

Renihan, Colleen, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright, eds. *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music*. Foreword by William Cheng. University of Illinois Press, 2024. 302 pages. \$28.00. ISBN: 978-0-252-08770-7 (Paper).

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My fingers type the phrase, “attached please find my review of *Sound Pedagogy*,” and simultaneous feelings of pride, guilt, relief, and embarrassment wash over me as I prepare to hit send. This review is coming in late, late enough to delay this issue of *JMHP* and place precisely the type of burden on its editor that I myself found frustrating in the seemingly endless “cat-herding” labor that shapes so much of an editor’s work and stress. However, at the moment I’m more concerned with my mother’s recent cancer diagnosis as I prepare to visit her in the hospital, having spent the bulk of last week in another hospital as another family member dealt with respiratory problems. While I’ve struggled to get the review of this important volume *exactly* right, to produce the kinds of sparkingly crafted insights and turns of phrase I pride myself—perhaps to a fault—on always delivering, I’m letting good enough be good enough (as I would *certainly* counsel any student in a similar situation to do) and hitting send so I can get my ass to the hospital and be with my mom. I would never start a book review with what feels like such a nakedly self-indulgent opening were I not moved to honor the spirit of this powerful collection of essays, which throughout entreats all of us to enact various forms of care through what might be called a rigorous practice of vulnerable kindness, one that asks us to dismantle norms including (but certainly not limited to) hyperproductivity and perfectionism. Throughout its essays, *Sound Pedagogy* and its authors ask us to engage our students and communities with an ethic of care that regards all those around us as whole persons leading complex, often difficult lives and, just as importantly, to introspectively and vulnerably extend that same care and grace to ourselves.

As its editors—Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright—frame this volume’s work and its urgency, “music in higher education needs repair

through radical care” (p. 1). As a pathway toward this repair, they offer “sound pedagogy,” a model that rests on a fundamental claim: that radical care must play a central role in the pedagogy and curricula of music classrooms and institutions. The model of radical care advocated for throughout this book prioritizes our students’ and our own (faculty’s) well-being over the content of the subjects we teach, emphasizing the need for our educational spaces to contribute to our community’s collective well-being. This advocacy position, to be clear, does not seek to simply jettison music-historical content nor to eschew the importance of musicological inquiry and its methods, indeed far from it. The book’s authors demonstrate throughout that musicological research and teaching have valuable, specific contributions to make to communities of care and to the promotion of well-being both within and beyond higher-ed music institutions. Toward that end, this volume and the sound pedagogy for which it advocates build substantively and explicitly on the work of William Cheng, whose transformative 2016 book, *Just Vibrations*, is engaged with both in the editors’ introductory essay and throughout several subsequent chapters (and Cheng himself furnishes an insightful and provocative foreword, which very effectively sets the table for the essays to follow.) As such, *Sound Pedagogy* seeks to disrupt the highly competitive cultural economy of music making with a charge, as Cheng argues for, to shift our focus from doing well to doing good. As Cheng puts it, “doing good would involve reaching out and reaching back, lending help to those in need, and seeking opportunities for care and repair. Repair is a crucial word here. Its many significations include physical reassembly, bodily rehabilitation, restorative justice, monetary reparation, and disaster relief.”¹

The reparative categories Cheng enumerates, among others, inform the variegated approaches to and aspects of sound pedagogy offered by the book’s sixteen chapters, which are organized into three sections that focus in turn on curricular advocacy, expanding pedagogical horizons, and emphasizing self-care. The first two sections feature a range of interventions into both the content and methods of teaching music history rooted in sound pedagogy’s ethos of radical care. A number of essays feature specific conceptual frameworks, such as Colleen Renihan’s application of empathy as a guiding principle in teaching opera, John Spilker’s advocacy for radical honesty as a pathway to intersectional equity and well-being in the classroom, and Stephanie Jensen-Moulton’s explication of universal design as a means of building a “kind classroom.” Frederick A. Peterbark broadens the discussion of care beyond the classroom, bringing an administrator’s perspective to bear on extending an ethic of care throughout a student’s entire experience with the institution, including during the process

1. William Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), 8.

of recruitment. Where these pieces largely discuss connections and dialogues between faculty and students (or between faculty, students, and staff), three essays expand this set of considerations toward wider conceptualizations of community. William A. Everett and Matteo Magarotto apply a public-musicology framework to interrogate the relationship between opera pedagogy and representational ethics. Mark Katz advocates for in-class collaboration with artists as a means for fostering both equity and empathy across classrooms, curricula, and institutions, and Kate Galloway extends this call for collaboration and empathy beyond strictly human interactions and into the realm of nonhuman expressions of music and musicality.

Notably, several authors across these sections frame their work in response to specific incidents of racial hate and violence. Sara Haefeli's opening anecdote frames her discussion of curriculum and repertory selection as necessarily in dialogue with students' need to respond to anti-Black violence and the Black Lives Matter movement's charge for equity and justice across all spheres of life in the US. Molly M. Breckling's piece recounts her classroom response to a white supremacist rally in the small college town where she teaches. Eric Hung opens his essay by recounting the 2021 murders of Asian women in the Atlanta metro area to advocate for a "socially responsible music history pedagogy," one that is "not just about the well-being of our students, but also about how our teaching alters the relationships students have with the historical and contemporary communities—particularly marginalized communities—we explore in our classrooms" (p. 138). Through confronting readers with this atrocity and our complicity in the cultural and media landscape that informed the killer's motivations, Hung makes clear the urgency of reckoning far more substantively with the Orientalist stereotypes replete in a range of music repertoires and that we risk reinforcing in our classrooms. In drawing these connections, these essays remind us of the necessity of considering both the need for our teaching to respond meaningfully to the immanent issues our students face beyond our classrooms and the short- and long-term material impacts our teaching work can have, both for good and for ill, on the communities our students inhabit and the many spaces they navigate.

The essays in *Sound Pedagogy's* final section, on self-care, focus introspectively and vulnerably on the authors' own identities and experiences in relationship to their teaching work, with Reba A. Wissner reflecting on her experience as a first-generation student, Amanda Christina Soto on her experience as a Tejana faculty member addressing border-related trauma in her home state of Texas, and Laura Moore Pruet and Mary Natvig sharing their own journeys as teachers grappling with challenges of physical and mental health respectively. The section is bookended by two essays explicating self-care frameworks: from Nathan A. Langfitt, who provides a counselor and student-affairs professional's

perspective on promoting student mental health, and Trudi Wright, who proposes the Jesuit concept of *Cura Personalis* as a framework for community and well-being within and beyond higher education. This section's emphasis on the relationship between self-care and community care provides a welcome disruption of the self-sacrificing mode of care for students that is too often an implicit expectation of teachers (whose deep care for our students' well-being is highly exploitable by the institutions where we work) and that often alarmingly models the romantic martyrdom that problematically shapes cultural norms across the arts. We do not, in fact, need to suffer to do our work and care for our students. By caring as radically for ourselves as for others, we both model healthier behaviors and contribute to a more sustainable collective foundation from which to do this urgently needed transformative work.

Alongside structures to nurture our physical and mental capacity to sustain transformative practices, *Sound Pedagogy* also provides vital conceptual tools to form and traverse pathways toward meaningful change. Among the volume's most valuable contributions is its application of a wide range of concepts from a diversity of fields and thinkers to the specific contexts of musicology classrooms and music schools and departments. Many of us have engaged on some level with the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Brené Brown, and other scholars whose work connects pedagogy with justice and wellness, but *Sound Pedagogy* puts the "rubber to the road" by furnishing actionable models, rooted in vulnerable reflection, for how concepts including intersectionality, decolonization, and care pedagogy can meaningfully transform our classrooms and institutions. As such, *Sound Pedagogy* should prove a valuable resource for any teacher or administrator whose work involves substantial engagement with music students or who is charged with teaching about music to a broad range of learners. I, for one, will certainly be revising the syllabus for my own graduate seminar in music history pedagogy to emphasize both content and methods from this book's chapters, and I very much look forward to exploring its rich ideas and interventions with my students this coming fall.

Still, while the book's advocacy for breaking down barriers and fostering inclusion and equity are powerful, there is a bit of tension throughout *Sound Pedagogy* in defining the scope of both its audience and the spaces in which it seeks to deploy its interventions. On the one hand, the editors situate *Sound Pedagogy* explicitly as a disciplinary project, stating that "the premise of this book is, ultimately, that care-based pedagogy can facilitate the systemic change that remains possible and necessary for our discipline" (p. 2). At the same time, it is replete with advocacy for an expansive focus on the entire scope of music-institutional spaces and for a dismantling of barriers between fields and disciplines. While the volume does indeed feature voices often absent from discourses in music history pedagogy, e.g., colleagues who work in recruitment

and career services, it is largely dominated by musicologists, most of whom are working full time as musicology faculty (which the editors do readily acknowledge in the book's introduction) and its essays concern themselves largely with work done within musicology courses. This is not necessarily a problem in and of itself; no single book can cover all angles or feature all perspectives. Indeed, this volume's situatedness within the discursive sphere of musicology and music history pedagogy, coupled with care pedagogy's emphasis on understanding the entirety of our students' circumstances and challenges, provides rich and novel applications of our robust fieldwide training. Throughout, these essays demonstrate the value of research that prioritizes the deep interrogation of culture and context which in turn helps us to unpack the types of institutional pressures and demands both faculty and students carry into our classrooms. However, as this book frames the scope of its radical intervention not as confined to musicology or music history pedagogy but as impacting the full gamut of music in higher education, and as it contains numerous critiques of toxic practices and ideologies within music schools and conservatories, it problematically excludes the voices of those whose work makes up in many such spaces the lion's share of a student's experience and whose very presence often forms students' principal impetus for enrolling: the performance faculty who run studios, teach one-on-one lessons, and recruit and mentor the students who, at least in my institution, comprise the bulk of the student body with whom musicologists interact.

While our disciplinary training and institutional roles may offer specific, valuable insights into the institutional cultures of music in higher education, there is perhaps a missed opportunity in the volume to more materially advance this work of repair as a collective, multidisciplinary project which will necessitate all hands on deck, including close collaboration with our colleagues in fields such as music education, music therapy, and music performance, many of whom are actively involved in projects of reparative work themselves. To be clear, some essays nod to research in music education and to discourses within organizations such as the College Music Society, whose scope extends across disciplines in which music teaching takes place. Furthermore, there are compelling reasons to attend to how musicologists can be more attuned to the manifold pressures our students face in our systems as they are rather than as they should be. Throughout, the authors do highlight the specific problematics of musicology's attachment to Eurocentric, white-centering "traditions" in curricular structure, pedagogical tactics, and disciplinary culture, and the editors explicitly name the parsing of music inquiry into its traditional subfields as itself "symptomatic of white supremacy culture, all of which do damage to many individuals who engage with them" (p. 4). Nevertheless, there are several moments throughout the book when musicology classrooms are singled out as potential safe havens from the damaging competitiveness and gatekeeping that

are either implicitly or explicitly blamed on the institutional culture of music performance.

The dismantling of performing-arts toxicity in higher education must ultimately be enacted as a broadly collective project lest we run the risk of reinforcing existing perceptions of musicological exceptionalism and widening the fraught chasm between the so-called “academic” and “applied” areas of college music teaching. A healing of this often contentious dynamic, which does not serve our students, needs to be part of our reparative project. That said, I don’t honestly know whether this issue could have been more thoroughly addressed without sacrificing at least some degree of the rich and variegated perspectives and ideas this book puts forward from *within* musicology (following the book’s own framing of the field, I should really say the musicology community) and the breadth of much-needed disciplinary interventions it offers; we do indeed need to get our own house in order. If anything, I hope that the book’s much-needed questioning of gatekeeping at all levels and its adoption of a radical care-based framework will lead to future sound pedagogy-focused volumes where the voices represented more fully realize the inclusive, multidisciplinary model of music inquiry for which this book so passionately and effectively advocates.

In informal conversations at conferences, I’ve often heard flippant critiques of music history pedagogy scholarship that ostensibly distill “merely” to “here’s what I did in this class I taught.” I think one of *Sound Pedagogy*’s most important features is that it does not move away from but rather leans into this format, because frankly, as a field we don’t say nearly enough about what goes on in our classrooms, and the transparency and vulnerability with which the authors in this volume share their stories of “on-the-ground” challenges and triumphs provide a much-needed contribution to our fieldwide culture. In this way, *Sound Pedagogy* is an intervention into discourses of music pedagogy in some ways similar to what *Shadows in the Field* has been for music ethnography: a lifting of the veil to discuss with vulnerability and transparency those parts of our life and work that we talk about with trusted friends and colleagues but almost never put in print.² By sharing difficult lessons learned, strategies for navigating uncomfortable moments and dynamics, and best practices to negotiate complex power structures with an eye toward equity and care, we move toward not only a critically necessary reshaping of our teaching and pedagogy, but also a valuable and equitable restructuring of what counts as “scholarly inquiry” in our field in a way that more meaningfully values the totality of the work we do and the full, complex selves we ought to more fully welcome into that work.

2. Gregory Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, eds., *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford University Press, 1997).