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Jazz Studies

The Jazz Studies faculty at the University of Maine stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, the ongoing protests against the wrongful deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor, among many others, and with all conscientious efforts to eradicate racially discriminatory practices from our society.

As predominantly white Jazz music educators and practitioners, we occupy a tension at the intersection of race relations and musical culture in American society. We are forever indebted to African-American culture for the cumulative, creative vision that we have come to call Jazz music. We recognize, with profound dismay, the tremendous violence and innumerable injustices out of which this music was born. We understand this music to represent, in large part, an ongoing protestation against racial injustice, and we understand our participation in this music to involve, in large measure, an active engagement against the forces of racism in American society.

Our Jazz Studies program is committed to examining the complex history of Jazz music through the social, cultural, and political contexts within which the music has developed as an art form. From its foundations in African and African-American music, through its interaction with Western European music and American culture, Jazz music has evolved to become a defining element of American cultural life. As a uniquely American art form, Jazz has long held the distinction of being one of America's principal cultural exports, and has subsequently cultivated a global reach, celebrated the world over, with myriad adaptations, interpretations, and fusions currently extant in many countries throughout the world.

We celebrate the broad reach and remarkable diversity of contemporary Jazz music. As well, we insist on continuing to educate ourselves and our students about the music's African-American origins, along with its multicultural history, in order to create a foundational historical context. From this foundation, we can begin to properly understand what the contemporary study of Jazz music involves, which is, in addition to the vast body of profoundly creative and intellectual music, a deep commitment to the active practices of anti-racism and social equity.

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