



# EDI AT THE SFS: FOUNDATIONAL WORK AND THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE

JUNE 8, 2020

# SF<sup>SYMPHONY</sup>

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## AGENDA

- I. Context
- II. Ground Rules
- III. Introduction to the SFS's DEI Workgroup  
and Language
- IV. Reflections
- V. Q&A

## Appendix

# SF SYMPHONY

CONTEXT

# CONTEXT

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- Acknowledging current events
- Introducing our panelists
- Evolution of this session

# SF SYMPHONY

GROUND RULES

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Talking about DEI can be tough in any setting, and even more so in a virtual one. We've made a practice of setting ground rules for most DEI conversations in our organization. Here are a few our panelists believe could aid us, as speakers, and you, as listeners and questioners:

- Make “I” statements
  - Step up, step back
  - We don't have to agree
  - Be willing to be uncomfortable
  - Expect and accept a lack of closure
  - Be fully present
  - Assume positive intent
  - Avoid “yeah, but's”
  - We are all teachers and learners
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# SFSYMPHONY

INTRODUCTION TO THE SFS'S DEI  
WORKGROUP AND LANGUAGE

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DEI WORKGROUP

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- Representatives from Board, Orchestra, and staff, but limited in size
- Monthly meetings
- Workshopped concepts such as identity, power, privilege, and oppression to create a shared understanding and lay the groundwork for ratification of the SFS's DEI language
- Ongoing development of a culture of respect, trust, vulnerability, and acceptance of cognitive dissonance
- A space for learning and support



# PRINCIPLES

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These guiding principles of the SFS's approach to DEI have significantly shaped the work and culture of the DEI Workgroup:

- Holding each other accountable to an internal focus first
  - Avoid a program-only approach
  - Address the cause vs. the symptoms
- Working on capacity building and culture change
- Engaging stakeholders across all internal constituency groups and across all levels
- Learning to accept a slow process with non-measurable, qualitative outcomes

# FOUNDATIONAL LANGUAGE: PROCESS

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- A subgroup of the DEI Workgroup developed draft language, conferring regularly with our consultant.
- The Workgroup debated the language over several months, providing feedback that was incorporated into updated drafts.
- Additional care and work was needed:
  - Individual meetings
  - Deeper collective understanding of key DEI concepts.
- A team of leadership representatives worked together on a final round of changes.
- Over six months later, the Workgroup ratified the language with the understanding that it is a living document.

# DEI LANGUAGE: KEY CONCEPTS

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## Overarching Considerations:

- The importance of humility
- Language-related considerations
- Context and framing (where we are now)
- Where we want to be

# BEFORE WE MOVE ON...

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An appendix at the back of this presentation provides a detailed overview of:

- The nuts and bolts of our DEI journey over three seasons
- How we define the words “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion,” and what those words mean to us as an organization.

# SE SYMPHONY

REFLECTIONS

# SF SYMPHONY

APPENDIX

# DEI WORK TO DATE

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## **17-18 season:**

- Conducted an internal DEI audit
- Created a report on the current state of DEI at the SFS
- Joined the National Alliance for Audition Support
- Hired consultant Jessica Schmidt of Orchestrate Inclusion
- Held a Town Hall meeting on DEI for staff and Orchestra
- Launched a series of monthly DEI Open Forum Discussions

# DEI WORK TO DATE

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## 18-19 season:

- Formed a cross-constituent DEI Workgroup that meets monthly
- Draft DEI language formulated, debated, and ratified in the Workgroup
- Stakeholder interviews conducted by Jessica Schmidt
- Co-hosted a day-long workshop on racial equity in the arts
- DEI funding built into the operating budget for the first time
- Increasing ownership and engagement across the organization
- “Mini-retreat” held to select focus areas for the 19-20 season



# DEI WORK TO DATE

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## 19-20 season:

- Held Board retreat focused on DEI
- Musician-initiated DEI meeting held for the Orchestra
- Working groups for Artistic Programming and Heritage Concerts focus areas established
- Season brochure and press release reviewed by DEI Workgroup for the first time
- Organization-wide opportunity to read and discuss the book *White Fragility*
- Five SFS musicians and staff, including the CEO, participated in the Sphinx Orchestra Partners Auditions and SphinxConnect for the first time

# EQUITY: SFS'S APPROACH

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The SFS prioritizes the following actions in striving to achieve greater institutional **equity**:

- Acknowledging and addressing racism, sexism, and oppression of all types, both societally and in our industry and organization, and striving to understand more deeply the root causes and systemic nature of the exclusionary practices we seek to end.
  - Considering how distribution of resources, including money, power, and influence, directly affect equity.
  - Considering who and what influences the actions of the organization.
  - Recognizing disparities in leadership representation and striving to recruit and retain individuals born among historically underrepresented communities to internal leadership positions.
  - Centering the voices of the least represented and most marginalized individuals and groups across our efforts.
  - Maintaining a humble organizational nature committed to constant learning.
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# INCLUSION: SFS'S APPROACH

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At the SFS, the act of **inclusion** is focused on caring about others and working continually to deeply understand different perspectives, needs and experiences. True inclusion requires first taking an active approach to understanding, and then taking an equally active approach to driving change in response to that understanding.

**Inclusion** calls for consideration of the following questions in organizational decision-making. Does our decision:

- Enhance the comfort that people from all backgrounds feel within the SFS's spaces and with orchestral music?
- Demonstrate that more people, vs. fewer, "own" and can influence orchestral music as an art form?
- Encourage the SFS to learn more about what it does not yet understand?
- Give true voice, partnership, and increased decision-making power to individuals from historically underrepresented groups within and outside of the organization?
- Take into consideration how the organization might be rewarding privilege?
- Support the integration and equalization of many experiences rather than creating and isolating separate narratives that "other" a group or individual?

# DIVERSITY: SFS'S APPROACH

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## How the SFS considers Diversity:

- Diversity at the San Francisco Symphony includes race and ethnic background, gender identity, sexual identity, age, socioeconomic position, educational background, religious identity, and differing abilities.
- We recognize that intersectionality - when people's identities represent more than one marginalized group - is a critical aspect of diversity at the San Francisco Symphony.
- Because research and societal outcomes demonstrate that people of color fare the worst within all other categories of marginalization, we will primarily focus our efforts on racially underrepresented communities. We also recognize that gender identity and socioeconomic class are and historically have been a basis for exclusion in the orchestral music industry, so will take them as important parallel focal areas.