

December 6, 2020

I am writing in support of David Rudge, whose work I have known about for many years, as a leading voice in improvisation pedagogy for classical and other musicians.

With skills spanning the areas of orchestral conducting, violin performance, and improvised music (performance and pedagogy), David is truly among the most remarkable colleagues in our field. I thus could not have been more thrilled when he and I teamed up in 2013-14 as members of the College Music Society Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major (TFUMM). Bringing together seven highly diverse individuals to advance a vision for the future of music studies, the TFUMM, particularly through its widely-read Manifesto, has catalyzed dialogue—which continues to this day—that arguably ranks as among the most prominent in the long history of music studies change deliberations. Moreover, given the recent wave of conversation on race and social justice, the Manifesto's advocacy of Black American Music is arguably more timely now than when the document first appeared.

David's contributions to that important work cannot be overstated.

First, he possesses a scope of artistry that recognizes how seemingly disparate creative/aesthetic/cultural streams can work in tandem to enhance overall musical development. When I think of individuals—and they are still at a premium—who are able to move beyond politically-correct progressive slogans, or from the opposite standpoint, kneejerk reactions against even the most modest intimations of diversification, I think of David. His kind of overarching musical awareness and understanding is invaluable when it comes to the reconciliation of longstanding tensions between the Eurocanonic engagement that has been the focus of most music schools and the African American core of our nation's musical heritage. The time has come to change this narrative to one of evolutionary confluence, and this will take individuals like David Rudge to guide the necessary deliberations.

A second realm of contribution might be seen as a subset of the first, involving David's precarious role as an orchestral conductor. I use the word "precarious" very carefully here, not as a pejorative (David is a first-rate conductor, with appearances across the globe), but to underscore the highly charged dynamics of the place of large ensemble in a changing music studies landscape. At a moment when the orchestra/band/choir experience is undergoing unprecedented scrutiny, informed and reasoned perspectives between conventional large ensemble advocates, pro-reform moderates, and anti-large ensemble extremists (my characterization) will be paramount to arrive at a solution that best serves the needs of our students, our schools and society. As expected, this topic was prominent in the deliberations of the CMS Task Force, and as lead author of the group's report, I cannot say enough about how David grounded the conversation in a highly nuanced grasp of pertinent musical, aesthetic,

curricular and pedagogical realities. While this conversation, in my view, remains in its embryonic stages, the involvement of colleagues like David will ensure that this important area of music studies and practice retains its integrity amid whatever the future holds for the field.

I have been happy, too, to encounter David since our work on the Task Force at various symposia and conferences. I was particularly impressed at the performance of his student improvisation ensemble at the International Society for Improvised Music meeting in New York City a few years back. I am hard-pressed to think of another colleague who bridges these areas, and could only marvel about the string players in the improvisation ensemble and what an example David was setting for them—here they are engaging in free improvisation with the same faculty member who conducts them in the Eroica, and also plays their instrument. That he moves fluidly between these realms only adds to the impact: if this is not the future of music studies, I don't know what is.

It is thus not surprising, when I examine David's worldwide conducting background and the reaction to such, to gain a clear sense of the energy and vitality he brings to this work, and his capacity to transmit this to the groups he leads. Given the well-known compromised fulfillment levels in the symphony orchestra world, the importance of this cannot be overstated. With David, it is all about the music, and few in the field are able to draw upon the scope of artistry that is part of his very being, and which comes out in all that he does.

I am happy to offer my strongest support for this exceptional colleague and his efforts to expand the creative horizons of today's musicians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward W. Sarath". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'E'.

Edward W. Sarath
Professor of Music
Department of Jazz and Contemporary Improvisation