

Designing Educational Initiatives for the Music of Asian America Research Center (MAARC)

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Education Programs as Advocacy

Largely because of decreasing budgets, advocacy has become a hot topic in archives in recent years. In her 2015 SAA Presidential Address, Kathleen Roe called on archivists to be much more active and imaginative in showing how archives can be relevant to and inspiring for everyone.

Classes (adult, teen and children), webinars, podcasts, and instructive games are some of the most powerful tools for advocacy work. Yet, compared to museums and libraries, many archives—particularly smaller institutions—have not invested deeply into educational programs. Similarly, the archival literature on educational programs geared towards the general public is rather slight.

Educational programs that are geared towards groups that are underrepresented in the education system might be particularly effective. This is because:

- They demonstrate that archives are essential for helping underrepresented groups feel a sense of representational belonging.
- These programs often showcase items in the collection that are not easily located in traditional finding aids. This is especially true of colonial collections.
- They can spur new research and community activism that lead new users to come into your archives.

About MAARC

Vision: Advancing knowledge about and social justice for Asian Americans through music.

Mission: The Music of Asian America Research Center (MAARC) strives to empower our communities through collecting, promoting, and teaching music created by Asian Americans.

Working with You:

- To create a comprehensive information center for Asian Americans, educators, researchers, and students
- To build a digital archive for Asian Americans, researchers, and students
- To develop education programs for K-12 teachers, college professors, and lifelong learners
- To collaborate with musicians, artists, archivists, researchers, programmers and others to organize community events

MAARC's Educational Philosophy

Asian American music provides unique opportunities for teachers and scholars who want to engage public audiences on issues of race and cultural competence. This is because all Asian American musicians have to navigate numerous conflicting discourses.

In North America, music genres are defined largely by race—primarily Black, White, and Latinx. Musicians who write or perform in the “wrong” style are almost automatically (and not always wrongly) labeled “inauthentic” or, worse yet, cultural appropriators. This practice, coupled with the model minority stereotype, has led many people to view and hear Asian American musicians as technically proficient imitators with limited capacity for innovation and emotional expression.

How Many Asian American Musicians Can You Name?



Top Row (l. to r.):
Masayo Ishigure (Japanese traditional and contemporary classical music), Toshiko Akiyoshi (jazz), Bruno Mars (R&B, pop, rap), Vienna Teng (singer-songwriter), Vijay Iyer (jazz)
Bottom Row (l. to r.):
Xian Zhang (Western classical music), Krewella (EDM), Bobby Enriquez (pop), Van-Anh Vo (Vietnamese traditional and world music fusion)

Prog. #1: Lesson Plans for Teachers

The Program: We are writing a series of lesson plans for junior-high / high-school social studies, history, and music teachers. All lesson plans are designed to develop information literacy and critical thinking skills. In terms of content and concepts, each lesson plan (or set of lesson plans) has a different learning objective: from citizenship to labor movements, and from racial formation to intersectionality.

Outline of Sample Lesson Plan—The Life and Music of Anthony Brown: Anthony Brown is a Berkeley-based drummer. Of mixed Japanese, African American, and Choctaw descent, Brown grew up in San Francisco, Okinawa, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Germany. The Asian American Movement emerged largely during the years he lived outside the United States. As a result, he did not identify as an Asian American until he began playing music with pioneers of the Asian American jazz movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The main objective of this lesson is to get students to think about the process of racial formation.



Activities include watching excerpts of an oral history with Brown, and then discussing: (1) how is race a social construction? And (2) how is race also a lived reality? Scan the QR code to the left to watch one of these oral history excerpts.



The lesson plan also asks students to listen to and think about Brown's music. In particular, we raise these questions: (1) How does Brown embed his racial identities in his music? (2) Is Brown's music “Asian American”? If so, how? If not, why not? (3) Why did so many politically-conscious Asian American musicians choose to perform jazz? (4) Why was Brown's mixed racial identity so useful to the early Asian American Jazz Movement?

Scan the QR code to the right to listen to one of the excerpts included in this lesson plan. It is from *E.O. 9066 (Truth Be Told)*, a suite that was released on his album *Family* (1996). Brown wrote the work to commemorate the experiences of people of Japanese descent who were incarcerated in U.S. internment camps during World War II.



The *Family* CD album cover, with the wedding photo of Brown's parents.



Prog. #2: For Lifelong Learners

The Program: We are constructing a course that explores five pivotal moments in Asian American history and culture through music. The five moments are: (1) Early Asian immigrants and their labor, (2) The Japanese Internment during World War II, (3) The Growth of the Asian American Movement in the 1970s, (4) The Arrival of Southeast Asian Refugees after the Vietnam War, and (5) 9/11 and its Aftermath on the Asian American Experience. A free version of this course (five 30-minute podcasts) will be available on our website. The full version (about 12 hours) will be given live or be available for purchase for a nominal price in Fall 2019.

Audience: Our intended audiences include 1.5- and 2nd-generation Asian Americans in the process of identity formation, teachers/scholars who are interested in issues of diversity and inclusion, Asian American artists who want to find an Asian American artistic lineage or voice, and musicians/music scholars who are interested in fusion and identity in music.

Pedagogical Approach: The 5Rs

Much of this course explores uncomfortable topics and ethnic histories that are largely absent in most high-school and college-level American history textbooks. We therefore expect a certain amount of resistance from our audiences. In thinking about how we can get audiences to challenge their pre-existing ideas and to overcome their resistance, Julia Rose's Commemorative Museum Pedagogy (CMP) is particularly helpful. Here is a summary of her guidelines—the “5Rs”—for engaging audiences with difficult knowledge in a museum setting:

- Reception: A welcoming introduction that also alerts visitors to the fact that exhibits might be challenging and even upsetting.
- Resistance: Allow visitors to air resistance to the narrative you are imparting. These expressions demonstrate that visitors are engaging with your materials and experiencing a learning crisis.
- Repetition: Allow visitors to reread information and revisit artifacts both at the museum and online. Also retell information in different ways.
- Reflection: Encourage visitors to ask question and to converse.
- Reconsideration: Encourage visitors to provide feedback. Also, offer relevant social action information.

Outline of SE Asian Refugee Unit

In our unit on the coming of Southeast Asian refugees, we “receive” our audience by introducing them to Cambodia Town in Long Beach, Little Saigon in Houston, and Hmongtown in Minneapolis. We then tell the often neglected stories of why people from not just Vietnam, but also Cambodia and Laos, became refugees. Expecting “resistance,” we “repeat” these stories using oral histories and music, such as Bochan Huy’s “Chnam Oun 16” (scan QR code on the right).



We ask our audience to “reflect” on the music through a live discussion or a writing exercise. Finally, we encourage our audience to “reconsider” by asking, “How has the refugee crisis changed in the past 40 years, and where do you see yourself in today’s refugee crisis?”