

Chris Rose - DEI Statement and Teaching Philosophy for COA - March 2021

“You are enough now, you’ll be enough when we’re done, and in between, we play.” I begin each of my classes this way, hoping to set a tone of togetherness and equity that does not always spring naturally from music study. Despite music’s near monopoly on the verb play (we share it with sports and games), music as a discipline is full of rules, rubrics, and hierarchies that benefit those born into great privilege. Self-anointed gatekeepers help to maintain a status quo that is often preoccupied with rightness, correctness, and cultural possession.

Such hierarchies will perhaps persist in music as they will in the world, but in the classroom, they become objects of contemplation, inspiring us to action. We notice, we acknowledge, and we act, dismantling myths and the inequality they perpetuate. What music resonates with you? Who are the musicians that make that music? What life experiences influenced those musicians and which forces amplified or silenced those musicians and not others? In class, each question, each memory, and each perspective is welcome and worthy of equal time and inquiry.

In my role as teacher-curator, I strive to de-center the white male perspective, and center historically marginalized voices. What are the canonical works of each musical era and who bestows that status? Which musics are less digitally accessible and how does that shape our biases? What can we do to overcome those biases and see injustice where it lives? In my life, in and out of the classroom, music itself is the greatest teacher, an infinite font of truth. Like water, it seems soft and yielding, yet it easily overcomes the hard and the strong. It is a mantra I return to every time I play, and I seek to model it for my fellow students.