



[*The Horizon Leans Forward...Stories of Courage, Strength, and Triumph of Underrepresented Communities in the Wind Band Field*](#), edited by Erik Kar Jun Leung. Chicago: GIA Publications Inc, 2021. 576 pp. ISBN: 978-1-62277-539-2.

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The Horizon Leans Forward is a new resource focusing on topics and ideas of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the wind band field. The book has two specific goals: Part I aims to inform and educate readers about the experiences of different underrepresented communities within the wind band world. Part II provides an annotated bibliography of wind band compositions from composers who are members of these communities.

Although this book is published by and generally aimed towards Americans, there is Canadian content and influences within this important resource. The editor, Erik Kar Jun Leung, is Director of Bands at Oregon State University, but was born and raised in Canada. One of the contributors, Robert Taylor, is currently Director of Bands at the University of British Columbia, and shares experiences as someone who has lived and worked in both Canada and the United States. While many of the references and stories are told through an American lens, these stories from, and about, people from underrepresented communities are extremely relevant to Canadian classrooms.

The title of the book comes from a quote from the incomparable American poet, Maya Angelou, "The horizon leans forward, Offering you space to place new steps of change."¹ In the introduction to the book, Leung poses and answers a few key questions, to set up the overall purpose of this resource:

"Why do we need this book? Whom does it benefit? For what Purpose?"

"For those who have faced discrimination or prejudice..." (p. 16).

"For those who bear witness to discrimination and prejudice..." (p. 17).

¹ Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of the Morning," *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House, 1994), 269-70.

“For those who want to diversify their programming...” (p. 17).

Part I consists of six chapters written by individual contributors who share their specific journeys within the wind band community. These personal and sometimes painful stories are presented either as an overall narrative or through an interview of other people with shared experiences. The contributors provide first-hand perspectives concerning race (Black and Asian musicians in the predominantly white culture of band directors and composers), gender (women in a male-dominated profession), Queer identities, and the creative process itself.

All of the chapters are thought-provoking and presented in the contributor’s own unique voice.

For example, Alfred L. Watkins is a Black band director from Georgia and relays his distinctly African American experience within a profession that was, and still is, dominated by white band directors and composers. Watkins discusses the painful and disgusting racism he experienced as an African American band director in America’s South. His perseverance and strength are evident within this chapter. Erik Kar Jun Leung shares his personal struggle with wanting to pursue a career in music and not receiving enthusiastic support from his family: “I realized that there was a fine line between honoring my parents and following my own dreams” (p. 60). Leung goes on to interview other Asian music educators and composers about their journeys into their respective careers in music. The individuals he interviews include two composers, a high school band director, and two American college band directors.

Courtney Snider interviews five women with a combined total of 240 years of experience as band directors. Shared stories and recollections of female resilience, inspiration, and determination are celebrated within this chapter. Her interview subjects include the first woman ever elected to the American Bandmasters Association as well as four college band directors. Another chapter that celebrates and advocates for strong female perspectives within the artistic community was contributed by composer, author, and activist Alex Shapiro. She describes her journey through many different advocacy organizations and how it strengthened her resolve to become a composer, even though hers was a “non-traditional path” (p. 157).

In his chapter regarding Queer identity, Robert Taylor’s opening sentence is simple, straightforward, and wise, “We are all so much more than the labels we give ourselves or those thrust upon us” (p. 117). Important discussions can and should be had within our music classrooms surrounding the Queer experiences in wind band and music education. This chapter compiled interview questions posed to educators and composers to share some of their experiences. The answers will empower, inform, and strengthen conversations for students and educators involved in the wind band field.

The final chapter within Part I is a slightly more abstract exploration of *how* a wind band composition is created, rather than by *whom*. It is an interesting opinion to include within a book dealing with underrepresentation, as author Jodie Blackshaw encourages band directors to consider

repertoire that explores many different aspects of compositional creation and structure, what she calls the “compositional/creative approach” (p. 187). It is a unique way to express the fact that most of the historical, well-known, and often-played music in the wind band genre was composed by “dead white guys.” Nevertheless, she argues, today’s band director can and should choose a different path for their ensembles. She weaves her own personal journey of teaching and composing through *Sa Ta Na Ma* – a Kundalini Kirtan Kriya meditation chant “defined as the beginning and the whole of existence as ever it was and will be” (p. 185).

This reviewer, a cisgender, white, male band director, was moved and inspired by the stories relayed within these chapters. Simultaneously, many of the deeply personal experiences that the authors shared also led to anger and disappointment. While the honesty of a particular contributor is challenging within some of these chapters, reading each experience provides more resolve to do all that is possible to assist in the advocacy and positive recognition of the incredible diversity already present within the wind band community.

Part II of the book is an annotated bibliography of wind band repertoire written by or attributed to people within the aforementioned communities. Leung states in the preamble to this list that it is not comprehensive (no list is). Some composers who were contacted chose not to be included for a variety of reasons, and the editor respected their wishes.

Repertoire lists are essential for new and experienced educators and band directors alike as they provide concrete recommendations for how to include more diverse music into one’s program. One slight disconnect found between the repertoire list in Part II and the chapters in Part I was the lack of references to the attributes of the (R)evolution that Jodie Blackshaw presented. Perhaps it is because of the subjectivity surrounding the definition of the compositional/creative approach, and the fact that it would take an incredible amount of analysis of each piece – time that wasn’t available to the editorial team.

Nevertheless, the annotated bibliography provides fantastic information on works for winds by composers of colour, women, non-binary individuals, and those who identify as LGBTQIA2S+. In addition to these identifiers, composer information also includes their home country. Thus, for Canadian wind band directors searching for quality Canadian content, this list can introduce the reader to potentially unknown home-grown compositional talent.

An important topic in North American institutions is decolonization. This repertoire list identifies three pieces that were composed by Indigenous composers. The pieces include *Tupulaga Samoa* by Opelage Ah Sam (New Zealand), *Grandmother Song* by Brent Michael Davids (USA), and *The Magic of This Dawn* by Christopher Sainsbury (Australia). While none of these composers identify as Canadian, these works represent another step in the important conversation with our students and colleagues regarding the need to study repertoire by Indigenous composers.

Overall, *The Horizon Leans Forward* is a worthwhile resource for conductors, educators and pre-professional music students who are in need of more pragmatic and practical information regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion in wind bands and wind band repertoire. The stories and experiences shared by the authors are honest and cause the reader to think critically about their relationship with the wind band repertoire.

This book is a resource that will be of specific and particular interest to music educators in the wind band field. However, the chapters in this book will also be of interest to others engaged in broader aspects of music education. They contain stories and experiences that parallel discussions that are happening in classrooms and educational institutions across North America regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion. Another important group that should consider reading this book is pre-professional music education students. The chapters and annotated bibliography will add a wealth of information to their university studies and prepare them for experiential learning as student teachers and interns within their school placements.