

Music, Race, and Human Rights in North America since 1948

Panel Organizer

Jessica Gienow-Hecht (Freie University Berlin)

This interdisciplinary panel seeks to offer a critical reflection of the interplay of music and human rights in North America since World War Two. To celebrate the UN ratification of the *Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), in 1949, U.S. composer Aaron Copeland published "Preamble for a Solemn Occasion" (<https://www.aaroncopland.com/works/preamble-for-a-solemn-occasion/>), a short yet solemn instrumental piece combined with narrative excerpts from the UDHR that draws on ideas of both pain and hope in a world seeking justice. Since then, hundreds of musicians, from Leonard Bernstein to Queen Latifah, from Yehudi Menuhin to Bruce Springsteen, from have cited music's potential to lobby for justice, freedom and human rights. At the same time, musical productions and musicians across all genres, from classical compositions to pop, experienced human rights violations, bans, incarceration, and torture the world over. American musical activists and human rights organizations, composers, concert halls, and conservatories, have all played a particularly important role in this scenario yet to be uncovered and analyzed.

Moving the focus from political actors and activists to cultural representation, the panel seeks to examine the notion of 'human rights' in the musical arena. Possible topics include human rights festival and galas, UN and US efforts to contribute to the "soundscape" of human rights, as well as efforts on the parts of musical artists to protest against human rights violations by way of composition, concerting, and outright political activism. "Human Rights," have always been consistently formulated and reformulated in the form of political and cultural practices and its meanings evolved on a par with historical processes such as (de)colonization, globalization, and transnational activism. The panel seeks contributions showing the extent to which musical actors developed their own set of visions of 'human rights,' in word, song, play, and deed.

Presentations

Sounds of Rights: The Declaration of Human Rights Concerts since 1949

Jessica Gienow-Hecht (Freie University Berlin)

Tuning into Justice: Yehudi Menuhin's Post-Holocaust Musical Human Rights Advocacy

Kira Alvarez (Freie Universität Berlin)

Identifying Classical Music's Racial Inequity: An Afro-American Perspective

Brandon Brown (Berlin)