

De-colonize Our Music?

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Music is, arguably, the crowning artistic achievement of our civilization.

It grew out of many folk and ecclesiastical practices, but one of the great innovations that allowed both Bach and The Beatles, Beethoven and Broadway, Bartok and “beats,” is the theory of music.

Which rests on that great innovation, musical notation.

Not my area of expertise, alas, but I tip my hat to the educators who know the physics and the art in precise and powerful ways.

Unfortunately, stupidly racist anti-racism has infected even music education. The latest example? The

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University of Oxford is considering a plan to get rid of teaching music through teaching notation.

“Sheet music is now considered ‘too colonial,’” explains *The Telegraph*, “while Beethoven and Mozart, and music curriculums in general, are



believed to have ‘complicity in white supremacy.’”

While mainly an attack on classical music, our popular music rests upon a lot of basic western technique, too. The idea that musical notation is racist is itself bizarrely racist. Do these people think because whites invented musical notation, non-whites are oppressed by it? Yes, the opponents of western musical notation, who include “activist students” as well as “activist professors,” are apparently ashamed of a tradition focused on “white European music from the slave period.”

But until fairly recently, *all* civilization was “the slave period.” And Europe, which developed the tradition, wasn’t the world’s most slave-ridden society during the period of western music’s development: Africa and Asia were.

Slavery is bad. Very bad. Freedom is good. Very good. But you don’t reject good things because they once upon a time touched bad things. We can have both freedom and music.

And musical notation.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.