

EDITORIAL

“Change”

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Typically, editorials are straightforward, written with relative ease as they function to summarize and frame the articles you will find within a particular issue. Somewhat more conceptually elegant are editorials which are shaped by a common theme, which allows for a process of creatively weaving together a shared thematic thread that runs throughout the various articles submitted. There are other times when an editorial must weave into its structure a pressing current concern or event relevant to its readers. My initial aim was to do just that. As I first sat down to write this editorial, which was back in the middle of May, the world was undergoing a catastrophic pandemic, a devastating death toll caused by COVID-19.

To date, millions of people around the world have contracted the virus and hundreds of thousands of people have died. And though we are all experiencing this pandemic, it is differentially impacting different communities, such as Black, Indigenous, and Brown communities, due to long-term disparities in health and access to nutritious food and affordable healthcare. We must take notice of the devastating impact on poor and under-resourced Asian and white communities for the same reasons. This global crisis is highlighting and magnifying these disparities. In fact, given the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on Black communities in the US, at the end of March, the guest editors of the next special issue for *Voices*—which will be a multidisciplinary issue on Black aesthetics and the arts therapies co-edited by Marisol Norris, Leah Gipson, and Britton Williams—requested that we postpone the next special issue precisely due to the impact that the pandemic was having on the authors for their special issue. For more about this, see their commentary in this issue.

So, in mid-May, I had crafted an editorial in my mind around issues the readership was facing, how this was experienced differently depending on sociocultural and geographical location, and I had tied this into themes that are found in the articles in this issue. I considered how a sense of being, belonging, and becoming, experienced by Autistic adults in a singing group, as described by Laurel Young in this issue, is being challenged for music therapists in this pandemic; how the theme of continual “becomings” of something new, as described by Maevon Gumble in this issue, is something we are forced to consider in terms of our roles as music therapists in this pandemic; how, like music therapists, refugees, in seeking a new becoming, turn to music performance as a primary source for healing trauma as Bernard Austin Kigunda Muriithi demonstrates in this issue; how COVID-19 may be influencing the perceived impact of music therapy, which could be examined using Giorgos Tsisiris, Neta Spiro, Owen Coggins, and Ania Zubala approach outlined in this issue as a guide; how what we unintentional-

ly learn in moments like this is sometimes more significant than what we expected to learn, as described in the work conducted by Jim Hiller in this issue; and, how not only understanding the intersubjective experiences of profoundly disabled people, as described by Jiří Kantor in this issue, but also the complexities of telehealth, pose strong barriers for the development of a therapeutic relationship.

And then on May 24th I woke up to an email from co-editor-in-chief, Brynjulf Stige, that was sent to Kat McFerran and me as the other co-editors-in-chief, in which he was informing us that he had decided to end his tenure at *Voices* in July of this year. I sat staring at my screen. While Brynjulf had been preparing us for a few years for this, it was suddenly very real. It took a while for it to sink in. It was 21 years ago that Brynjulf and Carolyn Kenny conceived *Voices*. For Brynjulf to leave *Voices* is a monumental change, as it was in 2013 when Carolyn stepped down. And this change is one of a string of changes this year in our *Voices* team. For example, at the beginning of the year, Melody Schwantes let us know that she would be stepping down as copyeditor after the July issue, then Kat McFerran let us know that she would be stepping down as co-editor-in-chief once we could find a replacement, and also we have just been informed that our new production editor, Hilde Kjerland, is being moved into another role and will be being replaced. As Brynjulf's email header aptly noted, "[The Times They Are A 'Changing'](#)"!

Given all of this, I knew that the focus of the editorial would need to shift to reflect these changes. But how? I kept hearing Nina Simone, "[Everything Must Change](#)," as I was taking in the effects of COVID-19 and all that was about to change at *Voices*.

everything must change
 nothing stays the same
 everyone will change
 no one, no one stays the same

 the young become the old
 and mysteries do unfold
 for that's the way of time
 no one, and nothing goes unchanged

 there are not many things in life one can be sure of
 except rain comes from the clouds
 sun lights up the sky
 hummingbirds fly

As I listened to her powerfully wise and instructive voice, I wondered what things in life we can ever be sure of, and more specifically in music therapy and in *Voices*. Yet, I was reassured of the power of music to transform us and to comfort us and to express our pains and our joys and our complexities. I was reassured that there is a community of people around the world who are committed to deepening our discussions on music, health, and social change. I felt appreciative of the great editorial team and reviewers we have who donate so much of their time and energy to maintaining a dialogical space at *Voices*. And I acknowledged that while everything must change, there are a few things in life we can be sure of, and one of these is our enduring relationships with music and our interconnectedness with each other, which COVID-19 has highlighted in so many ways.

I could barely sit with all of this, when a day later, on May 25th another African American, George Floyd, was brutally murdered by police here in the US. As I watched this unfold on video for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, I felt physically sick and shaken, emotionally shaken to my core, and spiritually shaken. As I grieved for this Black man, his family, his community, and my community, I was reminded about how in the US and around the world Black people are, to so many people, ungrievable. Judith Butler (2016) wrote:

One way of posing the question of who "we" are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered

ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others—even if it means taking those latter lives. (p. 38)

Here was another one of the “things in life we can be sure of,” and yet this one was so far from the comforting ones in Nina Simone’s song. This was a reminder that Black life is all too often not “counted as life at all.” Hearing George Floyd pleading and uttering multiple times “I can’t breathe” was eerily familiar. It is the exact same phrase repeated 11 times in the last moments of [Eric Garner](#)’s life in Statton Island, New York, in 2014; 12 times in the last moments of [David Dungay](#)’s life as he was murdered by prison officers in New South Wales, Australia, in 2015; in the final moment of [Eric Harris](#)’ life in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 2015 (where the response from the police officer was “Fuck your breath”); and in the final moment of [Manuel Ellis](#)’ life in Tacoma, Washington, in 2020. “I can’t breathe” has become a rallying cry in the [Black Lives Matter](#) movements around the world to represent how Black and Brown people are restricted in their mobilities, denied possibilities, as well as literally having their breath denied them. As Bryant Keith Alexander wrote:

I am thinking about breathing in relation to our need to learn collective breathing in relation to that now notorious message, statement, and cry, “I Can’t Breathe”—often posted as white letters on a black t-shirt or on the forever reimagined hoodie of Trayvon Martin—now as emblematic of the construction of restrictive mobilities, unquestioned intentions, and denied possibilities not only as an indictment but as an opportunity to meditate on the realities of breathing and the potential consequences of not breathing. ([Alexander et al., 2018, p. 2](#))

At this moment, I urge you to take a moment to remember all of the countless deaths of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) as a result of white supremacist policies and practices throughout our communities, while listening to and watching NYC Cellist Yves Dharamraj perform a five-cello arrangement of “When I am laid in earth” (Dido’s Lament) from Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* as a protest for Black Lives Matter and [artistic tribute](#) to George Floyd.

As the news of George Floyd’s death began to spread, the differences in felt responses was palpable. Many “good” white people responded with disbelief and outrage that this murder could have happened. Most Black people felt the trauma of yet another person’s name to add to a long list, the repetition of racist lynchings of thousands of Black people in the US for decades. And yet while acknowledging these very real differences in response, there has been widespread protests where people of all races, from a wide range of geographical spaces (almost every continent), have come together, risking their health and lives during the most devastating pandemic of our lifetime, demanding change. The widespread prolonged nature of the current protests feels different from anything many of us have ever experienced. While I continue to feel quite pessimistic, there is a glimmer of hope that this could be an important inflection point. For a moment, Sam Cook’s voice enters into my consciousness, “it’s been a long, a long time coming, but I know [a change is gonna come](#).”

So, for the past two weeks I have been unable to come up with a way to write this editorial. I have sat here at my computer with complete writers’ block. I wanted to find the right words to say at this time, to speak to what is, by any measure, a profoundly tragic time. But absolutely none were coming to me. There was just too much that felt too weighty to tie together into a coherent editorial statement. For those who know me, I am not usually at a loss for words. But here I was with none that were forthcoming. So, instead I decided to share the above to express the sheer difficulty I was having as I tried to find the words to express during this incredibly significant moment in our collectively shared history.

I have mentioned all of this without even touching on what is happening in Hong Kong, or Palestine, or so many other places that are also experiencing significant social injustices and human rights violations. I have said nothing about the continued climate crisis and the impact that will have on future pandemics.

And this all brings me back to Brynjulf Stige, co-founder of *Voices*, who reminds us of our complicity in systems of injustice, noting that we either “contribute to social control or to social and cultural change” (Stige, 2002, p. 278). In other words, when we are not actively working towards social and cultural change, we are not bystanders, but we are actively contributing to social control. It is not enough to express outrage at what others have done or are doing, but we must open ourselves up to learn how we are contributing to social injustices and how we can actively work for social justice. We need to free ourselves from the tenacity with which we try to assure ourselves that we are the “good ones.” Such hubris and tenacity only conceal the very unjust practices that we must change. We need to challenge and move from our understanding of ourselves as neoliberal subjects, and instead acknowledge our interconnectedness, that all that we do and don’t do touches / impacts others in ways we often don’t even imagine or even want to imagine. We often think about how this happens in positive ways, yet we must pay close attention to the negative impacts. It is our responsibility to humanity, our commitment to community, our obligation to ourselves.

Correction Notes

July 3, 2020, correction of name Giorgos Tsiris in third paragraph.

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