life.

For the middle class, however, participation in high-art culture was an opportunity to align themselves socially with the upper class – indeed, into the 20th century they had the most to gain from engaging with the propriety of classical music culture. The symbolic association between the structured conventions of cultural institutions and high-class elitism helped upper-middle class, newly wealthy, or socially ambitious members of society to acquire new social legitimacy. Especially into the turn of the 20th century, many of these newer groups in elite spaces had gained new money but still lacked the sociocultural clout to fully align themselves with the elite; learning the behavioral and lifestyle conventions of the upper class was an important step for their upward social climb. Through this process, as Paul DiMaggio shows, “the upper-middle class can assert symbolic identification with the rich and powerful by participating in the solidarity ritual of the arts occasion” (DiMaggio 154). Thus, engagement with and perpetuation of the values of the

Eurocentric cultural hierarchy benefited not just those already in the upper classes but those seeking to join them.

Of course, the whole notion of a "cultural hierarchy" had deeply racial undertones. Even the language of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" originate from assigning racial types to assign intelligence, with the "caucasian" type having the highest brow of all (Levine 225). Scientific racism and other forms of justification of racial oppression explicitly established a racial hierarchy (white people being the most intelligent, worthy, or valuable, and Black and indigenous people typically being the least). In a society which established white supremacist ideology in almost all public institutions, race would become indisputably connected with class and it was no accident that every member of the venerated musical canon was a white man, and almost everyone at the helm of the institutionalization of this cultural ideology was wealthy and white. (This paralleled the construction of canons, heroes, and institutional hierarchies in other fields at this time as well, like theater, literature, and visual art.) Boston had a socially significant Black population well before industrialization or the Great Migrations of the twentieth century, though it did increase in those periods, which were met with shifting white anxieties about race and racial hierarchy. As people of color made up more and more of the working class in the 20th century, the class divide developed increasingly complex racialized dimensions. As such, "culture" and cultural hierarchy became a way to make assertions about racial difference, backing racist ideology, paradoxically, using a justification of heightening public morality with music that many of the elite truly admired.

Building on colonial and imperialist histories, these hierarchical processes worked to further the elite social class as a fundamentally uncomfortable and unwelcoming place for people of color or people from working class backgrounds. The conventions, rituals, canon, and values

of the cultural space created what Rosa and Díaz (2020) term a raciontological system which lives on today. In this system, certain descriptors delineated cultural objects, behavior, and phenomena into worthy and unworthy, reflecting a specific set of values which benefitted and reinforced structures which kept the white and wealthy in power.

The Symphony Orchestra

In the late 19th century, a significant element of the construction of these hierarchical narratives was public discourse about music and its societal value. Literary and cultural journals emphasized rhetoric and the religious and political tensions of the time in debates about the merits and roles of different kinds of music in society (Broyles 13). John Sullivan Dwight, an upper class Unitarian and widely considered to be one of the first influential classical music critics in the US, was a loud voice in this public dialogue and had a significant influence on the founding values of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the tail end of the 19th century. In his journal, *Dwight's Journal of Music*, he called for the development of a permanent, independent orchestra which could meet the highest musical standards in the performance of what he considered the "best" music (essentially, Beethoven and his peers) (Levine 122).

He was a mentor to and had a significant ideological influence on Henry Lee Higginson, who founded the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Dwight was adamant about taste and standards: he wrote in his journal that musical performance should be "uncompromising in its devotion to cultural perfection" (Levine 120) and should always prioritize the purity of the musical art itself over the desires of the performer or audience. In fact, he declared that it would be better if the performer were invisible, because the purpose of a concert was not interpretive or to provide a "rendition" of a certain piece, but conservation, to keep the standard masterworks from falling into disregard. In his direct call for an independent public orchestra, he asked that it play "the

great masterworks of men of genius, grouped in programs which shall have symmetry and harmony of tone…and a pervading spirit of pure art….in this only is there real culture" (Levine 121).

The works of music created by this particular set of composers were considered to be sacred themselves, like religious texts that only the conductors could interpret. As such, they were not to be changed or abridged, especially not for the musicians' vanity or desire to show off their technical abilities. There was great suspicion of soloists who might "turn the music to their own purposes and encourage the audience to admire sensationalism rather than art….soloists who wanted to take liberties with [the music] in order to demonstrate their talents" (Levine 138) Even now, many musicians are encouraged to do historical and contextual research in order to better understand the composer's "intent" with a piece of music rather than focus on what it invokes in them personally. This obsessive focus on the composers themselves is not at all subtle—Beethoven's name itself is still inscribed above the stage at Symphony Hall.

The performance of these works, even and especially when the audiences did not like them, was perceived as working for the moral progress of the general public. As Lawrence Levine reports of another conductor of a major American symphony, "When Theodore Thomas was warned that he was peppering his programs with too many compositions by Richard Wagner, which the people did not like, he replied, 'Then they must hear them till they do'" (Levine 189). Audiences were disciplined with a syllabus of the "highest" cultural and moral works, rendering them obedient listeners to that which the conductors and experts judged worthy.

As such, Dwight was in favor of creating the Boston Pops, or something like it, so that "light, bright, sentimental music" (Levine 122) would be provided for those who wanted it, freeing classical music concerts from the obligation to satisfy the preferences of the general public

in their regular season. The institution acknowledged and accommodated the lower-status musical tastes of the public in order to increase revenue and maintain their ability to continue to program the music and composers that they wanted to represent as higher in the cultural hierarchy. Dwight was explicit and unabashed in his elitism when making this recommendation, defining "real culture" as the "highest" performance of pieces from this specific canon and declaring, "The highest type of music appeals to the highest type of person" (Levine 127).

Dwight also recognized that the formation of an orchestra which could satisfy these kinds of demands would require guaranteed consistent funding, so that it would not be dependent on public approval in the form of ticket sales to keep it going with a permanent, salaried orchestra of players. The money and motivation to fulfill his fantasy came along in Henry Lee Higginson, who "belonged to one of the old Yankee families, was a friend of the others, and was very conscious of his role as a defender of old values" (Green 110). Green, whose passionate advocacy for the ideology and hegemony of the elite Boston classes throughout his book borders on obsession, calls Higginson's founding and continued financial support of the Boston Symphony Orchestra a "god like-act; he not only created but sustained in being this world of music, for the aesthetic delight and moral improvement of his city. The two effects would be one: the high art would uplift ethically too; he would ensure it. 'But of course anything unworthy is to be shut out of the programmes'" (Green 110).

Higginson took his role of being a "cultural policeman" (Green 110) seriously, excluding all music outside of his own tastes. His (and Dwight's) commitment to "serious" classical music manifested in a "strong preference for the work of the classic Austro-German composers, especially Beethoven, who had first captivated him as a youth and who he remained convinced were ethically and aesthetically superior" (Levine 126). He formed and paid for the creation of

what he called "a full and permanent orchestra, offering the best music at low prices, such as may be found in all the European cities" (Levine 122). Higginson priced performances in reach of the middle classes as well as the elite, to expose as many people as he could to the classical canon. And so, in 1881, the Boston Symphony Orchestra was created.

Higginson took on a very influential role in the orchestra's artistic trajectory as a result of his immense financial contribution, with confidence that his own musical and cultural judgment was best in regard to most orchestral decisions. He reflected the anti-union and anti-worker attitudes of much of the socioeconomic elite at the time, arguing "the importance of populist musical institutions in a democratic society, while believing just as fervently that control of such institutions could not be in the hands of practitioners" (Broyles 12). While he believed in making the classical canon accessible to the working classes of Boston, he had no interest in allowing those that worked in the orchestra to have any influence over it institutionally. Orchestra members' contracts dictated that they could not play in other ensembles or play any other kinds of music, so that they could only devote themselves to the orchestra. They were not allowed to unionize, and could be fired at any time if Higginson disapproved of their playing. As a result he had authority over the sonic aesthetic of the orchestra, choosing conductors that aligned with his tastes and players that created the sound that he wanted. He delineated his purpose as "to pay the bills, to be satisfied with nothing short of perfection, and to always remember that we are seeking high art and not money: art came first, then the good of the public, and the money must be an after consideration" (Levine 127).

Higginson agreed with Dwight that the concert hall could act as a classroom of taste, but not an unlimited one. He believed that "great music, indeed great culture, had a limited audience and could be spread to large numbers only by diluting it, a tendency [he] battled against his whole

life" (Levine 126). With the goal of spreading "great culture" to as many people as he could while assigning value to it by implying scarcity, asserting that only a limited audience could truly appreciate it, the BSO became the first independent, permanent, disciplined orchestra which could perform European art music in the United States without having to answer to a disapproving public (Levine 126).

The orchestra began with most decision-making influence coming from Higginson himself and the conductors he chose, but as time went on, powerful, rich men in the city and region made financial donations which helped to maintain the orchestra's ability to play the music it wanted and stay open, and as a result also had some say in the orchestra's performances. They donated huge sums of money not just to support the institution but to influence it culturally and musically, and increasingly came to dominate the cultural scene in cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago (Levine 128). The boundary between the orchestra's financial and aesthetic influence was inherently blurred, and continued to become more blurred as donors could increasingly wield cultural or structural influence. When Higginson died in 1919, he passed his leadership to a board of trustees, dispersing the decision-making power and, over time, giving the conductor more control over the orchestra. The performers over time also gained better conditions, higher wages, and a greater focus on hiring American rather than European musicians after finally unionizing in 1942 following a strike and long battle with management (though in a pattern that mirrors most major orchestras in the US, they've still only ever hired one American and one non-white conductor).

A Brief History of the TFC

There was no permanent chorus at the Boston Symphony until 1970, when the Tanglewood Festival Chorus was founded. Previously, when the orchestra was performing a

piece which required a choral component it would outsource this role to choirs in the community, like the Back Bay Chorale or Chorus Pro Musica, but working with and scheduling rehearsals with outside ensembles proved too chaotic and unsustainable for the longer term. Additionally, when the BSO played at Tanglewood in Lenox, Massachusetts in the summers, coming by a suitable chorus was increasingly difficult as many of the standard choirs from the city were in their off season. As a result, John Oliver, who was at that time the director of the Framingham Choral Society, proposed creating a Boston-based chorus for Tanglewood which would sing in the summers with the BSO, supplemented by other choirs.

This eventually became the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, a year-round, volunteer choir that was a permanent component of the BSO. As such, it was held to the institution's high musical standards. Much of the original chorus was made up of choristers from the Framingham Choral Society that transferred over, as well as choristers from the MIT choral program, which John Oliver also worked with. Wayne, one of this project's interlocutors, became a member in its early years, and it was he who provided this history. The chorus grew over time, reaching more than 300 singers at its peak. The TFC performed works with the orchestra as well as a cappella prelude concerts at Tanglewood in the summers (Lunden 2010). As a volunteer choir, the TFC is distinct from the BSO in that it is predominantly made up of people who have had the opportunity to receive vocal training and can afford to donate significant amounts of time to rehearsal and performance at a professional level without compensation. It was directed by its founder John Oliver until his retirement in 2015; he was replaced by James Burton, a British choral conductor, in 2017 (Madonna 2017). The choir is its own ensemble, distinct from the orchestra, but their histories are enmeshed.

Legacies of Ritual and Invented Tradition

As part of the BSO's historical conception and evolution, the TFC has inherited a complex legacy of classed and racialized hierarchies, filtered through repertoire, aesthetic choices, and musical and behavioral conventions, all located within sacralized spaces and practices. The historical legacy of the BSO's conception in 19th century Boston can be traced through the rituals and traditions which fueled the narratives of its high cultural position, and how they supported the efficacy of the concert ritual not just through society but through time. Indeed, it has remained fairly consistent over the last century: "The ritual of the orchestral concert seemingly has not changed too much over the years, from the traditional sounding of the 'A' by the oboe for tuning, to the concertmaster's signal to the musicians to disperse after the final acknowledgement of the listener's applause." (Snyder 69) This consistency extends to the behavioral conventions, repertoire, and relative formality of the space.

The apparent constancy of these traditions through time is reflective of what Hobsbawm and Ranger called "invented traditions"— socially constructed conventions which are presented as timeless and often come to feel natural and inevitable. In the time when these rituals were first invented, the cultural space they inhabited became increasingly circumscribed and sharply defined, and "what was invented was the illusion that the aesthetic products of high culture are originally created to be appreciated precisely the manner late nineteenth century Americans were taught to observe: with reverent, informed, disciplined seriousness" (Levine 229). Various elements of European cultural symbols, religious ideologies, and political circumstances situated the Boston elite to reconstruct a cultural narrative in which it could locate meaning, comfort, and power. This was the case in Boston but also was mirroring more global patterns: industrialization and European (especially British) colonialism were at a peak moment, and white elites were both

experiencing extreme power and struggling with the effects of the mobility, displacement, aspiration, class divisions, ecological collapses, and radicalism that their own expansionism had set in motion.

Levine considers:

> The panoply of cultural creation, attitudes, and rituals which we have learned to call high culture was not the imperishable product of the ages but the result of a specific group of men and women acting at a particular moment in history. The reason why we have had such difficulty defining categories like 'high' and 'popular' culture and distinguishing with any kind of precision or consistency the boundaries between them is because we have insisted upon treating them as immutable givens rather than what the sociologist Paul DiMaggio has called "historically evolved systems of classification" whose boundaries have varied constantly; "ideological classifications in organizational forms"... To confine something as variable and dynamic as culture within rigid hierarchical divisions, which are then projected back into a past in which they did not exist, is to risk misunderstanding not merely our history but ourselves. (241-2)

As such, proper concert behavior for the audience remains quite demanding and specific. In 1892, Edward Baxter Perry told concert goers that they had "no right" to let their mind wander as they listened to the music: Attention, he announced, "is a rigid rule of the concert-room," and silence "is to music what light is to painting" (Levine 190). He even created a new commandment, as Levine calls it: "Thou shalt not whisper!" (Levine 190). Audience members were—and still are—expected to maintain rapt attention, without moving, speaking, breathing too loudly, or in any way disrupting the music. Intermissions were eventually added to allow people to talk and stretch, and ideally take time to consider that which they had just heard. Audience members were strongly discouraged from entering or leaving while music was playing, with the Boston Symphony's concert notes in 1885 ordering that no one "will disturb both audience and orchestra by leaving the hall during the performance" (Levine 190). Lights were dimmed to focus the audience's attention on the performers rather than each other.

Audiences had little to no agency over the music of the Symphony, or ability to express feedback, whether positive or negative. “Art was becoming a one-way process: the artist communicating and the audience receiving. ‘Silence in the face of art’ was becoming the norm and was helping to create audiences without the independence to pit their taste, publicly at least, against those of critics, performers, and artists” (Levine 195). Though “common” audiences used to encounter the works of Beethoven, Shakespeare, and other artists that had been claimed by the “highbrow” canon in their own preferred spaces, the process of rendering them as “elite" was already well underway by the time the BSO was created. As such, in Symphony Hall, audiences learned what it meant to consume “high” culture and how to do it “well” by learning to be a spectator rather than a witness, and to passively defer to the cultural “experts” in order to be cultured, refined, and morally developed.

Conductors and performers were also held to these kinds of standards of seriousness and propriety, and still are today. Lucy, a project interlocutor who has been in the TFC for more than 20 years, told me in an interview:

> Andris Nelsons was told by the management to stop saying lowbrow scatological jokes that involve bodily functions and stuff, which he would sometimes, and then he was told, don't go there. Like if a tuba made a noise, and he'd be like, Oh, that sounds like a fart, or something…he was told by management, don't go there. Don't say those jokes. Poor guy.

Though these kinds of jokes might not have been interfering with his ability to interpret the music or connect with the orchestra (indeed, it might have fostered stronger rapport with some musicians), the BSO management placed importance on a decorous tone being used when engaging with the classical repertoire in the revered space of Symphony Hall.

The dressing conventions of the BSO’s audience were–and remain– another important symbolic element of symphony decorum. There was a period of significant commotion over whether or not women could wear hats in Symphony Hall, with people complaining that they

blocked the views. This led to conflict in and out of the hall, and the symphony finally banned large hats or head coverings in 1900. Discourse around this issue accused women of being disruptive, as the "ornamental sex" (Levine 196), and of being unable to fully appreciate the fine art due to their vanity or silliness. Beyond the sexism, this conflict was reflective of the disciplined focus and intellectualism that was expected of audiences when they were witnessing a "great work"–- dressing immodestly or conspicuously represented an investment in the self rather than the collective worship to the 'gods' of classical music.

This principle was certainly maintained on stage, where performers to this day generally dress formally and homogeneously. A 1979 book about the Boston Symphony's history and players described the principle: "Listener concentration is greater when there are no unusual sartorial details to distract the audience eye" (Snyder 68). It goes on to describe the evolution of this dress code, which was strictly enforced by the orchestra manager: "A present longtime member of the BSO remembers sporting a pair of shiny black leather loafers on the Symphony Hall stage when this was a novel style in footwear, only to meet the reproving glance of the orchestra manager and be told to go and never sin again" (Snyder 69). Albeit a joke, the order to "never sin again" to frame this infraction points to how pervasive religious rhetoric had become in regard to the rituals of performance.

Diversions from traditional dress were only accepted, even seen as charming, when they were instigated by the director himself, and only in the relatively informal setting of the summer season at Tanglewood:

> At afternoon Festival concerts, everyone is dressed in white from top to toe except black four-in-hand ties for the men. This sightly regimen was upset upon a stifling afternoon in 1936 when none other than the normally 'correct' Serge Koussevitsky… 'asked for– and received– the audience's permission to doff his jacket: 'It is awfully hot. You will escuse if we remove our kowts.' Listeners, who in those days dressed to the nines even to sit on the lawn, responded positively to the maestro's cue. This precedent shattering event

> allowed comfort onstage after, and eventually led to an informality for loungers outside the Shed that Koussevitsky could hardly have envisioned. (Snyder 84)

From such a revered figure, a moment of humanness is rendered as charming and relatively inconsequential now. However, the fact that this was such a big deal at the time shows how much value the attendants attributed to the dressing conventions of those on stage, and to their own. The dress code acted as another symbol of the concert ritual which allowed them to perform social and cultural high class. Additionally, the dynamic between the audience and the conductor in this instance points to the intricacies of power distribution in the symphony context. Koussevitsky asking for the audience's "permission" before taking off his coat, though there wasn't much the audience would have been able to do to stop him without calling attention to themselves (which was taboo in itself) and the affectionate tone of the storytelling displays the ways that audiences had internalized their own passivity to the conductor but still appreciated being made to feel influential. The whole ritual is an exercise in trying to gain sociopolitical power by performatively forfeiting it culturally.

As such, the relationship between control and social order, both inside and outside the Symphony, became more closely knit. "Culture and order, order and culture [were] locked together in harmonious union" (Levine 200). "Culture", as a symbolic mechanism of social control, became one of the elite's strongest tools against the changing socioeconomic landscape of the city and society more broadly. The regimented behavioral conventions within the hall, therefore, became a strategy for keeping it clean of any indication of the lower classes, whether behavioral or aesthetic, and for honoring cultural artifacts that many of them indeed considered to be beautiful and sophisticated.

All of these ritualized conventions combine to construct the symphony space as what Jonathan Rosa and Vanessa Díaz call a 'white public space'. They characterize racism in relation to "white public space" as a fundamental power structure which was colonially conceived and is still manifesting and being recreated today. They articulate the US white public space, both semiotically and materially, as the sites, patterns, frameworks, and tactics which routinely, discursively, and sometimes coercively privilege Euro-Americans over non-whites and reproduce racism (Rosa & Díaz 122). In requiring what is essentially the performance not just of whiteness, but ritual worship of white supremacist symbols for acceptance within this space and therefore accruing sociocultural capital, the Boston Symphony Orchestra is one of the "white public spaces" that Rosa and Díaz refer to, and upholds and enacts white supremacist racism as such.

These traditions and the "white public space" they uphold have ongoing consequences in many different kinds of institutions which have used similar mechanisms of elitism and exclusion to construct their identities and societal roles. The ritual exchange between participants and narratives within the space is still carried out through semiotic systems of cultural and socioeconomic performance by engaging with rituals and displaying fluency with its symbolic, linguistic, and behavioral registers, and receiving acceptance and validation as a result. "Appreciation and understanding of the high arts is related to the context in which they are presented, and the context is generally more familiar to the upper-middle and upper classes than to others." (DiMaggio 150-151) In its modern manifestation, this system tends to uplift those who have had the background and education to learn those registers, (the "context" that DiMaggio refers to), and exclude those who did not. "Appreciation of and familiarity with the high arts is a trained capacity, with access to this training unequally distributed among social classes." (DiMaggio 149) This unequal distribution is also mapped onto racial and ethnic disparities,

reinforcing the orchestra and surrounding elite Western music institutions as spaces which are predominantly wealthy and European-American (which has become synonymous with white), and as a result prioritize white aesthetics, cultural behaviors, and sounds.

While this system certainly excludes many BIPOC people from ever accessing the culture and spaces of classical music, it also impacts the ways that they exist within it if they do. Davóne Tines, a successful Black classical soloist, said in an interview with The New Yorker the discomfort that he feels when participating in the semiotic rituals of highbrow classical music culture:

> I know just what to wear to signify class and status—that I'm an artist, but not too flamboyant about it, and I'm a little gay, and maybe even telegraphing a certain sexuality that's exciting to you, but I'm not being overt about it. There are so many levels and minutiae of messaging, and at this point in my life, having been forced into so many contexts, there's almost a certain play with it—you know? But it makes me sick, it makes me sick to my fucking stomach, that that's what I consign myself to everytime I go to an Upper East Side cocktail party. (Ross)

The performance that Tines has to engage in to signify that he belongs within the upper-class circles which his career has put him in directly caters to the gaze of the white and wealthy people around him, and what will help him to maintain control in an environment which is fundamentally unwelcoming.

This impact also extends to nonmusicians in classical institutions, and politics of visibility and value. Sarah, a Black female interlocutor, shared an anecdote of the "white public space" of the BSO:

> One of the things that is hard is the role of people of color. Since there are so few of us on the stage and performing, you know, you walk into the Hall and all of the service people are people of color: the ladies cleaning the bathrooms, the people sitting at the security desk. I'm always really conscious of that and I just say hello to everyone, because I want them to be seen, literally. We walk past [them to] the chorus room every day. You're a person, I want you to be seen. And one of the security guys, once said to me…I said hi to him, and I was the only person walking in. So I guess he took the

> opportunity…And he goes, "I sit here…every day. And you're the only…person in the chorus…who says anything to me." And all I could say [was] "I'm really sorry. That's awful…That should not be happening." And that just made me feel really terrible. I feel like people don't even realize that they're not seeing people. You don't say hello to this person you see every day, but you [greet] everybody else as if they're your best friend.

Politics of visibility are enacted in this example of the institutional culture of the BSO, and the ways that they unfold upon lines of race and class. This is also an example of how the TFC and BSO are "white public spaces" (Rosa & Díaz): racism and classism are reproduced not just through the people who are in the space but through the cultural conventions they follow. I will discuss further in a later chapter how increasing the demographic "diversity" in the choir will therefore not result in dismantling the fundamental racism of the institution and cultural system.

The broader power structure at work here is problematic in that it rests on an ambiguous concept of cultural value, which allows "culture" as a conceptual term to be used as an often coded and implicit (but sometimes explicit) tool of racial and ethnic exclusion which is predicated on some cultural expressions having more "cultural capital" than others:

> "[This] theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation… exposes White…culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison… In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society." (Yosso 9)

This set of intellectual and behavioral abilities are as such considered valuable in our hierarchical society. Participation in high-culture rituals can be a strategy to accumulate cultural capital, especially if economic and social capital might not be accessible. DiMaggio observed,

> "Fractions of the upper and upper-middle class that lack economic capital will accumulate cultural capital as an alternative strategy for maintaining and advancing their position in the class structure. The possession of refined cultural tastes can serve as an alternative to the possession of wealth and corporate power for asserting high status within the elite. " (DiMaggio 154)

This kind of cultural system perpetuates ideologies about what kinds of music and culture have value and which evaluative hierarchies are valid for making those kinds of judgements.

The cultural hierarchy upon which the BSO's elitism is predicated and the invented traditions which support it are fundamentally exclusive, directly through barriers to access and indirectly through the cultural norms of the space. However, all of this is not to say that non-white performers and music-lovers cannot or do not participate in the rituals of Western classical music – but as Tines' words show, the conditions under which they do so are always already shaped by hierarchies of race and class. A significant group of people who diverge from the white, wealthy stereotype have become longtime members of the BSO community, and have found ways to navigate its cultural and musical constraints. The next chapter will explore how and why they do so.

Chapter 2: Choral Togetherness: Mechanisms of Connection, Division, and Potential

The Tanglewood Festival Chorus is a professional, unpaid choir that requires a massive time commitment from its choristers. They often have multiple rehearsals and/or performances in a week and are expected to learn difficult music on their own outside of rehearsals. Though choristers are not compensated for this time, the expectations regarding skill and command of Western music theory are increasing, which has posed a significant challenge to its longtime members. Despite this, the TFC is a large, committed choir which generally meets the highest expectations of Western choral performance and is considered one of the most elite choirs on the East coast. And though the TFC is a predominantly white group in an organization which has layered historical and cultural forces that are designed to exclude low income and BIPOC people from succeeding as performers, it has a small but consistent group of BIPOC choristers, who generally express deep commitment and love for the ensemble. In this chapter, I will discuss what I consider to be the primary motivating factor for that commitment, given the TFC's intense demands of its choristers compared to most other unpaid choirs, and its rocky transition period in the last five years.

When I asked my interlocutors what they loved about being in the TFC, many offered similar responses: they were excited by the prestige of the ensemble and getting to sing with one of the best orchestras in the world, they loved the music itself, they loved the people they sang with and the close relationships they had formed over the years. They shared the pride that they felt for being a part of a group that performed at such a high level. But the most recurring response was about the singing itself, and how good it felt. They spoke about how singing together in such a frequent, committed, and focused way forged a deep connection within the community of TFC choristers, on musical, physical, and emotional levels. Each person spoke about the special

moments when they could feel that connection: they were described as “tingly…goosebump moments”, as “intimate”, “fulfilling”, even as a “state of ecstasy”. Every person described how those special moments felt to them, each a little differently but always with a tone of reverent joy. I call that feeling “choral togetherness”.

Celia described the way that choral togetherness merges emotional and physical experience, reflecting on her performance of the Shostakovich Symphony no. 2 with the TFC and orchestra:

> We were singing that Shostakovich and…one of the last few notes is so high and I'm at my limit in terms of volume and breath. Everybody is. And yet, I am singing as loud as I possibly can…I cannot hear myself but you can feel your entire body vibrating. And your head vibrating, all of it. That is such a rewarding feeling to be knowing [and feeling] that you're giving it your all. And yet all of that just disappears. And there's no sense of it. Except for what you're feeling, and what you're hearing…It's very weird… being super in tune with your body and all of the vibrations, but also very out of body because I'm not hearing anything…those are probably the biggest communal senses.

In this memory, Celia conveys the alignment between physical, social, and psychological experience, and the embodied trust that a person must have in their rehearsal and their bodily instrument to achieve it.

Shared emotional expression through choral togetherness can also be extremely intense when it serves as a vector for processing the emotions that someone is experiencing in their own life or in the world around them. Wayne remembered a moment when he was able to hold space for a friend’s loss while they sang together, and the intensity of the empathic connection that he felt:

> Like, on more than one occasion, but I can think of one specifically, I was singing next to this other guy. And he was a friend of mine, but he was a mess because his mother was dying from Alzheimer's. And we were singing – I’m getting emotional even thinking about it – we were singing some piece and I was so glad that I could be there with him, right then, because you knew he was doing it for his mom, you knew what he was feeling, right? And

> it's just like Dave, you know, at this moment, we're in this together. So that feeling is something that you don't get a lot in life.

As such, choral togetherness is what binds the ensemble together physically, mentally, emotionally, and even spiritually, and is what the ensemble is designed to create. The most beautiful and effective choral sounds come from when the choristers are sharing that feeling with one another, because it is created by and from a sense of total connection and synchronicity. It was not only a deeply important factor to the interlocutors' participation in the ensemble, but also in their identities and lives as people. Sarah, an alto who has been in the choir for 35 years, described what choral togetherness feels like to her:

> It's kind of focused, and it has a single mission. It feels like a group that is secure… that you can trust each other and you can be flexible enough to be in the moment and adjust to each other. You can just trust that they're going to come in when they need to…and that you'll kind of cover for each other when you need to. You'll be part of the whole. You've been plugging holes for each other, and you can just be seamless. I think of that point where it almost feels effortless even though it's not, there's a lot of effort and mindfulness directed there…like a weird state of ecstasy.

She explained that the feeling of choral togetherness is what has motivated her to be a lifelong choral singer, and what about it has been so fulfilling to continually engage with:

> I'm not really a joiner of things…But the one thing I can commit to is being in the chorus because I feel like that's my community. Because there's just something about being in that big group, of the body of people who are just on the same wavelength. You know, to the point where you're breathing together, you're listening to each other…your strengths are taking up someone else's weaknesses and…your weaknesses are assumed by someone else. There's just that deep feeling of contentment and… you kind of lose yourself when you're singing. It's such a weird state because you're thinking about what you have to do and you're producing. But, but just, you're doing it communally.

Everyone I spoke to echoed these kinds of sentiments about what made choral singing such a fulfilling practice. They all seemed to share a sense of gratitude, connection, and personal investment in the moments of choral togetherness that they had experienced, and recognized its power for transcending individual differences for a feeling of collectivity. I felt similarly: I have

experienced choral togetherness in the TFC and other choirs throughout my life, and am just as powerfully affected by the feeling as all the people I interviewed.

I spent much of the rest of my first round of interviews discussing what interlocutors felt they needed from a choir to feel choral togetherness. I pursued this question both because I had a personal interest in exploring an experience that I had been deeply touched by many times, and because I wondered whether there was other potential within choral togetherness for a wider and more inclusive range of human experience and response. I will spend the rest of this chapter sharing how they felt that the TFC mediates, creates, and inhibits choral togetherness, and what potentiality it might hold for the ensemble's future as a less culturally hierarchical entity.

Creating and Inhibiting Choral Togetherness

In this section I will outline the various ritualized processes which structure the development of choral togetherness in Western choral settings like the TFC. Though they are all broadly accepted strategies for collectively attuning and communicating a piece of music, they also can work to constrain or inhibit the feeling of choral togetherness when they are engaged with along lines of difference, exclusion, or inaccessibility. This paradox is a central element to understanding the way that many of my project's interlocutors relate to choral musicking in the TFC: the same processes which might make them feel closest and most connected to the choir in one moment or context might be a force for offense, pain, or isolation in the next. As such, understanding these mechanisms and the impact they have on various choristers' musical experiences is important for analyzing how (and at whose expense) choral togetherness is mediated in the TFC, and how the construction and experience of choral togetherness fits into a broader story of difference, power, and connection in the TFC and BSO.

One such mechanism is the chorister-conductor relationship. Almost all contemporary Western choirs have conductors whose musical visions and interpretations dictate almost every aspect of the ensembles they direct. This power dynamic manifests on the levels of both ensemble and institution, and has the power both to unify and inspire and to cause harm. Within the ensemble space, a conductor's role is to have an interpretive vision for the choir, to communicate it clearly, and to hold the choir accountable to it over time.

A few shared that they preferred singing with a conductor rather than without one because it took the pressure off of them to interpret or understand the music, especially on a more technical or theoretical level, and allowed them to focus more on listening and connecting to the rest of the group. Lucy, an alto who has been in the choir for 25 years, told me that she prefers "getting the conductor in front of us because I want to follow, and then I can be free to just kind of hear the sound around me, and work together that way." She thinks that a good conductor is someone "who's clear. His intentions are clear from the beginning, someone who's musical, understands the music… because I'm not so familiar with music theory, but understands like the chordal structure…harmonically, chromatically, musically where the piece is…going to be heading, what key it's going to go to… they will understand, and they do their homework."

Another important role of the conductor is to provide the choir with a sense of unity and inspiration. Many interlocutors discussed the importance of this in their interviews. Lucy said that "You should be inspired by the person." A conductor should "inspire you to be the best singer, as you can in rehearsals and for the performance." This inspiration is important because it helps to bring together and motivate the choir, even and especially when they're tired, nervous, or underprepared: a good conductor helps choristers to do their best work and deliver a compelling performance even under difficult circumstances. Maria, a soprano with 12 years of experience in

the TFC, specified that "The leader has to be someone who challenges me, whom I admire, someone that I feel that I trust to tell me what to do or to lead me." Some pointed to a sense of mutuality: Celia, a 25-year old alto who joined in 2018, told me that she is "a big fan of when conductors are obviously serious about their job, but trust you, right? Like, trust all of the training and rehearsing that has gone in."

This structure has proved to be useful and important to many effective choirs in which all members feel valued and respected, but it is not always this way. With so much definitive power given to the conductor's vision and often their ego, there is little accountability for abuses of that power, however big or small they might be, and massive changes can be made to the choir by the conductor with very little pushback permitted by the choir. From my own experience and those of the interlocutors I spoke with, this can sometimes leave singers feeling powerless and frustrated, forced to either leave a choir that they are emotionally attached to or stay in a situation that they cannot change. There are few structures in place for choristers to advocate for themselves within the ensemble itself without breaking behavioral expectations - choristers generally only speak in rehearsal when asking the conductor questions about his interpretive plan so they can better execute it.

This is reflective of the fact that choristers are often unpaid or paid significantly less than other musicians in both sacred and secular contexts, which builds in a kind of professional hierarchy in which singers are assumed to be participating for the love of it rather than as professional labor or artistry. The choir is regarded as a singular musical body, almost an instrument in and of itself, and singers are as such often lumped in with the whole rather than recognized as individual voices, artists, or even people. This positions the choir somewhere

between the conductor/orchestra and the audience, which is a similarly undifferentiated and disciplined entity, essential yet also lower in the hierarchy of power than the orchestra and director.

The major example of this which was explored in the interviews was a recent event at the TFC, which many interlocutors referred to as “the Purge”. When James Burton was hired as the new director of the TFC in 2017, he re-auditioned a large section of the choir, and cut a significant number of members. Many choristers who had been members for decades under John Oliver didn’t make the cut, and were outraged. Another large group of singers quit in solidarity with their rejected friends, and the chorus became chaotic and divided, splitting into the newer, younger group of singers that Burton was admitting and the survivors of Oliver’s generation of the choir, many of whom still feel frustration toward Burton’s decision. A self-proclaimed member of the “old guard”, Lucy expressed frustration with Burton’s handling of the situation:

> [Burton] should have just said, oh, I made a mistake. But he couldn't. Because he's, you know…he's a conductor. So it was just like bad feelings all around.…I wish he would just acknowledge it, that it didn't happen the way he wanted it to be or something, any kind of acknowledgment. But it's almost like losing face, you know, if he does admit something like that.

In this situation, the established power dynamics of conductor and choir prevented Burton and the choir from effectively communicating with one another throughout the transition, and left the choir (and perhaps Burton as well) feeling frustrated, unappreciated, and misunderstood.

Beyond the interpersonal power dynamics of the ensemble, "the Purge" also revealed and replicated other important aspects of identity politics in the TFC. Most immediately, the conductor’s powerful role can be problematic simply because of who is allowed to hold the position. Very few people who are not white men are hired for elite conducting positions, which means that many choristers and choral groups have very little diversity of direction. Sarah reflected on a pattern she observed in the directors of high-level choral groups:

> It's kind of a rotating series of people who..have these certain behaviors, a structure of… You know, it's like a prescription, like the charming, white, male conductor who gets out there and ha-has, jokes, and then, you know, kind of lays down the hammer and whatever…with that performative, "I'm the conductor" kind of loftiness about it.

Choristers are expected to respect and obey their conductor, which can support the construction of choral togetherness but becomes especially problematic when almost exclusively white men are permitted to hold those positions in elite ensembles. Given the power dynamics of these ensembles and the structures of power and ownership that have been historically constructed around classical music, the consistency of these hiring choices sends a message that only white men are appropriate vessels to interpret the classical canon. Especially to BIPOC and/or nonmale choristers, this messaging, whether internalized implicitly or explicitly, can be harmful.

One of the key conflicts of opinion I observed was regarding the importance of a familiarity with Western music theory for choral musicking. Some saw it as a vital component for the comprehension of the classical canon, some thought that it wasn't important at all in order to be a good chorister, and others fell in a gray area between. These opinions were especially heated because they reflected a current issue in the TFC.

The TFC's former director, John Oliver, did not prioritize a universal command of Western music theory within the choir. Maria explains: "Oliver also expected us to be good musicians and to know all these things. He just didn't test us for it, you know?... He wanted to know that, you know your music, of course. I think he concentrated more on the final product rather than the ways how you get to it." When Burton took over his position, however, having a background in Western theory became more important, and became an issue central to the tensions of the "Purge". Sarah told me that "[Burton's] goal is definitely to have a higher level of training…he would be happy to have…a requirement of a higher level of music theory knowledge. I would say he wants almost

conservatory level," and Sam agreed: "He's been very explicit about…wanting us to increase our collective levels of musical knowledge and understanding…He wants us to have that working knowledge of theory, those aural skills." This was certainly one of his criteria for the reaudition process, and many older members of the choir who had not needed to prove those skills in the past struggled with meeting his standards.

Some saw music theory as an important element to developing a shared musical understanding in the ensemble. Maria, who studied music theory throughout her childhood and trained at a conservatory in New York, "embraced" the new theoretical standards:

> I think it's vital for the rounded comprehension of it…I do think it's important…because it's a shortcut… it just shortens up rehearsal time if you don't have to explain every single thing. It just also makes you closer to the composer's intentions. And it puts you at the same level with the other musicians in the orchestra, because they are required to have a degree and to know all this. And I think it's important that we are all on the same level. It's to say, if we say, Let's speak English, and then I come and I don't speak English, then we can't speak English. Well, we have maybe a very basic conversation, but maybe we cannot discuss all the things that we need to talk about.

Sam, who studied classical music throughout grade school and college, agreed with her, saying: "At least in the type of chorus that we have, I do think it's important…. As of now, what we do, singing choral music behind one of the best orchestras in the world… there's a certain level of base knowledge you have to have to be able to sing."

For interlocutors who had not received advanced training in Western music theory, the new TFC expectation resonated quite differently. Lucy, who sang in choirs all her life but never learned Western theory, felt "frustrated" with Burton's changes because she didn't think that the level of theory he was asking for was necessary to being a good chorister.

> Being reliable and being on time and knowing all your music sometimes doesn't require seven years of music theory…So I wish that he would have recognized the value of people who are reliable singers, who can still sing, that don't know music theory as well as he

> would have liked. But did it ever stand in the way before? No… I never sang a concert I didn't know…I basically do everything that you need me to do. I just don't know the nomenclature for it…the proper terminology and music theory of what I'm doing.

However, she respected that Burton made theory such a priority:

> I think that's why he wants us to be more musical, understand the music a lot more: not his way, or the composer, but just the music. And he does a lot of his homework in order to communicate that to us as well. So I do find it interesting, you know, when he says these things, like, we're heading into E minor, you know, and even though I don't really understand it, I do understand it, you know?...In order to make… a musical point, all those things that like… we should know about those things. You know? Too bad I don't, but like it's good that he's making the effort for us to be more musical.

Lucy, who is in her fifties and did not receive theoretical training, also said that she "would have loved to [have] been more exposed to the technical part of music learning earlier," so that she might be able to understand that aspect of the music. Her trajectory to choral singing was through experience in a capella groups and choirs, which built up her aural training and precision but never embedded those skills in a theoretical framework. She is conflicted, in that she recognizes her own value and strength as a musician ("I do understand it, you know?") and at the same time has internalized the currency of classical training, resulting in a tension around what it means to be "musical" that values elite education over lived experience.

Sarah, a Black woman with a low-income background who also never received conservatory-level training, shared Lucy's frustration, saying explicitly that

> A lot of what's being required and the way it's being required, to me, doesn't have anything to do with being a good choral singer. And has a lot to do with, kind of, sets up barriers for really good choral singers, Black or, you know, whatever race, whatever race you are. But sets up barriers for people who don't have access to the type of training that... I mean, I got by on the skin of my teeth. I don't even know how I survived the re-audition.

She elaborated that there were things that Western music theory articulated using certain vocabulary or frameworks which could still be felt and understood without being framed theoretically:

> Things that you can kind of notice with your ears, I don't think it's necessary for you to be able to name those in a really formalized way…I don't think you need to be able to know the name of the chord you're modulating to. Of course, you need to know…some of those things. I don't think they're disqualifying things. And I also just think that they're things that…are going to exclude a very large number of diverse people who, who might be really great choristers, but who haven't gone to conservatory or even haven't had formalized [training].

Rather than providing a means to integrate and blend the choir, the formal musical training that was increasingly expected of choristers served to exclude those members without access to that elite privilege. Returning for a moment to Lucy's second quote, she used the term "musical" to describe singing that is informed by knowledge of Western music theory. I noticed that in other interviews, interlocutors who had studied Western music theory viewed singing "musically" as singing with passion or with good phrasing, whereas those without theoretical training associated the term with being able to read music with the lens of Western music theory. On the surface, it seemed that for a term as ambiguous as being "musical", people assign to the element of performance that they feel they have to be most intentional about. However, there is a subtext of privilege here: as a barrier to access that is often taken for granted by those who have it, the normalization of Western music theory as an unproblematic requirement of the TFC can passively reinforce a hierarchy within the choir that subtly devalues and excludes the musical and lived experiences of diverse veteran and potential members of the choir.

This kind of bias seems to be at the center of what makes these kinds of expectations problematic for choristers without conservatory-level experience with music theory. Sarah reflected further in an email about these experiences:

> The sense of "struggle" comes more from encountering the bias that formalized Western music theory training is the only mark of choral excellence, and not from the actual work of learning new theory skills. I'm always eager to improve my choral skills (seeking out resources, putting in study time, persisting), because I do want to meet the standard and

> add to my skill set. By high school, my ear training and solfege skills were solid, but when I was accepted into All-City, I practiced sight-reading and pored over music theory between rehearsals to catch up to my peers. In college, I was fortunate enough to have a choir director who incorporated intensive sight-reading, theory, and ear-training skills (James' approach actually reminds me very much of his), which allowed me to cover a lot of ground in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment. My college director remains my model of musical mentorship to this day, blending formal music training with a deep, empathic respect for choristers' individual musical journeys. Add to this my first formal individual voice lessons during senior year. (Side story: at the audition, my voice teacher exclaimed, "Where have you been all this time?" I said that I hadn't been aware until senior year that my scholarship would cover lessons. She was incredibly kind and apologized for asking, and said that it hadn't occurred to her that this could be an issue. I cannot state enough the kindness and respectfulness of my musical mentors at Vassar, the most elite of elite spaces, and I'm grateful to them these many years later.) During grad school and beyond, I continued to work on my sight-reading and theory skills in various Boston choirs, including TFC. The struggle is fighting the bias that sidelines excellent choral singers who might not have had access to formalized music theory.

The use of musical language is another important mechanism to consider, that can both inhibit and be a vector for choral togetherness. Some interlocutors observed that the language conductors use to communicate technique could also sometimes work to exclude those without formal training. Sarah, whose admission into the New York All-City Chorus in high school was her first experience in a higher-level chorus, reflected on what it was like to be surrounded by students who had already applied an elite technical vocabulary to their singing processes which was unfamiliar to her:

> In All-City, that was really the first time I was around people who had had voice lessons, and…that [vocabulary] was really ingrained…Some of them had either taken private lessons or they went to schools like Music and Art[s]... they were musicians, you know? They were formally trained, so they'd get up there and they could, you know, rattle off…They had this whole vocabulary of, you know, "opening up" and "feeling the band" and, and "expanding" and all of this…And in a way, I didn't like that it dragged me away from [focusing on] my sound.

Sarah also shared an example of ambiguous directorial language which was harmful because of its racially stereotypical undertones, and made her, as a Black woman, feel uncomfortable.

> The conductor would say, “Oh, you know, sing it [draws out word] ‘lazy,’ make that a ‘lazy’ sound…pronounce this as in a lazy way…when if you're singing a spiritual…or something, where they want you to be a little bit looser, like a jazz thing…So we'll kind of like look at each other or you know, or during break, you might go, oh, gosh, yeah, we're supposed to be [draws out word] ‘lazy,’ okay, we get it, we get the code…Some, I think sometimes you look, in the case of a conductor who is using language, that's just stereotypical…you wonder how deeply it goes. It's like, does he think I sound lazy when I talk?...Is he or she judging me?

This kind of terminology might have seemed insightful or intuitive to the white conductor because they did not realize its racist undertones in conjunction with Black music, but Sarah felt the full impact of the racialized language. This kind of situation echoes the conductor-chorister power dynamic discussed earlier, in which Sarah has no choice but to process the microaggression privately. At a personal level, her full trust in the conductor has been broken, which interferes with her ability to connect with him and the choir musically, impairs her comfort under his direction, and devalues her as an outsider in the space. Institutionally, these comments designate the TFC as a “white public space” that replicates and hierarchizes normative “white supremacist culture” behaviors and stereotypes (Rosa & Díaz).

Choral lyrics are another context within the TFC where language may help choristers to develop deeper personal connections to the music that they are singing, but may also make that connection feel uncomfortable or fraught. In her interviews, Sarah described examples of each kind of lyrical relationship. She explained how lyrics can be an important component of creating musical imagery: “Sometimes there's just something about the emotion, and it can be like through the harmony or just the, the right words… when the music and the words would go together and the chorus was just coming together… [and] you could see the imagery.” However, later in the interview, Sarah discussed her discomfort with some common lyrical elements of classical choral repertoire. She brings up a frequently used motif of using darkness as a metaphor for evil in the words of many British or European art songs, and a lyrical moment in the famous and frequently

performed piece *Carmina Burana*. She had sung it many times in many choirs, and always noticed how this moment made her feel:

> When… language, like, in classical pieces, [if] something is black, it's always evil or bad, or in *Carmina Burana*, where there's that word that actually sounds like the N word because it's n-i-g-e-r but it's [sung] with the classical Latin pronunciation, with a hard G… You know, "just" language, "just" words… [but] it's kind of like ugh, did we have to pick this piece?

These reflections are important because an important part of choral togetherness relies on a feeling of communal intention when communicating the message of a piece. It is easier to personally commit to a piece's meaning when you can feel everyone around you committing as well, which means that there is a baseline expectation for all choristers to feel and convey the narrative of the music, regardless of whether it applies to their lives personally or not. If you're singing a love song, you need to convey enamoration even if you're going through a breakup in your personal life. However, in this case, that pressure to express a piece's message forces Sarah not only to embody a lyrical message which devalues and offends her, but to pretend, at least in the performative ensemble space, that it did not bother her. As a BIPOC member of the choir, she is forced to maintain two identities: one, her private identity, that critically examines TFC norms and uplifts her, and another, a public identity that reinforces the values and codes of the white public space that devalue her.

In spite of moments like this, which were described in multiple interviews, they overall displayed a deep affection for the traditional canon of classical music. Celia said, "I do enjoy the music. I think it's beautiful," even while explaining the importance of branching out to contemporary and less frequently performed composers. Lucy discussed a similar sentiment: "All of those wonderful orchestral scores and things that people have sung for years. That's great. But maybe…open yourself up [too]." They seemed to enjoy having a shared canon of music that they

all understood and could reference – I also appreciated this with them in the interviews. We spent lots of time chatting about our favorite pieces in the canon, and our experiences singing them. Celia and I even realized that we had used the same book of 24 Italian art songs to audition for our high school regional and all-state choirs, and laughed about how familiar they still are to us. But while expressing deep affection for the repertoire than some of them had decades of experience singing, they all expressed a desire for something new, both because they were looking for new experiences within the ensemble, and because they all recognized the way that having a set canon drawn from the sacralized European repertoire could act as a barrier to access and belonging for non-whites in this white public space.

Another crucial element for the development of choral togetherness is the ritualized patterning and repetition of the rehearsal process. Choristers usually meet in the same physical space, sit next to the same people, and follow the same musical and behavioral conventions to rehearse music repeatedly until it is "performance ready", or until they have confirmed to one another that they have enough of a shared interpretive understanding of the piece that they are able to reliably feel choral togetherness while singing it, and convey it effectively as a result. In an elite choir like the TFC, these rehearsal processes have a regimented structure which allows the choristers to learn music at a predictable pace for what is often an intense schedule of concerts. The rehearsal structure also allows the ensemble to clearly establish the conditions that support their development of choral togetherness.

In fact, many seemed to find rehearsals to be the most fulfilling aspect of their time in the choir. Lucy explained that what made the rehearsal time so special to her was how their engagement with the music built over time:

> And I feel that gives me happiness when I go to a rehearsal, and it's like, oh, that sounded not so great. But hey, you know, they're seeds of something good. And then every week kind of building it and organizing it until it becomes complete, you know, when you can hit send. I love that part. And, yeah, that part of it, and you feel like everyone is doing it together, I think. So it's almost not even the singing. It's the coming together and putting something together that will eventually be something great.

Lucy also said that choir rehearsals were meaningful to her because they represented time that she was taking out of her busy weeks to do something that was just for her own enjoyment. She explained, "I have a job and a husband…when you're a grown up and your life is so busy, and then you have one thing that is like your thing, that even makes it more special too. "

Given the fulfillment that interlocutors had (and I myself have) derived from building choral togetherness over time in the rehearsal space, I was interested in further unpacking the conditions that mediated its development. When asked to describe the structural conditions of rehearsals, they mostly focused on what was explicitly asked of them: be reliable and punctual, bring a pencil and musical score, respond sensitively and respectfully to James' musical instructions, and take notes when he gives a specific musical direction. However, I reflect from my own experiences in the TFC and other elite choirs that much of the normative rehearsal structure is communally understood and enacted but goes unsaid. Choristers are expected to embody many nonverbal cues throughout the rehearsal process, many of which are specific to the Western choral tradition. In my experience, ensemble members walk into the rehearsal room quietly, sit down and can chat with their neighbors until the conductor stands, indicating that rehearsal is beginning. Choristers know to breathe before a conductor indicates a downbeat, so they are prepared to sing at their entrance. Choristers are expected to have a straight posture while singing and breathe from their diaphragm so they can sustain the breath throughout their vocals. And in Western ensembles especially, choristers are expected to stand relatively still as they sing, perhaps swaying their torsos a little to support their vocal phrasing but nothing that would visually

distract from the sound they're creating—key conventions that emerged from the "sacralization" of this music.

Additionally, many interlocutors said something about behaving "professionally", or displaying "choral decorum." The tone of respect and reverence expected from the choristers' behavior (by the administration and each other) reinforces the idea that they are all participating in a musical tradition, institution, and space which has deep cultural importance to them. Most valued the prestige of membership in an organization like the BSO, saying that they felt honored and privileged to be a part of such an elite institution. This ideology is supported by the maintenance of "professional" decorum as a behavioral expectation. In an interview, Celia described the TFC as being "the most rigorous, the most professional. Definitely operating at a very high level of musicianship, but equally. Everybody is equally committed." When asked to explain what she meant by "professional", she elaborated:

> [Professionalism means] behaving according to whatever standard of respect. Respecting other people's time, and their effort, and also James's time and effort. So coming very rehearsed and being prepared to sing and rehearse well. And not treating it so casually…obviously, professionalism has problematic connotations … I think there is also an unspoken kind of pressure to dress like an adult. Like, I would feel weird just rolling in in sweats and a hoodie, you know? Because even though it isn't like a job, it very much kind of is almost like a job for many of those people. Or like a side job even though it's unpaid.

Celia's explanation shows the way that expectations of professionalism in the TFC are built on ideas of sacralization and elitism which I discussed in the last chapter: behavioral conventions are meant to reflect the seriousness of their task as the performers of the great works in a great institution. Puritan, church-like conventions of stoicism and modesty still carry over to the choir's behavioral expectations even when they're not onstage, because they are so enculturated into the musical processes themselves. As Celia said, these kinds of associations are problematic,

considering their roots in hierarchies of power and the picture they convey of what a prepared, respectful, “professional” chorister looks like. As I will further explain later in this chapter using Tema Okun and Keith Jones’ theory of “White Supremacist Culture”, these conventions of “professionalism” are rooted in upper-class whiteness, and it is therefore the performance of upper-class whiteness which is expected from choristers.

On a more functional level, these kinds of conventions, when repeated over time, build a shared sense of comfort, familiarity, and belonging within the overall formality that surrounds Western classical music. The act of repeatedly sitting next to the same people, doing the same warm-up exercises, and rehearsing the same music both helps the choir to sing the music in a more accurate and cohesive way and also builds a communal reality which is dropped back into and further developed in each rehearsal. Every person is included and relevant to that reality because they helped create it, and as a result each person feels that they belong in a community of their own creation.

Within that community, deep social bonds are often formed. After eight years as a TFC member, Sam reflected: “My time in the TFC and singing has been the biggest focal point of what I do, in terms of drawing purpose…There's a lot of similarities that I draw with people that are in that same community. It's a social thing as well. It's a family type feeling….we just have a big community that we formed.” These social bonds are not just happy consequences of all the time the choir spends together. In a group with such long-term commitments from members, they are important in and of themselves. Building choral togetherness over time often requires deep vulnerability from participants, and it is easier to engage in that way with people who you trust personally as well as musically.

However, these kinds of deep social bonds can also turn in on themselves within the community of the group: social cliques can form and sometimes result in group divisions. In the TFC, the age gap and circumstantial tension between the "old guard" and the new group of singers which Burton has admitted since he was hired as director has resulted in such a division. Sam reflected on these cliques, sharing:

> It does get a little clique-ey. There are newer folks, [that] tend to gravitate towards [younger] people. Older folks, same thing. You have age differences. So considering all those differences, I feel like I'm as close to the chorus as I possibly could [be].

Lucy saw the boundary lines between these cliques solidify after Burton's "purge".

> I think [Burton] didn't realize that this is a huge community of people [who have] known each other for years. And when you cut 90 people just like that, you're going to lose like an additional 40 people who say, I cannot believe you just did that. A major chunk of the tenor section…all left, because they're like, No, no, you can't do that to our friends… And that was bad because they're desperate for tenors now, sadly.

Though Lucy attributed the resulting tension in the group mostly to Burton's original decision regarding the re-audition cuts, she also expressed that she thought the situation would be better if Burton was more "welcoming", especially to the older group.

> In rehearsal, he doesn't really talk to the older people, he generally only is very friendly and gregarious with the younger ones…I wish that he would be more welcoming. I mean, people have quit, because they just think that he's mean, you know? And I always defend him. And I say, No, it's not that he's mean, I think I said it's the British way. It's the perfectionist way, and you know, he never hid the fact that he wanted the chorus to be a certain way. But ultimately, it just comes across as just being mean, to the older people...It's clear that there's like a division, you know, in the chorus. And I wish it wasn't there because we're all there for the same reason, you know, to make music. So he may not like some people, and he may like other people, but every chorus director is like that, you know, John Oliver was like that. The younger folk are really nice kids, you know, it's not their fault. You know, but there is a division of us versus them in there.

Lucy's description of Burton's perfectionism mirrors "White Supremacy Culture" described by Tema Okun and Keith Jones, a set of norms of "professionalism" that "explicitly and implicitly privileges whiteness and discriminates against non-Western and non-white professionalism

standards related to dress code, speech, work style, and timeliness." (Gray) Ironically, the result of the imposition of Burton's working style on the chorus was not only the sense of exclusion of those who did not share his approach, but also the disruption of the sense of community within the chorus.

For Lucy and the others, the feeling of this musical community - choral togetherness - was the goal and joy of the TFC. Using Victor Turner's theory of how shared experiences of liminality foster social bonds, I can read choral togetherness as an example of the communitas formed from performance processes which are musically and socially structured through the rituals of rehearsal and performance, despite the distinctions and divisions that reflect structural difference and hierarchy. Turner explains that ritual processes like those being enacted in the TFC navigate the complex, dialectical relationships between structure and anti-structure, which are navigated around and through the experience of communitas. While the "White Supremacy Culture" of Burton's direction and the culture of "professionalism" in the TFC reinforce the "structure" of prevailing norms of culture and power, the choral togetherness sought by all of the choir - including Burton, no doubt - represent communitas, where anti-structure has the potential to create and strengthen bonds of togetherness that may transcend (and perhaps ultimately reshape) social hierarchies and distinctions. Turner saw that this construction of shared belonging could have a very wide range of outcomes, all the way from reinforcing hierarchies to overturning them in revolutionary ways. As such, the potentiality, for many different outcomes, at the heart of the communitas of choral togetherness has a dynamic relationship to the social and institutional structures which contain and sometimes constrain it.

Blending for Choral Togetherness

At the heart of choral togetherness in Western choral tradition is the role of “blend”, the sonic homogeneity that characterizes the traditional, “pure”, Western choral sound. Every interlocutor brought up blend as one of their top priorities when singing in choirs, and was familiar with the conventional strategies used by choral singers to achieve it. The centrality of blend has a direct impact on the types of voices which are valued and permitted into Western choral ensembles and institutions.

Interlocutors shared similar vocal techniques for ensuring the blend of their own sound with those around them. Many brought up the concept of “horizontal listening”, in which a person listens to the people sitting directly around them while singing to match their own voice’s tone, tuning, timbre, and volume to the others. If all choristers do this, it works to make sure that all the voices in the choir are able to create a uniform, blended sound. The singers told me in interviews how satisfying this process is, as they conform to the voices around them and feel the others conform to theirs as well. This is especially true for choirs with long-term members like the TFC, who might sit next to the same people for years and as a result become very familiar with how their voices blend together. A few singers even said that there are particular people that they really prefer to sit next to because their voices are really “blendy”, or even make them feel more comfortable or settled in their own voices.

Wayne explained the way that he specifically works to blend with those around him in Western choral spaces:

> I’m always interested in blend, you know, trying to see how I can blend in. I try to be smart about singing in terms of…trying to almost be supportive of those around me as opposed to leaning and depending on those around me. Some people like to be operatic and out there, and I try to be the other way. I've had a couple people say, wow, you're great to stand next to because it's almost like they feel more of themselves, as opposed to a competition… So I kind of like doing that. And I feel that in the Western style, or even in small group

> close harmony kind of things, I try to do that more, with respect to sort of more gospelly kind of music, then I find that I do it less, because it seems to be more about sort of the volume and the feeling than it is the blend, like the blend comes from the combination of everybody, as opposed to just, you know, me blending with the two people in on either side of me and the person to the back.

By drawing this stylistic distinction, Wayne calls attention to the expectation of "purity" in Western classical choirs, and how it is achieved through blend. Just as choristers aren't supposed to distract visually from the sound or experience of it, the sound itself isn't supposed to draw any attention to any particular singer but keep the focus on the music itself. This can be both frustrating and empowering - just as it limits the influence and recognition of each individual musician, it is also a component of how choral togetherness is formed in the Western style.

There are some voices which are less predisposed to create this kind of sound than others. Wayne told an anecdote about a tenor with a huge, operatic voice who sang with the choir for a weekend one summer, but was sent home after a few days because his voice wasn't blending enough with the choir. In her interviews, Lucy essentialized the ways that she thinks ethnic difference can manifest in vocal sound, and one's ability to blend. She is Korean, and told me, "A lot of Korean singers are very bright singers… There's a certain sound that Koreans have that is, and maybe it's the way that we say our language too, or something, but there's like a timbre that's really forward, the way we sing." Her voice has those bright, forward qualities that she was describing, and she said that it can affect her ability to blend in a Western choral setting.

These kinds of ideas about the relationship between vocal timbre and race/ethnicity are rooted in problematic stereotypes about whom, and from where, "good" choral sounds can come from, and it seems that the internalization of these ideas seemed to affect how Lucy evaluated her own contributions to choral settings. When discussing who in the choir had the best blend, she compared her own sound to a friend who she enjoys sitting next to:

> She is the perfect person to sit next to because she has a really pretty voice but it's like super blendy…I think hers is better. Because it's so, so great with anyone. Mine is a little loud and too full…sometimes it's too much. I think even if I'm singing piano [i.e. quietly], it doesn't matter, like something cuts through. So I'm always trying to blend and make sure, but not by cutting back on my volume or cutting back on my sound. Just like keeping an ear out.

Lucy also sings in a quartet with her husband, who is white, and her two half-Korean sons. In this setting, she is able to closely observe the differences between her "brighter" tone and the more "covered" sound of her white husband's voice, and how her children's voices compare, reflecting the entrenched semiotics of tone, timbre, and blend that she has learned from the Western classical tradition. In this comparison she seems to favor the timbre of what she calls a "white" sound, requiring her and her son's brighter voices to match it when the four of them sing together. She shares,

> My younger son is like a clone of his dad and [my older son]...is like me. And he and I blend. Like when he was young, we couldn't even tell the difference between his soprano and mine. So we have the same voice, like genetically, he got the Korean voice. And my younger son who has the covered, really blendy baritone…he has a white sound… he sounds like his dad, which is like a white covered sound. You know, when we're recording ourselves, [my older son] and I have to step back…They have to be closer and we have to be further because ours are much more projecting and bright….And they can get away with it because they have, which is weird, white voices, even though my son is half Korean.

In this description of their sound, Lucy characterizes the "ideal", "blendy" choral voice as being a "white" voice, not only contrasting her own tone to it sonically, but racially and ethnically as well. This is reflective of the broader history of how classical music became so rarefied in the first place: part of the political subtext was that everyone needs to follow the same musical rules, and the white, well-educated sound is the one that everyone should match. When Lucy realized that her family's four voices didn't blend together naturally, she didn't tell her husband and younger son to make their voices brighter and more forward, rather she and her older son made efforts to change theirs. This reflects the high quality assigned to a "pure", "white" sound and stereotypical

essentialisms of racial and ethnic difference manifesting in vocal timbre: both problematic elements of the Western choral tradition's semiotic systems of sound which combine to form the narrative that Lucy shared about her own experience - not just requiring a sonic performance of blend, but a racial and ethnic one too.

Of course, all cultures have their own aesthetic and norms; difference and preference are not inherently problematic. The complexity of this expectation and conformity lies in their political and racial implications within broader societal and institutional power structures. Like the racist microaggressions in the language used to describe a lazy sound, or the symbolism of darkness as evil, BIPOC choristers are required to outwardly conform and adapt in order to have access to the power, status, and musical experiences afforded by this white public space.

While the requirement of blend in the Western choral tradition carries complicated racial and stylistic connotations, interlocutors agreed that it serves an important functional role for the kind of musicking that most Western choirs and conductors aim for. Sam explained the ways that having a uniform choral sound is important for a conductor to be able to get the sounds they want out of a choir: "[For] any good choral direction, you're going to try to mold…obviously there are things that have to be right. You want a chorus that blends, you want a chorus that is good with things like diction, language, being in tune." Especially given that conductors usually have all the interpretive power, the collective embodiment and creation of sonic homogeneity by the choir is important so they can be flexible and adaptable to each new piece of music, and to the conductor's direction within an inherently hierarchical cultural structure that mirrors its broader societal contexts.

As such, they valued blend because they seemed to see it as both the sonic manifestation and a central ingredient of choral togetherness: a primary indicator and consequence of a choir that is well-synchronized in intention and deeply connected in the moment. It can only be achieved by a choir that is simultaneously creating, experiencing, and listening to its own sound, with choristers giving their all to it while simultaneously feeling their surrounding colleagues do the same. Celia said that a central element of this process is the shared breath:

> To be taking a breath, that's not just your own breath, but it's a collective breath, that's really good. I am especially partial to moments that are super quiet and delicate. And requires you to be pretty much soundless, and yet still making enough sound. And like when that all blends together, that is one of those magical moments ….And so when it's all in sync, it hits different.

Only by simultaneously listening and creating, supporting and being supported by their fellow choristers can they collectively create something so unified and beautiful. I and everyone I spoke with agreed that singing in a well-blended choir is truly an amazing experience for this reason. As such, the creation and feeling of blend is essential for choral togetherness.

The Cultural Costs of Blend

However, interlocutors also reflected on the ways that conductors' methods for molding an ensemble's blend could be detrimental to the creation of choral togetherness. Given James Burton's background singing in more "pure"-sounding British choral contexts, Wayne analyzed:

> If you're looking to build an organization that is of the British style, from which James comes, then there are not a lot of ethnic people doing that style. It's almost like John Oliver, specifically, and I think intentionally wanted to create a soup where there were lots of different ingredients, and maybe taken by themselves would not have been the most savory thing, but when you put them all together, it's a delicious meal…Whereas I think James is the other way. [He wants] clean, clear, chicken broth, nothing else, no vegetables, nothing. So I think that changed.

Sarah mentioned that sometimes a conductor's demands for homogeneity can be detrimental to a choir's ability to fully lock in to choral togetherness because they are too intense, or putting too much focus on individual technique rather than connecting with one another: "I personally welcome the fine tuning of the chorus. But I feel like some of it is restricting…I think that it makes people sing in ways that they might not sing…. Because we're so worried about making a mistake…If you think too much about technique, you can't really perform!" Ironically, efforts to achieve blend can detract from choral togetherness when demanded in the extreme.

In this way, the sonic, ideological, and behavioral functions of blend get complicated when read in the context of power dynamics which exist on ensemble, institutional, and sociocultural levels. Choristers are being asked to match their voices to a central "white" vocal ideal, in an ensemble space that is likely dictated by a white man, in an institution which promotes white, European culture as a "highbrow" ideal, and in a broader society which at best accepts and at worst embodies classist, white supremacist, and patriarchal attitudes. There is significant pressure, especially on economically disadvantaged and/or BIPOC choristers, to adhere to the expectations of their conductor and institution, even when they may be antithetical, offensive, or harmful to them or their communities. For TFC choristers of these identities, in order to be accepted into what is arguably one of the most culturally venerated ensembles and institutions in the region, they must accept the repertoire programmed, stylistic and behavioral rules, and the predominantly white and older demographic and cultural environment of the BSO and TFC.

Sam, who has been making classical music in elite, predominantly white environments since he was in middle school said that "Being a music maker amongst white people, you know, it's…a part of me when I talk about my identity." He accepts the predominant whiteness of his musical environments, and therefore always existing in the racial minority, as a given of being a

Black classical musician. The centrality that being a musician has to his identity comes with it the implication of being racially isolated. Sarah, on the other hand, explained what her lifetime of experience as a female, Black chorister in elite choirs has been like:

> [When] you choose classical music as a person of color, there are those weird moments where you're just kind of like, ugh, you know? I think it might be similar to... I talk to my friends who are Jewish, and who sing classical music. When they're singing the masses in Latin, and they're singing, oh, the Jews… killed Jesus. And it's like, how do you feel about that? [They say,]...yeah, I kind of just ignore that part. I said; I know [what] you mean, I do the same thing. So I think that there are a lot of people who feel… you know, we love classical music, but there are definitely parts of our identities that are like, Okay, you just kind of have to look the other way. Or say something to someone or...talk about it amongst ourselves.

Many BIPOC and low-income choristers struggle to avoid internalizing the often masked or depoliticized attitudes of white supremacy and European cultural superiority which define much of Western classical music culture. Wayne explained his personal struggle to feel belonging in the choir, as one of its few Black members:

> You want to be one of them. And that's one of the things, you got to be one of them. Because if you're not one of them, then you're not going to get ahead, you know? And so, in performing and singing, I wonder that sometimes. Am I just being one of them, or am I doing this just because I love doing it? And so that's why seeking out [more diverse programming] as one thing that I'd like to do more of. Because it's like, yeah, I'm not just one of them. I can do this, and I can do that. And it's different experiences and is more, in some cases, addressing some of the root things that I feel are lacking, you know, in me.

After explaining a microaggression that she had experienced from another TFC member, Celia said that she wasn't sure how to make the choir a reliably safe space for BIPOC choristers. She reflected on the ways that the TFC structurally fails to support choristers in situations like this, and her frustration with the pressure to deal with it individually:

> The TFC is not there [to support its choristers of color]... We go, we rehearse, that's kind of it. And so there's not a lot of time, and there's not a lot of space for those dialogues to emerge naturally. I think trying to have policies is difficult, because how do you write a policy about that? I think having somebody there, as a mediator in conversations is always helpful…because I, 1, shouldn't have to, and 2, do not have the bandwidth to have that

> dialogue all the time with people directly. It'll be good, if… allies, who are willing to take on that role of like, hey, so like this has happened. Could you maybe go talk to this person? Like, I'm happy to be present in the room, I'm happy to talk to them as well. But like, the bulk of the explaining is something I do not want to do all the time [given the amount of emotional labor involved].

The depoliticization and denial of racialized experiences in elite classical music spaces like the BSO forces the burden of processing, dealing with consequences, and seeking acknowledgement and restitution into internal and personal spheres, rather than treating it as a direct consequence of the racial and cultural past and present of the BSO. Celia continued: "It's not been publicly said, recognizing [that] we are predominantly white space, we are predominantly white and older. And so I think it goes back to like this whole kind of colorblind mentality of like, we don't really need to address this, because it's not a problem." As such, they fail to take sufficient responsibility for the situations that Celia, a young Asian woman, is put in by participating in the TFC, forcing her to do the work of dealing with it instead.

In moments when a conductor says something racist (or any other moment of collectively experienced racialized harm), Sarah said that it helps to talk with her fellow choristers about it to process and acknowledge what happened. She explained: "Moments like that, we always just kind of kind of meet in the hallway. The eyes will all meet during the moment." In an environment which provides no support for processing microaggressions, it is important for people with BIPOC identities to find other sources of communal acknowledgement of their experiences. With a director who is probably white and male who has all but total power over the space, the options are either to pretend that nothing happened or to find a safe space with friends, either nonverbally in the moment or in the hallway during break or after rehearsal, to find acknowledgement and validation.

To meet this need, structures emerge that both conform to and subvert performances of whiteness or white normativity in the ensemble culture. While the outwardly performed norms of the rehearsal space conform to white, upper-class behavioral conventions, even musical "Britishisms" as directed by Burton, subgroups also emerge to allow people spaces to share and process their experiences. Lucy told me about a moment when one of these subgroups emerged:

> We realized in one concert that almost all the Asians of the chorus were in it. And so we took a picture together…it was 34, 33 of us that just happened to be singing this one concert. And we were talking about in the hallway, all of us, Asians…and we realized [that] we have this weird reputation of being more reliable than the average person…Our resting, 'Angry Asian' face or the stereotype of Asians being stoic and hard working, it actually works to our benefit. We were saying, when one of us asks a question, and if for some reason it's given more validity than if another person asks the question, it's almost like, she's done her homework because she's Korean. That's not necessarily true, you know, [compared] to someone else. But for some reason, it's more valid if we raise our hand, and we never really ever have to raise our voice, or anything… You don't even have to call out, and we get, we get recognized because there's all this baggage about being a responsible, hard working Asian person, you know, so it's like, we get to weirdly reap the benefits. But then we get bad stereotypes. Like we're too precise, or we're too rigid, which is not necessarily true, you know? We were laughing about it. How we were all there, just that one time.

Lucy remembered this moment because a distinct space was created for all of the Asians in the choir to come together and find acknowledgement for their shared experiences in the choir. However, she also reflected that those identity-based spaces can also feel exclusive, sharing that she was sometimes in a "liminal zone," because she is Korean-American, and doesn't speak the Korean language. She said: "All the other Koreans cluster together and they'll speak Korean to each other. But I'm…too American for that group. But I'm Korean enough, you know, where I'm included… it just is very off." That group feels linguistically isolating for Lucy specifically because she shares part of their identity but not all of it.

The complexities of inclusive and exclusive social dynamics within the choir reflect the theoretical contradiction at the heart of communitas. Social structures and boundaries of difference

can feel like they are being transcended in the most liminal moments of choral togetherness but never really go away, and are sometimes even reinforced through ritual experiences. The mechanisms that build connection can also be exclusionary. Choral togetherness, and the communitas it develops, can do many different things, often paradoxically and at once. These cross-cutting lines of differentiation and togetherness, layered inclusion and exclusion, show that very clearly. Lucy's statement is also a salient reflection of the complexities of American identity in the choir and broader society: while the sacralization of this music was intimately tied to the fear (and reality) of diminished white/Yankee control in Boston, the kinds of people and identities which experience the consequences of the invented traditions created for that end are deeply complex in their own right. That tension and process is one that has never really ended, and is never really accomplished either.

For a racial community that has much smaller representation within the choir, those communal moments might feel quite different. Sarah told me about a similar moment: "Five [Black] people, and we were all [performing in] one concert once, and we're like, oh, wait, look! One of the people was joking and saying it's the Black Caucus here! Here we are…the Black people. And it's like, yeah, here we are….You know, the survivors." Describing themselves as the Black "survivors" is reflective of their collective understanding of the subtle cultural violences of the space, and how both everyday pressures and exceptional moments like the 'Purge' have reduced the numbers of Black choir members, to only leave them. It also acknowledges the work that they have put in to remain there, despite the barriers in their way.

I haven't spoken with the BIPOC choristers who have left, but I imagine that for those who did not have the same theoretical approach to choral musicking, couldn't find a community of peers who they trusted and could process things with, or didn't have the means to continue such

an intense commitment of time of work, the potentially unwelcoming environment might not have felt worth it to stick out.

However, through my research I also found evidence that the kind of choral togetherness that I have discussed in this chapter can, under certain circumstances, be liberatory and even transformative on both individual and collective levels. In her book *A Queerly Joyful Noise: Choral Musicking for Social Justice*, Julia "Jules" Balén explains the powerful implications of identity construction in a choral setting. In a study of the socially transformative power of queer choirs, Balén shows how choral singing can simultaneously (re)construct personal and communal identities of queerness and communally construct a space where all members are valued and belong. Through a "practice of holding ourselves and each other in valued identities while letting go of damaged ones" (Balén 30), choristers become "queer ethical subjects". The ethical nature of these newfound identities is developed through mechanisms of relating and identifying their own identity to the community, working to "transform the either/or produced through binary logic and valuing systems (you belong or you don't) into a logic of both/and (you are different and you belong)" (Balén 170). As such, her thesis rests on the claim that choral musicking has the power to bolster or even create social change through these internal and interpersonal identity constructions, and the power of the community built through and around them.

The kind of social transformation that Balén illustrates is made possible through the shared liminality of choral togetherness, and its power for deeply relating a community of people to each other by creating and expressing communitas, and reinforcing, troubling, or transforming social structures and. Balén says:

> Queer choruses perform in the slippage between sociomusical dichotomies to resist them...with an implied, if not stated, intent to transcend these binaries. To claim queerness

> in a place as ritually formal, proper, and normative as choral performances creates a place for… being new, ideal selves not based on othering. (Balén 171)

Balén's analysis of the potential that choral musicking has for social change speaks directly to Turner's theory regarding the ways that rituals can exist within structures while also holding the potential to channel anti-structural power in transformative ways.

Of course, the kind of setting that Balén is exploring is fundamentally different from the TFC in many ways. The sacralized, white-centered setting of the BSO puts the BIPOC choristers within it in a minoritized position, which is paradoxically both assuaged and intensified through their experiences of blend and choral togetherness. As such, my interviews showed clearly that there is discontent and critique within the choir, though it seems unclear exactly what this means for potential change within the choir, organization, or genre. To further explore and hone this question, I will use the last chapter to consider existing discourses about diversity within the BSO and TFC and consider what they may mean for the future of the organizations and for Western classical music more generally. I explore the ways that "diversity" does or doesn't fit into interlocutors' visions of the BSO's future, and what potential (for transformative change, structural reinforcement, or something in between) lies in the powers and relationships between choral togetherness, communitas, and diversity.

Chapter 3: "Diversity" as a Process: Necessary Possibilities of a Co-constructed Future

Thus far, I have articulated the important, layered contexts of the histories of the region, institution, and ensemble of the TFC, the rituals which have sacralized its musical tradition, and the mechanisms of blend and choral togetherness which currently bind, complicate, and characterize the TFC as a choral ensemble. In this final chapter, I will explore the ways that the "diversity", as a discourse, goal, or process, fits into the histories and social narratives of the TFC, BSO, and the broader classical music tradition, and I conclude by speculating about what role it might play in their futures. I will begin with a general discussion of diversity as a concept and discourse, explain the measures the BSO is currently taking to address its goal of "diversity", present my interlocutors' responses to diversity measures and discourses in the TFC and BSO, and finish by clarifying the kind of processes for change that they resonated most with and how "diversity" fits into them. In this chapter, my own use of the term "diversity" will either be in quotes, referring to the generalized goal that has been culturally established, or used when referring not to a goal but a *process* of change which challenges existing systems of whiteness and elitism even while existing within them, in which structural and anti-structural flows of power can align and co-construct in de-hierarchizing ways and the very concept of "diversity" itself is being collectively defined.

Why Pursue 'Diversity'?

Sam, a Black man who grew up an inner city, explained the lack of "diversity" in classical music, and how it feels to be an exception to the rule of exclusion:

> It boils down to, at the core, there's just not much diversity at all in classical music….It's a Western European art form, dominated by historically white people….You're not going to be able to sing in the chorus if you a haven't been highly trained, which costs money, or you have a degree or at least college level training in music, like those are going to be

> prerequisites. You can look at general demographics about college education in general, separated out by demographic or ethnicity or race or whatnot. There is a disproportionate amount of people that aren't able to make it to college that are people of color or minorities…[And] you also have a very small amount of those folks going into classical music, because it's not accessible in inner cities, it's not accessible in places where there are heavy populations of people of color. So at the root of it all, it's just not going to be super diverse. But the root of that happens way before even talking about the choral body of the TFC. It goes back to the communities where people are learning to do what they do. I was lucky enough to have the drive and the intention of going into classical music, because of a field trip I went on in fourth grade. And I was lucky enough that, you know, I had a black orchestra director, in my school district that I saw myself in, that was able to teach me through school lessons all the way up through graduating high school, how to play music. And if it weren't for that, I definitely wouldn't have been singing in the chorus…I'm kind of an anomaly in terms of that.

In some ways, the BSO and its cultural rituals have been grappling with paradoxes of power and difference since its creation in 19th century Boston, in response to the shifting cultural dynamics of the city. Grappling with questions of who gets to reside where in what cultural hierarchy, through what ritualized or semiotic systems cultural expression is mediated, and who gets to make classical music in what kinds of settings was a central part of the BSO's inception and evolution. The assertion of "diversity" as an institutional goal is the contemporary manifestation of struggles to answer these kinds of questions in the BSO and institutions throughout society, in their newest sociopolitical form.

Many people in the BSO and classical music in general seem to want to answer these questions in new ways, and confront and change the exclusive systems of classical music and the predominantly white cultural and demographic institutions they create. The issue of racial demographics is particularly poignant in the current moment because in the last decade, and especially since the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, American society has been experiencing one of its cyclical attempts to reckon more directly and lastingly with its culture of systemic racism and racial violence. In spaces like the BSO, issues of racial discrimination and white supremacist cultural ideologies have begun to be recognized, though many of the systems

and practices which uphold them remain intact. As such, orchestras like the BSO and countless other predominantly white organizations and institutions are expressing renewed interest in pursuing diversity, equity, and inclusion, conducting "DEI" (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) audits and focus groups, expanding existing community initiatives, addressing hiring and staffing, and similar efforts. In the music world, these often include programs to support access to classical music for historically excluded youth, and work toward bringing in more "diverse" conductors and repertoire. Many of the BSO's peer organizations have put out public statements expressing their intention to pursue these goals, though the BSO has not explicitly.

Attempts to reckon with or change the BSO's culture have manifested in many ways throughout time. Henry Lee Higginson himself created the Pops in 1885, only four years after creating the orchestra, to provide employment for the orchestra in the off season, programming "light classics and the popular music of the day" in the summer months. (BSO - History) Especially as they evolved over time, the Pops often catered to a different audience demographic than its on-season shows, with different behavioral expectations as well (attendees can eat and drink at tables during performances). By programming concerts with more "popular" music during the performance off season, Higginson recognized and catered to more "lowbrow" musical tastes in order to keep the institution afloat and make it more culturally relevant. This is an early example of the ways that the BSO has contended with the social consequences of its exclusivity, and made a cultural adjustment as a response.

More recently, the orchestra has made various changes to its programming, investments, and public engagement due to the social consequences of that same exclusive culture. In 2019, the BSO held its first sensory-friendly concert, designed for audience members with autism spectrum disorders or sensory sensitivity, and have continued these concerts since. They include

modifications to the usual environment and behavioral expectations of the space such as "relaxed house rules, reduced volume and lighting levels, extra space for movement, available noise-reduction headphones, designated quiet room and support spaces, and credentialed autism therapist volunteers on site" (BSO - Sensory-Friendly Performances). These concerts are intended to make performances in the hall more accessible and inclusive to those who might be unable to conform to the traditionally rigid behavioral conventions and "foster a judgment-free environment" (BSO - Sensory-Friendly Performances).

The BSO has also invested in various community programs supporting youth classical artists. The BSO works with a program which was founded by BSO personnel in the 1980s called Project STEP (String Training Education Program), which works to give youth from historically excluded communities access to training in string instruments. The orchestra and Project STEP are also part of a community partnership based at the New England Conservatory called BEAM (Bridge to Equity and Achievement in Music), which is working to "support the expansion of available educational and career opportunities for young musicians from historically underrepresented communities," including "access to concerts for BEAM students and their families, college mentorship programs, college and career counseling, coaching by BSO musicians, and other learning opportunities" (BSO - BEAM). A recent surge of interest in "DEI" initiatives at the BSO were also brought up in multiple interviews, citing recent audits and surveys about "DEI" and the "culture" of the institution.

So these kinds of efforts for institutional change are nothing new, but they have generally failed in the past to address root problems of inequity, elitism, and exclusion as I have shown in preceding chapters. Cultural studies and queer theorist Rinaldo Walcott discusses the issue of predominantly white and historically colonial organizations using terms like "diversity" as

institutional goals to push for transformative change in his 2019 essay "The End of Diversity", saying that rhetorics of diversity and their resulting initiatives will not result in structural justice or transformation because they tend to continually center and mask whiteness, preventing the desired "inclusivity" from manifesting. Walcott argues that diversity rhetorics, as they exist today, are predicated on lies of white supremacy, faith in the current social order, and the origin myths of nation-states like the United States. Originally rooted in what he calls the "lie of multiculturalism", "diversity", for Walcott, operates as a performative stand-in for real change, a way to keep discussions of whiteness at bay while still catering to it in ways which are antithetical to transformative change. He explains:

> The structures that require radical transformation to change…cannot be transformed without the transformation of whiteness, and such a transformation can occur only if people marked as white are implicated and fully understand their implication and are prepared to act on it. The hard truth of the matter is that the governing and administrative apparatus of whiteness is prepared to appropriate any discourse, any politics, any ideas and ideals that retain the post-Columbus compact—a compact in which Europe and its derivative nations and their peoples now marked as white continue to be given privileged status across the globe. [They] (re)produce themselves and appropriate ideas like diversity, equity, indigenizing, and decolonizing while keeping in place all the institutions that flow from the initial and ongoing colonial condition and context. To claim that we can diversify, achieve equity, indigenize, or decolonize without taking on the social, cultural, political, and economic arrangements of whiteness is to enter the terrain of lies. Such claims of indigenizing and decolonizing in that fashion are coterminous with the logic of "putting history behind us." Such claims leave intact institutions not built for us, never meaning to receive us, as the ongoing regimen of our society. In essence, then, such appropriations of language invented to produce transformative change work to keep white supremacy intact even if it is an understated white supremacy… [R]hetorics and policies of diversity do not work to undo the power and authority of whiteness; rather, they work to calm white fears of a transformation that they believe would harm them.

Given this astute analysis of the way that terms like "diversity" have operated in many institutions like the BSO, it is not surprising that many of the efforts made by the institution to move toward this goal have been unsuccessful in addressing root causes or entrenched white spaces.

Walcott's assertion that "transformation can occur only if people marked as white are implicated and fully understand their implication and are prepared to act on it," especially points to the inherent limits of rhetoric and policies of "diversity" - it seems like this kind of transformation would require deeper levels of accountability, structural change, and cultural awareness that actually reckon with and work toward dismantling power structures that center whiteness, rather than just "diversifying" them. The "both/and", "you are different and you belong" concept from Balén's ideas that I explored in the previous chapter would likely not just organically manifest in a setting as hierarchized as the BSO even if its racial and ethnic demographics did become more balanced through "diversity" efforts. That kind of interpersonal dynamic of belonging, inclusion, and collectivity would have to be reinforced structurally, habitually, and in practice with frameworks much more broad and radical than "diversity" alone. Choral togetherness is especially valuable for this reason: even in the BSO's hierarchized space, moments of choral togetherness and its resulting development of communitas give a peek into what a collective embodiment of "you are different and you belong" might feel like in the TFC, and BSO more broadly.

Using Walcott's argument as a critical tool, it also seems that the current mechanisms for change in the BSO which focus on "diversity" seem to put the impetus for that change on the new, non-white people and cultural artifacts which would be theoretically brought into the space and required to blend to it, rather than critically re-examining the cultural norms of the space or asking the predominantly white group of people that are already there to critically examine and change their own ideologies and behaviors. Bringing more people of color into a space and system that requires them to blend in with white cultural behaviors which will likely harm or offend them seems to continue the patterning of protecting and accommodating whiteness that I articulated in

the last chapter, and considering the relative inscrutability of a term as broad as unqualified "diversity", would not hold the institution accountable for change via its own structuring.

While these kinds of "diversity" efforts might be flawed, the transformative, institutional change toward more newly constructed communities, styles of musicking, and cultural norms that they are supposed to be pushing for are deeply necessary, not just for the ethics but for the survival of classical music as an art form. In an interview with the New Yorker, prominent Black bass-baritone Davóne Tines said:

> The message I tried to send to organizations is this. Cool, you can do the D.E.I. efforts, you can play a Florence Price symphony on your program. But if you don't do it well enough, or if you don't address the root issue, it's not that you will be moralistically judged—it's that your organization will simply die. Mozart alone will sell tickets for only some years. When you get to Generation Alpha's kids, they literally won't have a context for it, and it will die. Entropy is real, and the universe moves on.

Tines' point is important: Diversification processes are not just important to support some kind of pluralistic ideal, they are deeply necessary for the future of classical music. An important element of this change would be the ways that audiences are anticipated and catered to: the demographics of classical music audiences are generally white and older, and in order to expand a new generation of audiences, the cultural priorities, traditions, and identities of the institution will need to adjust from what they have historically been.

The BSO, as an element of the broader classical music scene nationally and globally, can play a role in the survival of its own institution and the tradition more broadly. This means supporting the next generation of composers, so the genre can evolve. Celia articulated this in an interview, sharing that she sees institutions like the BSO as having a responsibility to support young composers of color:

> Just the same things over and over, the same types of composers, the same types of music. Very little branching out to new composers. The problem is, we're in Boston, which has so many contemporary composers and composers of color. I think the BSO tends, from what

> I've seen in the programming, to continue to commission or perform works by contemporary composers who are [more] well established already. They're not looking to take chances on new composers or young composers, especially those of color. That's problematic in many ways. At this point, it's 2021. You do realize the same old shit won't fly all the time!

She also spoke about how the BSO, given its large accumulation of cultural capital and influence, should be taking risks to invest in a new, more diverse generation of classical composers and musicians because it could lend them cultural legitimacy and opportunities. However, having established their preeminence by sacralizing a particular canon and particular spaces for performing it, it makes sense that institutions like the BSO would continually struggle to maintain and assert their own vibrancy and relevance as times and culture change. Even as they expressed fondness for the Western canon of white, older composers and repertoire, many interlocutors expressed the importance of the BSO bringing in a new generation of composers, contributing to the diversification and modernization the narratives being told, embodied, and listened to in the symphony space and helping to change its societal role over time from canonical museum to a more open space of musical performance and engagement.

Interlocutors discussed their desire for these kinds of changes, even as they too feel its conflict against forces of nostalgia and reverence which are so central to the American classical tradition, especially in relation to their identities as BIPOC. Sarah told me about how she and a fellow Black classical musician had discussed the importance of classical institutions updating their cultural values and practices:

> I feel a need to move a little with the times or we're literally going to lose our audience…And Black classical players and singers. We love the- I have a friend who plays a viola da gamba. And she's another Black woman. Early music is her thing, that is what she's immersed in. And we were talking, like, we love this music. We love it. We want to see it survive. But we also want to see the institutions come into the 21st century.

As people who would have been historically excluded from classical music based on their racial identities, their desire for it to change so that it can survive shows both the depth of their love for it and their understanding of the unsustainability of its systems of exclusion.

In conversations about expansion of the repertoire, conventions, demographics, and sociocultural role of the BSO, I and my project's interlocutors quickly realized that the breadth of the term "diversity" contains complexity in and of itself. As a vague, standalone goal, it could be referring to any range of variety and change and therefore carries very little conceptual accountability. In the 2020-2021 Annual Report on the BSO's website, the orchestra's previous board chair notes that the organization has "grappled with our society's reckoning with structural and social injustice, the BSO's role in perpetuating it over the years, and our intention to right these wrongs going forward. To that end, we continued our strategic, organization-wide approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion issues" (Hostetter). She is not specific about what that entails, or what kinds of "diversity" the organization is focused on. Indeed, while many expressed in interviews that "diversity" was decidedly important to them, it seemed to be an ambiguous, frustrating, and even impossible concept to collectively define.

The pattern of nonwhite classical musicians only having access to predominantly white musical ensembles and institutions in order to perform Western classical music at a high level often complicates their own personal cultural relationships. Wayne, a Black man who has been singing in the TFC for more than 40 years, shared his experience singing as one of the only Black people who have sung in the TFC for that long:

> I'm in two different worlds, right? I'm one of just a couple of Black people on stage… there'd be, call it 200 people on stage, and they're like, three Blacks, right? And you're looking out to the 1600 people that occupy Symphony Hall….and maybe there are five, you know, but the point is you're in a group, doing something that is sort of, Western white

> culture singing and performing in a group that is Western white culture, to an audience that is Western white culture.

He went on to explain how decades of investing so deeply in a white, upper-class cultural space has made him struggle with his relationship to his own cultural and racial identities:

> Part of me feels like I have divorced myself from my culture. Whether it's moving to Boston after living in the inner city in New York, or going to MIT and having a…successful…being economically okay. I feel like I have left that part of my culture behind. And don't know how I feel about that. You know? Should I be in it or not?...And then I asked myself the question, which I think is really an important question is, who defined affluence and liking Western music, and whatever, who said that's a white thing? Why is that a white thing? Economically, there are rich and poor people of every color, right? But if someone says it's a poor person, or a poor neighborhood, people think, Oh, it's a neighborhood of color. Why is that? You know, if people will say, Oh, this is a rich billionaire, chances are they're not thinking of a Black guy, or Spanish guy, or whatever, or even guy at all, a woman, they would not think of it, right? And so that issue of culture, where I said that, I feel like I've divorced my culture. Then I ask myself, who says that's part of, that's the only part of my culture?...I wonder how many whites wonder if they are white enough... if they're not rich? If someone's white and poor do you think they think, I don't feel like I'm part of my community? No, they don't!

The associations between wealth, whiteness, and "highbrow" cultural artifacts in the US is a continually maintained cultural ideology which prevents people like Wayne from feeling that they can truly belong at the BSO, with all their own cultural identities included. He can only develop that feeling of belonging over time if he, as Sarah put it, "looks the other way", in a way that most of his white colleagues don't have to. And at the same time they are left isolated from their culture of origin - leaving them unable to fully blend in either world.

The vague establishment of "diversity" as a goal gives it very little teeth or accountability for the institution, and made it hard for interlocutors to even articulate what the BSO is working toward in its "approach to diversity issues". Was it just trying to racially diversify, or do so in terms of ability, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity? How "diverse" was it going to make its staff, or the repertoire it performed? What were the boundaries of this process, and what kinds of

differences was it most trying to welcome and manifest? They had scattered and inconsistent answers, and this vagueness, and the unchecked and perhaps empty promise that it leaves space for, is evocative of Walcott's perspective of the dangers of words like "diversity" being institutionally applied as a broad, static goal. The gesture toward transformative change that it makes without identifying how the institution will get there makes it both a source of hope and frustration for many interlocutors, and obscures their own personal visions of what "diversity" might mean in the TFC.

Indeed, "diversity" being conceptualized as a desired institutional outcome rather than a deconstructive and reconstructive process tends to muffle actually-existing dynamics of inclusion and exclusion across difference in ways that often leave problematic dominant structures uninterrogated and unchanged, and does not challenge institutional systems which are barriers to both any imagined "diverse" end goal and any real engagement with traditions, practices, musicians, and repertoire which do not fetishize the same familiar canon and cultural value system. The rest of this chapter will be spent explaining why many interlocutors think the BSO's structural approach to "diversity" is failing and even sometimes acting as a barrier to change, and exploring their visions for what potential might lie in the kind of process-based approaches that I outlined above.

Chorister Visions of Diversity as Goal and Process

In a sociopolitical context which is more directly calling out institutions like the BSO for their problematic whiteness than has happened before, it seems that many people within the institution want to address this issue both in the orchestra and the tradition more broadly. The kind of efforts noted above seem to be doing important work, but they haven't made much of an impact on the demographics of the orchestra or choir themselves, and do seem to be emulating Walcott's

concerns regarding institutions using “diversity” as a goal while failing to address root problems of whiteness and exclusivity. They also seem to be failing to address the concerns brought up in interviews, as no one seemed to feel that the BSO was doing “enough” to address the racial and cultural problems with its institutional and ensemble spaces. Wayne, a Black chorister with more than 40 years of TFC experience, shared his frustration with the way that the organization has been handling their recent pursuit of DEI:

> When we're talking about this equal opportunity thing having to do with George Floyd in the BSO last year. The BSO put together a task force to discuss this issue and decide what the BSO's position is going to be, blah blah blah, and the orchestra put together a working group to start talking about it. And I said, we, as a chorus should put together a working group to start talking about this thing, too, and figure out not only what our position is, but more importantly, how do we deal with it? How do we deal with people's reaction to it and everything else? And what came back after not just me, but other people doing it? It's like, Well, you know, this is an initiative across the organization, and we're going to have to see what the organization decides, and, in good time, you know, the chorus will be included in those kinds of conversations and discussions and stuff like that. And I'm thinking, really? Okay, you probably have more people of color in the chorus than in the rest of the organization. And you're basically not allowing them or permitting them or encouraging them to either be involved in the process or to create their own process.

Wayne also brought up the ways that institutional power structures are being increasingly enforced, with boundaries of difference actually becoming more increasingly opaque and impassable over time. He said,

> The orchestra knows that it is a guardian of history, and guardian of a culture, and it knows that it moves really slowly. It's not clear how some of these decisions are going to be made….it would be better if there was more transparency. I mean, even things where, and this drives me crazy. When Seiji was there, I could walk up to Seiji and say, Hi, Maestro, hey, Seiji, how you doing? Blah blah blah, and then maybe throw in a comment about, Oh, yeah, that Daphnis was great. Or, you know, maybe we should have done whatever. As things change, you would have a comment, and want to say, I want to talk to Andris. No, you can't talk to Andris. What do you mean I can't talk to Andris, he's standing right there? No no, you have to go through here and here and here. I mean, it seems like, he's not God, he's a guy.

By further formalizing the hierarchy between conductor and musician, the orchestra makes its creative decision making more opaque and makes it more difficult for the choristers or

musicians to share musical or cultural input with them. Wayne explained that he thinks this is partially because the BSO administration has been called out in the press for their mistakes in the last few years, such as hiring known pedophile James Levine as the orchestra's conductor and the mishandling of Burton's reaudition process. Wayne said that rather than trying to openly improve their decision-making practices, they reverted back into the conservatism of established bureaucratic power structures, "buckling down", becoming more "stodgy" and "slow".

The subtext of the reinforcement of these kinds of boundaries is reflective of the BSO's historically stratified relationships between administration and performers, with creative higher-ups having most of the decision-making power, and musicians (especially unpaid choristers) being shut out of that process. Many interlocutors brought up the issue of the board of trustees (who, in Wayne's words, are "99% white, 99% old, and 99% in the Western tradition,") having so much power over the orchestra due to the essential donations and fundraising that they do for the orchestra. Though not necessarily a racialized system, the power dynamic between institutional higher-ups like the trustees and the musicians "below" them is indicative of the difficulty of breaking out of existing structures of power (especially when those in power cling to them), even as they try to enter into a space of change.

Another effort that the BSO seems to be making toward their "diversity" goal is regarding repertoire, and bringing in especially nonwhite or female conductors. However, as result of the institutions' predominant whiteness and the administrative struggle, and perhaps hesitancy, to break away from power structures and cultural ideologies which have upheld them in the past, some of the BSO's well-intentioned maneuvers to broaden the racial and cultural scope of their artistic pursuits have made their musicians uncomfortable and even offended. Celia conveyed such an anecdote:

> In my first residency, they had a John Williams film night. Which is great, because obviously John Williams– great conductor, great composer. Long history with the BSO Pops…But we sang this one piece from the movie Amistad, which is about…these slaves [that] had escaped and then they were brought to trial in America… The song is called Dry Your Tears, Africa. And it's based off of a poem that was written in the Mehndi language by a West African poet…[it plays when] all of those enslaved, newly freed men and women are making their way back home… There are a lot of feelings I had with this…it's beautiful and I think John Williams…based it off of this poem by a West African poet, and incorporated West African rhythms and things like that, but, I mean, of all the pieces to choose from John Williams' very large body of work, you decide to choose one about slaves returning to their homes in West Africa, sung by a predominantly white chorus. Seemed to me to be in very poor form, in poor taste, and I was uncomfortable singing it quite frankly. I was like, this should not be happening….the great irony of, your ancestors were the people who enslaved the very people you're trying to embody…a lot of that was very problematic, and not well thought out…If I'm putting myself in their shoes, it's like, we want to show that he's well rounded. And that he puts thought into all different kinds of stories and the diversity of his repertoire, but if you want to do that, this is not the way to do that. It's not appropriate.

Others had similar stories. Several mentioned an occasion when the choir sang Porgy and Bess with a cast of Black soloists, and many choir members felt uncomfortable sharing the embodiment of a Black story as a predominantly white, and predominantly non-Black, chorus. Wayne observed a broader trend in how orchestras like the BSO try to "diversify" their repertoire:

> You wonder if the group [isn't diversifying repertoire] because they want to play it safe, or whether the group is doing this because they feel the audience will not come, but in my opinion, any slight foray that they make into another culture, it's where the pieces that they have chosen are kind of more aligned with a Western kind of music…. A Western conductor and music director will say that one of the reasons that they don't want to do some other style, whether it's gospel or whatever, is because they didn't want to sacrifice the quality in order to do that other thing, which is really interesting because that means in their mind, they're associating a particular kind of quality.

Interlocutors seemed to agree that the BSO's love and tenacity for the canon and fumbled attempts at programming noncanonical pieces (especially those which explore non-white narratives) showed that even in their forays into more "diverse" repertoire, the administration's choices reflect a tenacity toward the status quo of the musical canon and creative power structures.

Wayne gave another important critique with his opinion of the tone of this process of repertoire and conductor "diversification":

> Something about the way this is being approached, it's almost like white settlers teaching Native Americans Christianity, right? To say, Oh, hi, we're up here. And we're gonna have a program, [sarcastically] we're gonna have a program for this and whatever. And I'm thinking, that's not right. That's not, No! You shouldn't...and I know he's very accomplished and everything, [but] Wilkins, the Black conductor, who does diverse programs for the BSO? He shouldn't be… like, oh, we're gonna have diversity programs. So we're gonna have to hire a Black conductor to do this, like, no, you can have a white conductor do it, but have a black chorus. The point is, why isn't Andris, like, you know, from Nairobi? Or something. I mean, why is it that you know, there is no Black person who is the managing director of the BSO? Or a person of color? It can be... whatever it is! Indian!... But the point is that when you approach it like a program, right, then it's different because it's not in the DNA of the organization….It's something you do to satisfy x, y, z, as opposed to being part of who you are.

Celia also pointed out that the BSO has internal, cultural barriers to connecting with an impactful approach to "diversity." She explained,

> This is not unique to the BSO by any means, but it's [the idea that] music is this place that's separate from the world. That all these cultural, political problems don't come to bear when [we're making] the music or when we're in rehearsals. But it's like, no! You forget, like, 1), music is not created in a vacuum, 2) the people who perform that music do not live in a vacuum. They are affected by, especially people of color are affected by all of these things. The concert hall, but also classical music…it's a museum, right?...all of classical music is about all of these pieces, these works are artifacts that we try to preserve in the museum of the concert hall. And they're dead. And we keep trying to keep them alive and putting them on display. And so it's like this weird thing where we're artificially trying to keep something that's very long passed.

One barrier Celia brought up as a result of this cultural insulation is a "colorblind" approach to difference on institutional and cultural levels, saying:

> Luckily, nothing outrageous has happened in my time [in the TFC]. And I think everybody in the chorus, or the vast majority of people tend to be those who are in support of equity and diversity. But it's not at the forefront of people's minds, I would say…I think the problem is, like, a lot of the acknowledgment hasn't happened yet. And it's not been publicly said, at least, recognizing, like, we are predominantly white space, we are predominantly white and older. I think it goes back to that whole kind of colorblind mentality of, we don't really need to address this, because it's not a problem.

Celia also pointed out the ways that these conventions, and their cultural subtext, are upheld by individuals as well as the broader tradition, even those whose sense of personal values might be in tension with that subtext. Even though she sees the convention of remaining totally silent during a performance as “ableist and silly”, she told me how irritated she feels when someone doesn’t adhere to the convention:

> It's hard because we've grown up in this tradition and are so enculturated by it and like, Damn, how do you break out of this?...I'm like, resist the urge to get annoyed…Why is this sound so triggering for you? Like, calm down… I think we're at this point, like, our generation, at least, is critical of it, and aware that it's not just some be all - end all. Something that is just there, something that should be questioned and should be challenged.

This speaks to the nuances of the Turnerian structure/anti-structure paradox which I introduced in the last chapter. Though many of the problematic aspects of the classical tradition are rooted in societal, institutional and traditional structures, they are also embodied and internalized on individual levels, even as those individuals may be aware of its problems and pushing against them.

I also found Celia’s quote personally interesting because I have had a similar experience. After reading all about how the conventions of silence were a part of the arbitrary sacralization of the classical canon and the ways that it excludes some parts of the disabled community (as well as most children!), I was determined to reject this idea and never get irritated when someone sneezed or was whispering during a performance. I failed, because I wanted to be able to hear the music! While I was “enculturated” to these conventions, as Celia astutely said, I also just prefer to hear the music in silence. However, as she acknowledges, identifying the ways that those kinds of sounds can be “triggering” of our enculturation and learning to read them just as sounds that are maybe interfering with the other sounds we want to hear, rather than within the tradition’s sacralized, ableist lens, is important in and of itself. Just because these conventions originate from

ideological foundations that I do not agree with does not make them all inherently bad all the time, and are in fact part of what creates a sense of communitas and belonging around the Western classical music tradition, for better and for worse. In this context, perhaps an application of the kind of transformative change that Walcott calls for in place of "diversity" would consist less of immediately discarding all conventions of classical music because of their cultural connotations and more of the kind of approach Celia took in our conversation: critically analyzing these conventions, where they come from, how they affects us, and what to do with them.

In spite of their strong critiques of the institution's goal of diversity, interlocutors seemed to generally display cautious enthusiasm for a goal of diversity, mostly because of the more immediate changes that its pursuit might bring to the ensemble and institution if better executed, and the kinds of lasting change that they hoped might come from pursuing it. While they were broadly dubious that it ever might be achieved, especially demographically in merit-based auditioned ensemble spaces, they seemed to be invested in working toward it.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, many struggled to agree on or even coherently define the BSO's goal of "diversity", though many supported it. However, when asked about what changes they would implement in the TFC or the BSO more structurally, many of them had clearly defined pictures about what could and should be done to make the space more welcoming and accessible to previously excluded communities (which many of them identified with), and how the cultural identity of the BSO might be changed. Once they were thinking less about defining the term "diversity" and more about processes of change, they had much more grounded opinions. My conclusion from our conversations was that, when conceived of as a transformative process rather than a static and ambiguous goal, conversations about "diversity" have the potential to build the

kinds of structural and cultural change that they valued and that the organization is at least ostensibly trying to work toward.

Many had specific thoughts about the explicit actions which would be part of a *process* of "diversification". Generally, they wanted to see the institution change its structures and systems in ways that would acknowledge its past, break down bureaucratic barriers and opacities, bring a wider variety of people into the various levels of the organization, broaden the repertoire that is programmed, and further connect with BIPOC and low income communities in Boston to support a next generation of musicians.

Interlocutors seemed to generally concur that this process would have to start with developing more trust between themselves and the administration, which would be predicated on them acknowledging the realities of the BSO's exclusivity and past harm it has done. This would be important because it would make the structural changes which would follow feel like a genuine investment in change and supporting musicians, rather than a PR move or removed bureaucratic choice. Breaking down some of the bureaucratic opacity which has frustrated some of the most long-term TFC members would be important for them to feel like valued parts of the organization again, and an important source of institutional faith for new choristers. Celia said,

> I think all too often things try and kind of get folded in together in like one generalized discussion of diversity and equity…Diversity, and equity initiatives are not just some, like publicity strategy, or something that you need to do to stay afloat in the current day, it's something that requires actual action. And really does affect the performers that [are] at the basis of your entire operation… And so taking very seriously their experiences, as people of color and recognizing that, we shouldn't address this just because… everybody else is doing a diversity and equity initiative. No, we need to do this because we care about the people who are in our organizations, in our institutions. And also, thinking just outside, we are not divorced from everything else that is happening in the world and in society. And it may have been that way in the past, but there are opportunities for breaking down those divisions of, 'oh, the BSO is a classical music institution. It's shielded from all of these things,' but it's really not …you're actually not immune to this. And there is a demand both internally, from your members and externally from audience members…for more diversity.

Almost everyone shared the opinion that these structural processes of change needed to pervade the institution on all levels possible: in the staffing, ensembles, audiences, and musical and administrative leadership. Interlocutors wanted all these positions to be held by people from a variety of backgrounds and identities, especially those being musically represented, so that more varied repertoire and cultural expectations of the symphony space could be achieved authentically. They called for the board of trustees to be inhabited by a wider variety of people, who will voice support for these changes and will be willing to take risks. Wayne expressed the importance of this change, saying "I think the BSO, just like other institutions, should acknowledge, recognize and totally integrate people of color throughout the organization…It should be like, we're all in it together." He emphasized how making these kinds of hiring decisions would be important for establishing new norms and expectations in the institution, and creating new narratives about who can hold power in a classical music space.

In our conversations about diversity, many spoke about a desire to have more people of color and from non-privileged backgrounds joining the ensemble itself to support their own senses of belonging and safety. Celia explained why it is important to have a community of Asian women to sing with in the TFC:

> As long as choruses continue to be predominantly white, it is that much more important for people of color to have their own communities within here to feel a sense of comfort and belonging, and safety and security. Because, like, I love singing in the TFC. But it is kind of an uncomfortable experience at times, and it's not specific to the TFC, it's just any chorus. But at least in the TFC, I have another group of people that I can sing with and just sit with, and we don't ever talk about this explicitly, but just being in that group is comforting for me.

Interlocutors also advocated for the importance of sharing and embodying more racially and ethnically varied, non-canonical repertoire to invite new musical and ideological relationships to form between musician, ensemble, and repertoire. However, many raised concerns about

approaching this music without having any representation within the ensemble or direction from the kind of experiences or identities that the repertoire spoke to or from. Sam reflected on a 2019 performance of Cantata Criolla, an iconic work by Venezuelan composer Antonio Estévez, sharing that the path to an authentic performance required the visiting Venezuelan soloists to do unpaid cultural labor, the difficulty of performing varied cultural repertoire as a predominantly white choir, and the importance of providing the choir with support when rehearsing a piece from a cultural background with which they are unfamiliar:

> If there's ever going to be a time where we sing or perform anything from artists that are minorities…then I'd be able to like, see, oh, are they bringing in the right resources? Are they bringing in the right people to instruct us? Or is it just James learning what he does and trying to bring that? Are we being authentic to it?...I think when we did Cantata Criolla the other year, because [[Venezuelan-born conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic] Gustav Dudamel was supposed to conduct that [and] he had to pull out because of injury. The soloists that we had were from Venezuela, and James got told, like, a few weeks into rehearsal, that he was going to be the one actually conducting this right? So he did his best…But with our actual rehearsals, like on the stage, and with the orchestra, a lot of the background and performance notes and things like that were given by the two Venezuelan soloists. So, that was good. That being said, I know for a fact, they weren't paid extra for the extra work that they did. Obviously, we had to do what we had to do. Dudamel was supposed to be in and he wasn't, so, that's okay. But in situations like that, it's like, could you do more to help make sure that we, as a mainly white group, are getting the info that we need to perform this accurately and effectively and correctly? I think the answer is always going to be that you can do more, but… If anything, you know, bring in more of our music. Bring in more diverse music.

This kind of concern for authenticity seemed to become especially poignant for interlocutors along lines of racial and ethnic difference. Indeed, at the beginning of this project, a significant reflexive observation of my own was the countless times in my own lifetime of choral singing that I have performed a Black spiritual in a predominantly white choir with no discussion or acknowledgement of that fact and its implications, and how uncomfortable I felt about those performances in hindsight. When reflecting on the "Porgy and Bess" concert I mentioned earlier, many felt uncomfortable performing a work which narrativized a Black story and experience as a

part of a predominantly white choir when the racial dynamics between ensemble and narrative were not being acknowledged, and they didn't feel that they had the guidance they needed to approach it appropriately. About this concert, Maria said, "if we have more of the real demographics, it actually will make a lot more input in the music and make it a lot more real." Several others expressed this opinion, speaking about a general need for the ensemble and creative advisors to represent people with experience or backgrounds in the music they were taking on, so it could be embodied authentically.

However, while many interlocutors expressed discomfort regarding their performance of Porgy and Bess as a predominantly white choir, this did not mean that it wasn't a meaningful experience to some. Wayne told me that it was a valuable moment for him: as a longtime Black member of the chorus, he said that, while he loved the music that he made in the TFC, he sometimes longed for an opportunity to engage with Black musical culture in the same way that he did with white musical culture. He described this experience as a "longing": "It's like, if you love cheesecake and you haven't had it in 10 years…I really like a lot of the things about Western music and the challenges and the harmonies…But you know, I just would really like some cheesecake now and again." He elaborated:

> Like, for instance, doing gospel pops, or having other musical styles, having more Blacks...I mean, you can't have everything all the time in life, for anything, right? But when you have something and you don't have much of the other, then that's where you start to feel that longing and the need for the cheesecake. And one of the performances, that really, I was so glad to be able to do it, was Porgy and Bess. Because here we are, Black, highly professional singers, you know, um, and, you know, the audience was more diverse than normal…and I'm thinking, this is great. Why isn't it more like this all the time? Now, I know Porgy and Bess is ahistorical and all those kinds of things. But I'm sure there are other works that are written. I'm sure there are other works that can be loads of fun, so there are other opportunities for non-whites to get involved.

While some non-Black interlocutors expressed frustration and discomfort with the performance of Porgy and Bess as an expression of "diversity" by the BSO, Wayne derived value and satisfaction

from participating in it despite its flaws. For him, it was meaningful to sing a piece on the BSO stage with famous Black soloists that narrativized a Black experience. While maybe he did not share that experience with those around him, it was still valuable. This is an example of how steps toward "diversity," however clumsily done, have the potential to both make a positive or negative difference. Interlocutors generally supported pursuing "diversity" and singing more "diverse" repertoire because, while imperfect, it was better than changing nothing, and because while sometimes it could cause discomfort or even harm, it could also provide meaningful musical and cultural experiences, especially to the musicians whose identities were being acknowledged in the process.

The tension between advocating for more "diverse" programming practices while at the same time critiquing them when they fall short is indicative of the push and pull of trajectories of change at places like the BSO. Complicated and sometimes precarious relationships can form among changes occurring simultaneously on varied institutional levels. For example, when considering the question of making repertoire changes, some brought up the power held by the board of trustees over these kinds of decisions, and how its financial role in the institution complicated both its "diversification" and its ability to support the kinds of radical changes necessary for the BSO to move forward. Maria reflected:

> From the top and the choices of repertoire and stuff, I think they need to choose repertoires according to their bigger donors and stuff, but I think they could also push the envelope a little more and be more inclusive…If you have a singer, you, you cannot say, Oh, I want to have 30 black singers in the choir and 35 Latino, you can't pick that….Because you want to have the best and the most qualified and you cannot discriminate that way, of course. But…there are wonderful conductors [and] repertoires in every single language and color, so they can start by doing that. Then the only problem [is] the audiences because, I, myself would love to go, I would pay to go see Venezuelan [singers] if they come with Dudamel, but I don't know if some white people would think the same. You know, and since they are, you know, demographically the bigger supporters, I don't know if they will sell out the performance. It's kind of like a catch 22….And I think it comes from the directives to take risks too. Because I remember for Cantata Criolla, it was very well attended, there was this

> huge group of Venezuelans that came with flags. So you, you know, you kind of have to take the risk too, and see…there's so much that needs to be embraced and needs to be adapted to keeping up with the way things are changing in our times.

Interlocutors seemed to agree that if "diversity" is not a universally enacted process on all levels of the orchestra, it will be difficult for it to be successful at any level, but that this kind of struggle would likely be a part of a transformative path forward. This means that a road toward "diversity" would have painful lurches, in which it was moving forward in some aspects but falling short in others. This kind of learning process would have to be embraced in and of itself, and built into the systems of leadership and accountability of the organization.

However, as Maria acknowledged earlier, making big changes in institutional decision making and culture across the board often appear risky to those currently in power. Celia pushed back against the narrative that this group of predominantly white and older people would not be open to change their musical values, saying that it is an "ageist [idea] that people are not open to learning. That is quite an assumption to make." However, Sam explained the financial implications of making these "risky" changes, and how he thinks they could be implemented as a structural goal in the organization:

> Orchestras, just by nature these days, don't have a lot of money. They're nonprofits, a lot of them, even the big major ones operate at deficits, and really rely on funds and donations. So a lot of them are just trying their best to create revenue…they feel like they don't have extra money to attribute resources towards something that's not going to bring them money. And it makes sense. But it kind of works the same way that the idea of reparations work, where you have to invest that money, just kind of expecting to lose that money in terms of not making a return on it, you have to do that first, to be able to create a program where you can create lasting effect on these communities that you want to touch, to bring in diversity…You're not going to get any money from it, right? You're not going to sell tickets on it. But it's an investment to create education for the community around you..because that one field trip I went on to The Nutcracker, that was one thing that touched me specifically. If I instead, along with a bunch of my classmates, four times a year, we go to Symphony Hall, and we've done four different units centered around, you know, William Grant Still or Gustavo Dudamel and the work that he's done with El Sistema, and then you bring us each year into that hall to see these performances and see how I could be that that person, singing or playing that music. And then of course, you still have the issue of, it's

> still a bunch of white people out there performing. So that's why you have to make sure that the people that are in front that are creating those programs are people of color, that you can create that connection, somehow…It takes several years.

He emphasized the importance of having people on staff that represent the communities that the institution is trying to attract and welcome, and the time it takes to make change:

> It's going to have to start with staffing, because artistically, the problem happens way before someone would get to the level of being able to be in the choral body or be hired as an orchestral musician. It's just not going to be diverse because you don't have that access in the community. So you have to start in the actual staff…Because you're not going to be able to have an organization run by a bunch of white people know how to get inclusiveness. How to really touch or how to really attract or inspire talent in those minority communities…If you're going to do anything to build up the next generation of classical artists, and create that diversity, you need to have staff that are going to make decisions to say, we're going to invest here and invest there…invest correctly and know about those communities. So you can be as gung ho about it as you want…if you're a bunch of white people, you're not going to know how to connect to those communities, because you don't know those communities…And if, you know, we can kind of get to the point where, Okay, great, like, this orchestra has now become a big part of this community. It's done a lot of good social work, you know, in terms of creating diversity in the communities and bringing minorities into the fabric of the organization. 10, 15, 20 years down the road, you can start to see a lot of that talent coming of age to be able to do something like join the TFC, join the BSO.

These are the kinds of processes which are so important for developing an institution and ensemble which contains a community with a greater balance of identities and backgrounds. Interlocutors acknowledged that this would have to be a long-term process, worked toward with strategies like the one Sam outlined above.

Tensions between advocating for the process of working toward diversity and critiquing it, pushing for institutional risk-taking while also investing deeply in its survival, show the complexity of the BSO and TFC’s reckonings with difference and change, and the ways those complexities are embodied and struggled with in the broadest ranges of American sociopolitical discourse and in the most individual, embodied experiences. Since the BSO’s inception in 1800s Boston and especially since George Floyd’s murder in 2020, people everywhere in American and

global communities have sought to better understand how to navigate complex systems and histories of racialized oppression and difference while seeking social change. "Diversity", as a central element of that discourse, is thus a lightning rod for both hope and frustration, representing a possible path forward and the fundamental obstacles that that path will face. Indeed, despite their awareness of the infeasibility in the near future of a goal like "diversity" in the BSO and TFC, interlocutors seemed more motivated by the processes to get there than the goals themselves, grounded in their own love for classical music and for the BSO itself.

Conclusion

In an article entitled "Black Beethoven," Alexis Holloway, a Black classical musician and anthropologist, explores the implications of imagining that a revered composer in the classical canon might be Black:

> If Beethoven were Black, my [Black] interlocutors would no longer be questioned about why they play classical music rather than jazz. If Beethoven were Black, maybe the racial hierarchies that are bound up in notions of musical genius and virtuosity could be dismantled. Perhaps the classical music canon could be radically re-evaluated. Or maybe the idea of "Black music" could be expanded to encompass classical genres.

While this example speaks more to the un-whitening of the canon than the diversification of it, its impact speaks to a similarly radical reconfiguring of the hierarchies embedded in the classical canon and its ideological system. As Holloway articulates, disrupting these hierarchies might allow for a change of the terms of engagement with classical music for musicians and audience members and the often racialized boundaries of exclusion which exist in the culture, repertoire, and demographics of the tradition and American society more broadly. The Black Beethoven hypothetical helps explore what it might mean for people of color to unapologetically take up space in the classical music world and claim it as their own, to look up at the name inscribed above Symphony Hall and imagine it as that of a person of color, to exist in a community which reveres

Blackness as well as whiteness (as well as other cultural and racial expressions) and has acknowledged and reconfigured the racial politics of its space. "You are different, and you belong." (Balén 170) Rooted in these kinds of imaginings, broader cultural and ideological changes in classical music and the more embodied experiences of historically excluded communities within the TFC are more connected than they might seem, and indeed are interconnected aspects of a potential trajectory of transformative change in the genre, its institutions and ensembles, and American society more broadly.

The hope and tenderness that Holloway's perspective holds for Black classical musicians and the possibilities for the classical tradition in general is a significant part of her argument, and speaks to a specific part of mine. The TFC, BSO, and broader world of classical music is inhabited by people that cultivate their deeply held love for it through their engagement with its communities and musical practices, formed during those liminal, anti-structural experiences of choral togetherness and collective performance. That collectively nurtured and individually felt love is what ritually binds the BSO and TFC together, what keeps them going, and what fuels many of their harshest critiques and most radical reimaginings for the future. It has been felt and fostered by me and all the interlocutors, and was what held this deeply critical thesis project together throughout its path.

Indeed, the paradoxical nature of this love – in the musicking itself, the rituals and feeling of communitas that structure its development, and the bonds that it forms even as it exists within stubbornly hierarchical and exclusionary structures – are where potential lies for the reinforcement, modification, or even transformation of the social structures that contain it. The dialectical relationships between these social structures and the anti-structure which flows and surges in and around them have been foundational to processes of change on all the contextual levels I have

explored in this process, including both the BSO's inception and history as well as discourses and experiences of "diversity". In the sense that processes of "diversity" are themselves structurally and ritually embodied, they reflect all of the paradoxes and complexities of American sociopolitics and cultures of whiteness, the sacralization of highbrow classical culture and inception of the BSO, and the ritualized systems of connection, exclusion, and performance within the TFC as a choral ensemble. "Diversity" contains great complexity, both as a conceptual term, in the ways it has been discursively used and critiqued, and in the role it has taken for the visions for the TFC and BSO's future shared in my interviews.

In spite of its flaws and paradoxes, interlocutors located value and meaning in "diversity", and had deeply insightful thoughts about its role in the processes of change that they imagined for the institution. While "diversity" could not offer a comprehensive solution, it did open up important conversations about what they think needs to change in the world of classical music as it exists in the BSO and TFC.

Rinaldo Walcott says:

> The truth is that white people clinging to whiteness and its ideological apparatus is as bad for them as it is for the rest of us. Their inability to betray whiteness as a structure of knowing, as a regimen of encountering the world, as a measure of what it means to be human, and as an arrangement for the terms in and on which we govern our collective selves remains a danger for all of us….White people will have to risk something here. They will have to risk that we will not do to them what they have done to us and continue to do to us. The measure of a possible future begins in the moment of the betrayal of whiteness, both in its bodily comportment and in its authority to know, narrate, administer, and thus command the terms of social relations and sociality.

With Walcott's ideas in mind, transformative change in the BSO would have to be a co-constructed process which fundamentally and without reservation challenged the pillars of whiteness and elitism upon which the organization was originally founded without reservation. (Finally deciding: is "diversity" the goal to aim for? Should this be more specifically about Blackness or other

racialized identities, or more generally about shared human experiences of making music together? What new pillars should we build upon?) In this process, members of the organization and ensembles on all levels would work to build a foundation of trust regarding the honesty, intentionality, and commitment of those around them, be willing to take actions which might feel like risks, and collectively decide what to change and discard in the classical tradition from a place of truly loving it. With the more open communication between administration and ensembles which interlocutors called for, the structural and anti-structural elements which have been pushing and pulling one another in the BSO could engage more directly with co-constructing a future for the orchestra and choir, and their musicking. That continued love for classical music is the glue of the BSO's structure, of this project, and of this whole potential process.

I conclude that diversity, when conceived not as a plan to include various repertoires and people in an unchanged system but rather as a transformative process that challenges the comfortable centrality of highbrow whiteness in classical music, has potential to help create an environment in which a path toward a mutually desired, imagined, and embodied future is being co-constructed on multiple interrelated levels: transformed institutional and musical systems, the acknowledgement and change of the cultural values they represent, and the trust and space given to collective embodiments of choral togetherness. "Diversity" has the potential to work with and against the performance rituals of the TFC and BSO in ways that could be transformative: not an antidote but a potentially important component for the evolution and survival of the TFC, BSO, and Western classical tradition as a whole.

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As I bring this project to a close, I am inevitably confronted with all I was *not* able to do: all the contradictions I wasn't able to unpack, all the contextual research I wasn't able to

incorporate, all the connections I wasn't able to draw. I have received feedback from interlocutors in response to (or even in conflict with) their choirmates' contributions as well as my own, and have been working to balance the varied and dialectical currents of intention, agenda, and ideology running through us all. Given the limited scope of the project (and that all works of scholarship are unfinished in their own way!), its process has left me most poignantly with the feeling of curiosity: about what I studied, but also how I studied it. I am curious about the ways that good scholarship can open up space rather than just fill it, and have learned and changed immensely through my clumsy exploration of this question in the last year. I hope that this work, however imperfect and incomplete it may be, can contribute to a discussion that I believe to be important about a musical practice that has changed my life and the lives of this project's interlocutors. May we all find the spaces and rituals of togetherness that nourish us most deeply, and hold ourselves accountable to and in community with them.

I conclude by most sincerely expressing my gratitude for the six TFC interlocutors, as well as my incomparable advisor Cathy Stanton and all my beloveds for their sweetness, patience, and support.

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