

Appendix D: Case Studies (D.1–D.6)

For: Special Commission · By: Yu Guo

Scope. Each of the case studies below sets out a sourced record of an episode discussed in the Cancel Culture section of the report, drawing on the published accounts and documents and noting where they conflict. The episodes were chosen as illustrations, and are not a representative sample from which the frequency of such episodes could be estimated. Nor are they episodes of a single kind: D.1–D.3 concern adverse professional action that followed public campaigns; D.4 the renaming of a scholarly award; D.5 a published scholarly exchange over a central disciplinary term; and D.6 a governance conflict within a professional association.

Conventions. Claims made by one party and not independently established are attributed in the text (“by his account,” “the petition alleged”), and where sources conflict, both versions are given. Court rulings are described by their procedural stage: a ruling that allows a claim to proceed is not a finding that the claim is true, and a settlement resolves litigation without any judgment on the claims’ merits. Likewise, that one event followed another does not itself establish why an institution acted, and the case studies assert an institution’s reasons only where a source states them. The record is current through July 29, 2026.

Appendix D.1: The Journal of Schenkerian Studies Controversy and Litigation (2019–2025)

Date	Event
Nov 9, 2019	- At the Society for Music Theory Annual Meeting, Philip Ewell delivers his plenary talk, “Music Theory’s White Racial Frame.” - The transcript is later published in <i>Music Theory Spectrum</i> (Ewell 2021). - Abstract: “For over twenty years, music theory has tried to diversify with respect to race, yet the field today remains remarkably white, not only in the people who practice music theory but also in the race of the composers and theorists whose work music theory privileges. In this article, I offer a few explanations for why this is so. I posit a music-theoretical ‘white racial frame’ that is structural and institutionalized, and argue that only through a deframing and reframing of this white racial frame will we begin to see positive racial changes in music theory.” - Ewell cites sociologist Joe Feagin’s concept of the “white racial frame” and argues that in music theory, this manifests as a “pro-white subframe.” - Schenker is Ewell’s key example: “The best example through which to understand our white frame is Heinrich Schenker, a fervent racist whose racism undoubtedly influenced his music theories yet gets whitewashed for general consumption.” <i>The New York Times</i> later reported: “The society’s members — its professoriate is 94 percent white — responded with a standing ovation. Many younger faculty members and graduate students embraced his call to dismantle ‘white mythologies’ and study non-European music forms. The tone was of repentance.” (Powell 2021)
Jul 24, 2020	- The <i>Journal of Schenkerian Studies</i> (JSS) publishes Vol. 12 (Journal of Schenkerian Studies 2020), featuring the “Symposium on Philip Ewell’s SMT 2019 Plenary Paper, ‘Music Theory’s White Racial Frame’” (pp. 125–214). The symposium comprises fifteen responses, one of them anonymous. - Timothy Jackson (UNT professor and JSS founder) authors a critical piece accusing Ewell of anti-Semitism: “Ewell’s scapegoating of Schenker, Schenkerians, and Schenkerian analysis, occurs in the much larger context of Black-on-Jew attacks in the United States... In this sense, Ewell’s denunciation of Schenker and Schenkerians may be seen as part and parcel of the much broader current of Black anti-Semitism.”
Jul 28, 2020	- The Society for Music Theory (SMT) Executive Board publishes a statement condemning the symposium (SMT Executive Board 2020). - Statement excerpt: “As reported by participants [of the symposium], the journal’s advisory board did not subject submissions to the normal processes of peer review, published an anonymously authored contribution, and did not invite Ewell to respond in a symposium of essays that discussed his own work. Such behaviors are silencing, designed to exclude and to replicate a culture of whiteness. These are examples of professional misconduct, which in this case enables overtly racist behavior.”
Jul 29, 2020	- UNT graduate music students petition their dean to condemn the symposium, dissolve the journal, and investigate the editorial process (Duke Law). - A majority of the faculty in UNT’s Division of Music History, Theory, and Ethnomusicology endorse the students’ petition (Duke Law); by Jackson’s account, 17 of the division’s 23 faculty (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i> complaint).

Date	Event
Jul 31, 2020	17 faculty members of the division sign a “Statement of UNT Faculty on Journal of Schenkerian Studies” (UNT Faculty 2020). - It declares that they “stand in solidarity with our graduate students in their letter of condemnation of the Journal of Schenkerian Studies.” The statement continues: “We endorse the call for action outlined in our students’ letter, which asks that the College of Music ‘publicly condemn the issue and release it freely online to the public’ and ‘provide a full public account of the editorial and publication process, and its failures.’ Responsible parties must be held appropriately accountable.” - UNT College of Music Dean John Richmond announces a formal investigation into JSS Vol. 12 (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i> complaint).
Aug 1, 2020	- Yale’s Department of Music (Ewell’s alma mater) issues a “Statement in support of Philip Ewell” (Yale Department of Music 2020). - Statement excerpt: “Our graduate faculty rejects and condemns the racist and personal attacks on Prof. Ewell that appear in the most recent issue of the Journal of Schenkerian Studies, and in particular the decisions by commissioning editors to include an anonymous critique and to exclude contributions from Prof. Ewell or indeed any scholar of color. We believe that the execution of the ‘Symposium on Philip Ewell’s 2019 SMT Plenary Paper’ serves only to exemplify Prof. Ewell’s observations that ‘the white racial frame seeks to shield Schenker from unwanted criticism’ and that ‘the most important function of the white racial frame is to keep the system as it is,’ and in so doing, the Journal of Schenkerian Studies failed to meet the scholarly and ethical standards that we expect of our discipline.”
Aug 6, 2020	- The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) submits a letter to UNT warning that the investigation violates academic freedom and the First Amendment (FIRE 2020). - The letter states: “While some may find the viewpoints espoused by the Journal or Jackson, or the namesake of the Journal itself, to be deeply offensive, UNT has violated core principles of academic freedom—and the First Amendment—by initiating an investigation into the editorial practices and decisions of a journal produced by graduate students and faculty members.”
Aug 7, 2020	<i>Inside Higher Ed</i> covers the controversy (Inside Higher Ed 2020). - Ewell is quoted as saying he did not plan to read the JSS symposium: “I refuse to participate in my own dehumanization.”
Sep 14, 2020	- Alex Ross publishes “Black Scholars Confront White Supremacy in Classical Music” in <i>The New Yorker</i> (Ross 2020). - Ross writes: “The <i>Journal of Schenkerian Studies</i>, which is based at the University of North Texas, chose to devote ninety pages to responses to that brief talk. Some were supportive, others dismissive; one accused Ewell, who is African-American, of exhibiting ‘Black anti-Semitism,’ even though Ewell had not mentioned Schenker’s Jewishness.”
Nov 25, 2020	- Four months after the issue’s publication, the UNT ad hoc review panel (five faculty members from outside the College of Music, all journal editors) publishes its report, “Report of Review of Conception and Production of Vol. 12 of the Journal of Schenkerian Studies” (UNT Review Panel 2020). - The report concludes: “In sum, we do not find that the standards of best practice in scholarly publication were observed in the production of Volume 12 of the JSS.” - The panel’s recommendations included changing the journal’s editorial structure and making its editorial and review processes clear and transparent.
Nov 30, 2020	Provost Jennifer Cowley writes to Jackson (by his complaint’s account, to him alone), instructing him “as the Director of the Center for Schenkerian Studies, to develop a plan to address the recommendations by December 18th and submit the plan to Chair Benjamin Brand and Dean John Richmond for review and approval” (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i> complaint).
Dec 11, 2020	- The division’s chair, Benjamin Brand, informs Timothy Jackson that he will be removed from the journal and that resources for the Center for Schenkerian Studies will be eliminated (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i> complaint). - Brand writes: “I cannot support a plan according to which you would remain involved in the day-to-day operations of the journal, and its editorial process in particular, given the panel’s findings of editorial mismanagement at JSS.” - The removal concerns the journal editorship and the Center’s resources, not Jackson’s faculty post: he remains a professor at UNT throughout the dispute (the Fifth Circuit’s 2023 opinion, below, describes him as “a professor at the University of North Texas”).
Jan 14, 2021	- Timothy Jackson files a federal lawsuit (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i>) against eight members of the UNT Board of Regents in their official capacities, a graduate student, and 17 faculty members (Inside Higher Ed 2021; <i>Jackson v. Wright</i>, 5th Cir. 2023). - The First Amendment retaliation claims, seeking prospective relief, were brought against the Board members; the defamation claims against the graduate student and the faculty signatories. Allegations included violations of First and Fourteenth Amendment rights and retaliation for protected academic speech; all were disputed and none had been adjudicated at filing.
Feb 14, 2021	<i>The New York Times</i>’s Michael Powell covers the story: “Obscure Musicology Journal Sparks Battles Over Race and Free Speech” (Powell 2021). - Ewell later criticizes the article for “bothsidesing” in his 2023 book <i>On Music Theory</i>: “Powell’s piece ... comes from a time-honored tradition of white men soft-pedaling and obfuscating racism in the mainstream media, and the New York Times, of which I’m a daily reader as a New Yorker, is no exception. At issue is the simple notion of objectivity and the mistaken belief that it is attainable when, in fact, it is not.”
Jan 18, 2022	A federal district court (Judge Amos L. Mazzant III, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas) denies the defendants’ motion to dismiss, allowing Jackson’s First Amendment retaliation and defamation claims to proceed to discovery (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i>, E.D. Tex. 2022).

Date	Event
Sep 15, 2023	- The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit affirms the denial of the motion to dismiss as to the members of the UNT Board of Regents (<i>Jackson v. Wright</i>, 5th Cir. 2023). - The panel opinion (Judge Andrew S. Oldham, joined by Judges Jennifer Walker Elrod and James C. Ho) states: “Timothy Jackson, a professor at the University of North Texas, sued eight members of the UNT Board of Regents in their official capacities for First Amendment retaliation. The Board defendants moved to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(1). The district court denied their motion to dismiss. We affirm.” - The appeal turned on the jurisdictional questions raised by the Rule 12(b)(1) motion (sovereign immunity and standing). The ruling let the retaliation claim proceed; it did not decide whether the allegations were true or whether any defendant had violated the First Amendment.
July 2025	- After more than four years of litigation, the university settles Jackson’s lawsuit for \$725,000 (Duke Law). - The settlement comprised \$400,000 to Jackson and \$325,000 in attorneys’ fees and costs; the defendants admitted no liability, and Jackson dropped his First Amendment and defamation claims. - As part of the settlement, UNT reinstated Jackson as editor of the journal for a five-year term, with a one-course reduction in his teaching load and a half-time research assistant during his editorship, and with the journal to be treated under the same standards of editorial review as the other academic journals published or distributed by UNT Press; in the third year Jackson is to appoint a co-editor (subject to the editorial board’s approval) who will serve a five-year term as editor after Jackson’s term ends (Reason 2025).

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Appendix D.2: Martin Speake and Trinity Laban Conservatoire (2024–2026)

Date	Event
By 2024	Martin Speake, a British jazz saxophonist, has taught jazz for some 35 years, 22 of them at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance,^[1] as well as at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Royal Academy of Music, and has been the London Jazz Orchestra’s lead alto saxophonist for 15 years (Humphries 2025; CAF 2025; Cumming 2025).
Feb 1–5, 2024	Trinity Laban’s principal, Anthony Bowne, emails staff about the conservatoire’s Black Lives Matter policy and diversity initiatives, inviting them to “share their experiences” (CAF 2025; Humphries 2025).
Feb 6, 2024	- Speake sends his reply, an email of about 1,170 words (reproduced in full in Speake 2024) addressed to Bowne and the director of music, Aleks Szram,^[2] disputing that Black musicians are underrepresented in U.K. jazz and criticizing Black Lives Matter and critical race theory (Humphries 2025). - He argued that Black musicians in jazz “are definitely not under-represented in the UK” but “have far more opportunities than many others,” that institutional racism “does not exist in the jazz world, apart from maybe against whites,” and that the real barrier to opportunity “is about class not skin colour.” He called it a “mistake” to “direct any of this agenda to the jazz course,” which he found “divisive”; described the promotion of Black Lives Matter as “very dangerous”; disputed the “critical race theory stated by BLM” that racism “is embedded in society”; and closed by invoking Martin Luther King’s call to judge people “according to the content of their character not the colour of their skin.”
Feb–Mar 2024	While awaiting a reply, Speake shares his email with one third-year student during a conversation about race and jazz; the student reads parts of it to some peers but does not forward it (Humphries 2025; CAF 2025).
c. Mar 2024	- About five weeks after the email, Szram replies and agrees to the meeting Speake had requested (CAF 2025).^[3] - The next morning, by Speake’s account, another message reaches his inbox: several students have read the email and are now too “anxious” to attend his classes. The school suspends his classes and, he says, threatens him with disciplinary action (CAF 2025; Humphries 2025). - The school holds a meeting with about 95 students, from which, Speake says, he is excluded (Humphries 2025; CAF 2025). - The next day, by his account, he is pressed to consent to circulating his email to the jazz department and students, and the director of music tells him, “I fear for your safety”; the email is then posted on social media (Humphries 2025; Cumming 2025; CAF 2025). - Speake says senior staff told him that some of his views were “racist” and others “offensive”; separately, the school released a statement that, while not agreeing with his views, expressed “how in awe we are of [the students’] sense of community and solidarity with each other”^[4] (Humphries 2025).
Mar 14, 2024	- A student’s petition, titled “To the privileged, equality feels like oppression,” demands Speake’s immediate removal from the faculty (Change.org petition). - Written by a Trinity Laban student, it charged that Speake’s comments had “perpetuated harmful and defamatory narratives about black musicians in the jazz industry” and created “an uncomfortable and distressing learning environment,” and held that black musicians “have encountered (and continue to encounter) discrimination, limited opportunities, and unequal access to resources compared to their white counterparts.” - The demand: “We demand that Martin be removed from his position at our university immediately as his conduct and beliefs are inconsistent with the values and principles of the institution. This is essential not only for creating a safe and inclusive environment but also for upholding the university’s educational ethos around diversity, inclusion and providing an excellent student experience.”
Mar 15, 2024	- A counter-petition supporting Speake is created (Change.org counter-petition). - An open letter from “Friends and students of Martin Speake,” it said that “despite his outspoken and sometimes eccentric beliefs, Martin is not racist in any way,” and that no one should be “hounded out of” a long career “for expressing their honest opinion in private.”
Spring 2024	- By his account, students boycott his classes at Trinity Laban and other schools, the London Jazz Orchestra asks him to leave, other bands decline his compositions, his U.K. performances and future bookings are cancelled, and the release of his album is halted (Humphries 2025). - Noel Langley, a co-founder of the London Jazz Orchestra, said he believed parts of Speake’s email were “racist” and “disgusting” and included “far-right conspiracy theories,” that 19 of the 20 members did not want to share a stage with him, and that Speake was “being quite arrogant” (Humphries 2025).
c. Apr–Sep 2024	Speake takes five months of sick leave (Humphries 2025; CAF 2025).
Sep 2024	He returns to teaching; the boycott resumes immediately. He said, “Every class for weeks, I would just sit there playing by myself,” and that “when I walked down the corridor, I would be ignored by students who I had previously gotten on well with” (Humphries 2025; CAF 2025).
Nov 2024	After about half a term in which, he says, no students attend and the school tells him that it must reassign his teaching because the students are “missing out” on their education, Speake resigns (CAF 2025; Humphries 2025; Cumming 2025).

Date	Event
Mid-Dec 2024 ^[5]	- A CrowdJustice campaign, “Fighting for academic freedom and free speech in the Arts,” is launched to fund his legal costs (CrowdJustice; Gilbert 2025). - By the campaign’s launch, Speake has brought an Employment Tribunal claim for discrimination and harassment, but not yet the constructive-dismissal claim: the campaign’s case page, written in his voice, states that he has “already filed a claim against TL for the discrimination and harassment I have endured on the basis of my protected philosophical belief (under the Equality Act 2010),” alleging that the school “has failed to secure my right to academic freedom and free speech more generally,” and that he is “now also going to file a claim for constructive dismissal”; it credits “the generous assistance of the Free Speech Union” (CrowdJustice).
Jan 10, 2025	<i>The Times</i> reports the case, and a Trinity Laban spokeswoman contests Speake’s account (Humphries 2025). - She said there were “multiple factual inaccuracies in Mr Speake’s account of events and their timeline,” and added: “While a temporary pause was placed upon Mr Speake’s classes after he shared his email with students, he was welcomed back by Trinity Laban.” The school, she said, had “encouraged Mr Speake to understand that while institutionally we did not share his views, his rights to hold them were absolutely protected by us,” and “No disciplinary action has been taken against Mr Speake on the basis of his personal views, and no action has been taken by Trinity Laban to influence the actions of any of Mr Speake’s other employers.”
Jan 14, 2025	The Committee for Academic Freedom publishes an interview with Speake, and <i>Jazz Journal</i> reports his resignation and legal claim (CAF 2025; Gilbert 2025).
Feb 5, 2025	The constructive-dismissal claim is lodged with the Employment Tribunal: the campaign’s first update announces that “Martin’s claim for constructive dismissal was lodged with the Employment Tribunal on the 5th of February 2025” and that preparation is under way for a preliminary hearing listed for September 9, 2025 (CrowdJustice, update of Feb 12, 2025).
Jun 24, 2025	<i>The Telegraph</i> covers the case in a feature on “academics cancelled at Britain’s ‘wokest’ campuses”; a Trinity Laban spokesman told it that “no disciplinary actions were taken against Mr Speake on the basis of his personal views” (Cumming 2025).
Feb 2026	With a preliminary hearing scheduled for May 6–8, 2026 (on whether his beliefs qualified as protected) and the full hearing listed for August 3–12, 2026, Trinity Laban and Speake reach a settlement; the May hearing does not take place, and the tribunal never rules on the claims. The settlement is bound by confidentiality, and its terms are not public (Gilbert 2026; CrowdJustice, update of Jan 23, 2026).
Feb 17, 2026	- Trinity Laban posts a statement on its website (Trinity Laban 2026). - The statement set out the beliefs Speake had identified in his claims, noting that “similar beliefs have been found to be protected in a previous employment tribunal case.” It said: “Trinity Laban accepts that the email which Martin Speake sent to Trinity Laban on 6 February 2024 and in which he considered he expressed the beliefs set out above had no racist intent and that Martin Speake considers himself, and has done for all of his life, an anti-racist,” and that it “acknowledges that discrimination against staff and students because they hold or appropriately manifest protected philosophical beliefs is unlawful.” It closed: “Trinity Laban acknowledges the hurt felt by Mr Speake, and that he has reported significant damage to his personal and professional life and wishes him well for the future. Trinity Laban condemns public attempts to unfairly vilify him.” - The statement records no admission that Trinity discriminated against, harassed, or constructively dismissed Speake (Trinity Laban 2026).

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Notes

1. *The Times* gives Speake’s tenure at Trinity Laban as 24 years; the Committee for Academic Freedom and *Jazz Journal* both give 22, the figure used here.
2. The email’s salutation reads “Dear Aleks and Anthony,” while the Committee for Academic Freedom reproduces it under a heading naming Hans Koller (Trinity Laban’s head of jazz) alongside Aleks Szram and Anthony Bowne. Whether Koller was also a recipient is not established by the text as reproduced there.
3. *The Telegraph*, by contrast, reported that Speake “never had a direct reply to his email” (Cumming 2025).
4. The bracketed words “[the students’]” are *The Times*’s editorial insertion.
5. The campaign page states no launch date; “mid-December” is inferred from the earliest Internet Archive capture (19 December 2024, then showing only £345 from 7 pledges, indicating a recent launch) and the campaign’s funding deadline of 16 January 2025.

Appendix D.3: Dona Vaughn and the Manhattan School of Music (2020–2023)

Date	Event
1994	Dona D. Vaughn joins the Manhattan School of Music (MSM) faculty (MusicalAmerica 2009).
Jul 2008	- Vaughn becomes MSM’s artistic director of opera, a post she holds until 2020 (MusicalAmerica 2009). - In Mac Donald’s account, her “experience included singing, acting, and directing on and off Broadway and on opera stages” (Mac Donald 2021).
Jun 17, 2020	- Teaching a Zoom class on musical theater to high school students, Vaughn is asked by a participant about her production, several years earlier, of Franz Lehár’s operetta <i>Das Land des Lächelns</i> (<i>The Land of Smiles</i>), and cuts the questioner off (Mac Donald 2021, 2023; Change.org removal petition). - The removal petition that followed (June 21, below) recounted that, after the questioner said the operetta “plays into racial stereotypes and depicts Asians as one dimensional caricatures,” Vaughn “cued her moderator to cut off the questioner” and said, “cut him off,” then, “that’s a political statement about some of our productions here at msm... it’s been ongoing for a while... cut him off, just get rid of him” (Change.org removal petition; ellipses in the original). - In Mac Donald’s account: “An unidentified participant, whose name and image were blacked out [...], asked her, out of the blue, how she could justify having produced Franz Lehár’s allegedly racist (in this case, allegedly anti-Asian) operetta <i>Das Land des Lächelns</i> (<i>The Land of Smiles</i>) several years earlier. Vaughn cut the questioner off for raising an issue irrelevant to the current discussion” (Mac Donald 2021; bracketed ellipsis ours).
Jun 21, 2020	- As a video of the exchange circulates online, a Change.org removal petition addressed to MSM president James Gandre demands Vaughn’s “immediate removal” (Change.org removal petition). - The petition alleged that Vaughn had “not only produced an extremely racist and insensitive opera but also chose to cast the only black student as the butler in this production,” and that “there have also been reports of homophobic aggression and body shaming directed at her students.” It concluded: “Dona D. Vaughn is a danger to the arts community, she must be fired from her position at Manhattan School of Music immediately” (Change.org removal petition). - Mac Donald dismissed the petition’s basis, calling the butler-casting allegation a recycled “meme” and countering that “a rule banning blacks from playing servant characters would put off-limits some of the most essential roles in the repertoire”; she described its reports of harassment as unspecified (Mac Donald 2021). - A separate, broader student petition, “It Stops Here,” is created later the same day (Change.org “It Stops Here”). - Addressed to MSM and directed against “Racism, Sexual Assault and Harassment, Homophobia, Anti-Semitism, Misogynoir, Sexism, Transphobia, and Xenophobia,” it did not call for Vaughn’s dismissal: it demanded that she issue “a formal apology to the Manhattan School of Music community,” that she “is no longer on the committee to decide a new Dean of Vocal Arts,” and that her “employment at the Manhattan School of Music is reviewed.” It named other faculty and dated the <i>Land of Smiles</i> production to April 2015 (Change.org “It Stops Here”).
Aug 10, 2020	- The removal petition posts a victory update: “Dona D. Vaughn has been removed from her position at MSM” (Change.org removal petition). - Vaughn later said she was “still in total shock” and described the episode as “guilt by allegation” (Mac Donald 2023). - OperaWire reports that Tazewell Thompson has been named MSM’s Director of Opera Studies, effective immediately, replacing Vaughn; it states that “over 1,800 people signed the petition” and that the school “made no mention of Vaughn in its press release announcing Thompson’s appointment” (OperaWire 2020). - MSM’s own announcement gives no reason for the appointment and does not mention Vaughn or the petition (MSM 2020). No public statement from the school about Vaughn’s status appears in the sources cited here, so the record establishes that the petition preceded her replacement, not why the school acted or on what terms her time at MSM ended.
Nov 30, 2020	Vaughn files a defamation suit, <i>Dona Vaughn v. Giovanni Xu et al.</i> (index 160322/2020), in the New York County Supreme Court against two of her former students over their social-media accusations of racial and sexual-orientation discrimination; she amends the complaint on June 17, 2021 (<i>Vaughn v. Xu</i> docket; New York Anti-SLAPP 2024).
Aug 17, 2022	- The court dismisses the suit at the pleadings stage under New York’s anti-SLAPP law, which protects speech on matters of public interest (<i>Vaughn v. Xu</i>, 2022 WL 3446931; New York Anti-SLAPP 2024). - Vaughn files notices of appeal in September 2022 but later withdraws the appeal: following her counsel’s correspondence of March 17, 2023, the Appellate Division, First Department, deems the appeal withdrawn (order entered May 2, 2023), leaving the anti-SLAPP dismissal in place (<i>Vaughn v. Xu</i> docket; App. Div. 1st Dep’t, Mot. No. 2023-01289).

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Appendix D.4: Steve Larson Award Renaming

Date	Event
c. 2011	After the death of the music theorist Steve Larson (1955–2011), whose 2009 book <i>Analyzing Jazz: A Schenkerian Approach</i> applied Heinrich Schenker’s analytical methods to jazz, the Jazz Interest Group of the Society for Music Theory (SMT) names its annual award for jazz scholarship the “Steve Larson Award for Jazz Scholarship” (Larson 2009; SMT Newsletter 2022).
Nov 9, 2019	At the SMT annual meeting, Philip Ewell delivers his plenary talk “Music Theory’s White Racial Frame” (Ewell 2021).
2020	At the SMT annual meeting, the Jazz Interest Group discusses “the ways that music theory’s White racial frame has impacted the study of jazz—a culturally Black music” (SMT Newsletter 2022).
2021	- A special committee (Varun Chandrasekhar, Ben Geyer, Marc Hannaford, Garrett Michaelson, Joon Park, Keith Salley, and Janna Saslaw), convened in the spring, proposes renaming the award and creating an antiracism committee; the interest group then “voted overwhelmingly to approve the name change and establish the committee” at its annual meeting (SMT Newsletter 2022).^[1] - In a letter to members, the committee framed the change “not as a repudiation of Larson’s work, but rather as a proactive step towards countering the field’s pervasive Whiteness,” reasoning that Larson had used “Schenkerian analysis—with its White supremacist origins—to explore Black music.” It singled out his 1998 claim that “Schenkerian analysis may be applied to any jazz performance—and it may show the shortcomings of that performance” as a view it disagreed with strongly, while stressing that “no accusations of personal racism on behalf of Larson have been made” and that those who knew him thought he “would likely have been a supporter of antiracist initiatives today” (Larson 1998; Parkhurst 2024; SMT Newsletter 2022).^[2]
As of July 2026	The award is now “The Award for Excellence in Jazz Scholarship”,^[3] winners from 2021 and earlier are acknowledged under its previous name, the “Steve Larson Award for Jazz Scholarship” (SMT Jazz Interest Group).

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Notes

- “Overwhelmingly” is the newsletter’s own description; it does not give vote totals.
- The committee’s letter to members is not publicly posted; its wording is quoted here as reproduced in Parkhurst 2024.
- The name eventually adopted differs from both forms floated at the time: the committee’s own letter proposed the “Award for Excellence in Jazz Theory and Analysis,” whereas the SMT Newsletter’s 2022 report gave the proposal more briefly as the “Award for Excellence in Jazz Theory” (Parkhurst 2024; SMT Newsletter 2022).

Appendix D.5: Jason Yust, “Tonality and Racism” (2024)

In “Tonality and Racism,” the featured essay in the *Journal of Music Theory* 68, no. 1 (April 2024), Jason Yust (Boston University) argues that “tonality,” one of music theory’s central organizing concepts, is “problematic—racist, colonialist, and a hindrance to scholarly progress” (Yust 2024, 78), and suggests that the field could “expunge the concept of tonality from our discourse effectively overnight” (Yust 2024, 66). He traces the term to François-Joseph Fétis, whose *Histoire générale de la musique* (1869) is, Yust argues, premised on “the biological racism then current in European intellectual circles” (Yust 2024, 60), citing a passage that immediately follows Fétis’s definition of *tonalité*:

The inhabitants of Europe and those of the colonies founded by them have, in general, the necessary aptitude for grasping the tonal relations [rapports de tonalité] of certain series of sounds; an aptitude which develops by the habit of hearing music and which is perfected by study, because the law of progress is inherent in the nature of this race. It is through it that they possess the ability to sing in tonal accuracy and to vary the forms of their songs. Savage populations also have the physiological organization by which we perceive the sensation of sound and which allows us to grasp the relationships between sounds, so as not to confuse the intonations and to be aware of their differences, but these sentimental and intellectual operations take place in them within narrower limits, owing to the inferiority of their cerebral conformation.
(Fétis, *Histoire générale de la musique* [1869], 12, in Yust’s translation; quoted in Yust 2024, 60–61)

Yust maintains that this racism is built into the concept’s structure, not an incidental corruption of an otherwise neutral idea (Yust 2024, 61).

The essay ran alongside nine invited responses,^[1] from Ewell, Christensen, Rings, Biamonte, Tymoczko, Loui, Long, McClary, and Hynes-Tawa.

Yust’s essay advances three claims that a respondent may accept or reject independently: that Fétis’s *tonalité* was bound up with the racial theory of his day; that the concept as music theory now uses it is itself racialized; and that the term should accordingly be given up. The responses divide differently on each, so they are set out here claim by claim rather than as a single count for and against. The classifications in the table are this appendix’s reading of the nine pieces, supported by the passages quoted below. The nine responses are the exchange the journal published, not a sample from which the balance of opinion in the field could be estimated.

Response	Fétis’s genealogy	The concept as now used	The term
Ewell	Accepts	Racist	Retire
Rings	Accepts	Carries a troubling history	Retire
McClary	Accepts	A “bankrupt notion”	Retire
Loui	Accepts	Racist as an institutional category	Retire
Biamonte	Accepts	Racist as a universal organizing principle	Reform: pluralize to “tonalities”
Long	Accepts	Upholds Fétis’s narrative	Set that narrative aside; leaving the notion will be hard
Hynes-Tawa	Accepts	Not itself bad; the fault lies in the narrative of tonality’s death	Keep, qualified; retire “pre-tonal” and “post-tonal”
Christensen	Accepts the later racialization; denies it was present at the coinage	Not the carrier of the problem	Keep
Tymoczko	Accepts Fétis’s racism; denies that it transfers to the word	Usable ethically and responsibly	Keep; retire “post-tonal”

Four called for retiring the term: Ewell, Rings, McClary, and Loui. Ewell agreed “that tonality is more trouble than it’s worth, and that it makes sense to move beyond the term” (Ewell 2024); Rings opened “I’m persuaded,” reversing his earlier view that dropping the term was “overly fastidious” (Rings 2024); McClary would, “along with Yust,” “advocate ditching the term *tonality* altogether” (McClary 2024); Loui counted “jettisoning the term tonality altogether, as Yust advocates,” among the changes needed to counter systemic racism in music education (Loui 2024).

Three accepted much of the critique without simply dropping the word. Biamonte holds that treating tonality “as an organizing principle and as a universal concept ... promotes institutionalized racism and classism,” while a generalized, pluralized construct “could be useful as a descriptor” (Biamonte 2024). Long writes that continued acceptance of Fétis’s narrative “implicitly upholds the white supremacy that underlies Fétis’s project,” that “it may be worth setting aside Fétis’s grand metanarrative on ethical grounds as well as methodological ones,” and, in closing, that “it will be difficult to walk away from the notion of tonality—even as we keep many of its analytical affordances—because it is embedded into our sense of how we listen” (Long 2024). Hynes-Tawa agrees that there are “serious and racist issues deep at the roots” of tonality, but argues

that “while *tonal* has been used badly, it might not itself be bad,” locating the fault in the narrative of tonality’s death: “*Pre-tonal* and *post-tonal*, on the other hand, are inescapably bad and should be retired” (Hynes-Tawa 2024).

Two defended the concept directly. Christensen granted that Western musical institutions are “burdened by severe legacies of racism and colonialism,” but called the claim that the concept “was infected with a colonialist and racist virus from its inception ... simply not correct,” allowing that Fétis’s later writings did racialize it, and held that the term “remains useful” (Christensen 2024). Tymoczko agreed that American academic music theory “is structurally racist” and that “the term *post-tonal* is irredeemable,” but argued that “tonality can still be used in an ethical and intellectually responsible fashion,” since “offering simple linguistic solutions to complex conceptual problems is symptom rather than cure” (Tymoczko 2024).

On the proposal itself, four would retire the term (Ewell, Rings, McClary, Loui); three would keep it, Hynes-Tawa with qualifications alongside Christensen and Tymoczko; and two would do neither, Biamonte pluralizing it and Long setting aside the narrative it carries. On the diagnosis they divide differently, and in their own words: Ewell, Loui, and Biamonte call the concept as now used racist; Rings, McClary, and Long accept the critique but put it otherwise, as a troubling history, a bankrupt notion, and a narrative that upholds the white supremacy underlying Fétis’s project; Christensen, Tymoczko, and Hynes-Tawa hold that the present concept is not the carrier of the problem. The division does not run in a single line: Hynes-Tawa, who accepts much of the critique, and Tymoczko, who rejects it, arrive at the same place on the word itself, and both single out “post-tonal” as the term to abandon.

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Notes

1. That the responses were invited is the participants’ own description: Yust’s acknowledgments thank the journal’s editorial board “for the excellent idea of inviting responses to this essay, and to all the respondents for agreeing to participate” (Yust 2024, 59, unnumbered note), and Ewell thanks the journal “for the invitation to take part in the present colloquy” (Ewell 2024, 94).

Appendix D.6: Danielle Brown’s Open Letter and the SEM Response (2020–2021)

Date	Event
Jun 12, 2020	• Danielle Brown publishes “An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies, Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education” on her website, My People Tell Stories, and posts it to SEM-L, the listserv of the Society for Ethnomusicology (Brown 2020; Cooley 2020a). ◦ Brown, who had resigned an assistant professorship at Syracuse University in 2014 and founded the platform, framed the piece as “candid thoughts on the state of music studies in the United States, addressing primarily issues in ethnomusicology and music education,” adding that “these thoughts are my own, and are not meant to represent those of any other person” (Brown 2020). ◦ Her central charge was that although “many white ethnomusicologists understand interpersonal and systemic racism on an intellectual level, they just don’t get it,” and that “an organization, whose predominantly white members by and large research people of color, is and can be nothing other than a colonialist and imperialist enterprise.” She wrote: “No matter how hard we try to convince ourselves otherwise, until ethnomusicology as a field is dismantled or significantly restructured, so that epistemic violence against BIPOC is not normalized, Black lives do not matter” (Brown 2020). ◦ She held that institutional gestures would not suffice, writing that “statements, lists of resources, curriculum guides, roundtables, panel discussions and so forth will not put a dent in the system,” but clarified that she was not calling for scholars who had long studied a culture to stop teaching: “Does this mean that those who spent decades studying a culture have no right to teach and write? Not necessarily, but changing the system does mean that people of color must be at the forefront of telling their stories until some sort of equity is reached” (Brown 2020). ◦ She warned that diversity, equity, and inclusion risked becoming “buzz words,” part of a “diversity fad,” and identified equity as the crux, “the elephant in the room—the underrepresentation of BIPOC in the music classroom.” She closed: “Not admitting that ethnomusicology remains a colonialist and imperialist enterprise is part of the resistance to equity and justice for Black, Indigenous, People of Color and simply tells me what I already know—White Lives Matter” (Brown 2020). • Timothy J. Cooley, SEM’s president, replies the same day^[1] in a message to the listserv titled “SEM is Changing” (Cooley 2020a; Garcia 2020). ◦ Addressed to Brown and posted to SEM-L, the reply read in full: “Dear Dr. Danielle Brown, Thank you for your Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies. As the current President of the Society for Ethnomusicology, I am committed to using this position of power and privilege to address the very concerns about and criticisms of SEM articulated so well and helpfully in your letter. Should you return to SEM, I believe you will find it a different place. Sincerely, Timothy J. Cooley, President, Society for Ethnomusicology” (Cooley 2020a). ◦ A SEM Board timeline later reproduced by Garcia called it “an extremely unsatisfactory, dismissive, and gaslighting response,” posted “without consultation from the Board” (Garcia 2020).^[2]
Jun 14, 2020	• A statement, “In Support of Dr. Brown’s Open Letter,” circulates by email (“In Support of Dr. Brown” 2020). ◦ Its short “Twitter statement” version read: “We’re with Dr. Brown. Dr. Brown’s letter must be taken seriously: racism in ethnomusicology is real and urgent today. We must acknowledge anti-Blackness & white supremacy in SEM, hold one another accountable, and commit to radically restructuring the field” (“In Support of Dr. Brown” 2020). ◦ The statement was framed as a “living document” that continued to collect signatures; its final preserved version (the “Final Statement”) lists 467 signatories (“In Support of Dr. Brown” 2020).
Jun 15, 2020	• According to a SEM Board timeline later reproduced by Garcia, Board members write a message of concern to the President about his response (Garcia 2020).
Jun 22, 2020	• The Board delivers a “four-page, single-spaced letter of concerns to the President,” followed by “concrete action items” (Garcia 2020).
Jun 24, 2020	• SEM member Luis-Manuel Garcia posts a personal “holding message” to the SEM-L listserv, the first of several (Sakakeeny 2020). ◦ Garcia, who stressed that he wrote “entirely on my own, without consultation with anyone,” said he was “very aware that some of the people who signed on to the statement in support of Dr Brown had absolutely no business signing their name in good faith. Furthermore, I can scarcely imagine if it’s worse whether they did so obliviously, guiltily, or spitefully.” On the statement’s purpose he added: “Signing a petition or collective statement exonerates NO ONE, including myself. That is not the point of it, in any case. It sets a reference point for measuring accountability in the future, but fixes nothing in itself. We are working on ways to hold every signatory to that statement accountable, with specific and concrete calls to action. This will not happen tomorrow” (Sakakeeny 2020).
Jun 25, 2020	• The Board votes 7–1 to suspend discussion on SEM-L and distribute a poll, “with the President as the only opposing vote” (Garcia 2020).

Date	Event
Jul 2, 2020	- Garcia posts a second “holding message,” this one including a “SEM-L Demographic Report” on who had been posting to the list (Sakakeeny 2020). - The report covered June 12 to July 1 and tallied the posters by race, gender, and employment: 31 white ethnomusicologists, 6 non-Black people of color, 1 Black ethnomusicologist and 9 whose racial or ethnic identity could not be ascertained; 22 men, 14 women, no trans or nonbinary posters, and 12 whose gender was not specified or could not be ascertained; and 23 senior faculty above the tenure line, 2 tenure-track, 8 graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, 8 independent scholars and 6 underemployed ethnomusicologists. A second tally, restricted to the posts responding to Brown’s letter, gave 23 white, 5 non-Black people of color, 1 Black and 3 unascertained; 16 men, 10 women and 6 unascertained; and 15 senior faculty, 2 tenure-track, 6 graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, 4 independent scholars and 5 underemployed ethnomusicologists. The race and employment figures each come to 47 posters and the gender figures to 48; for the responses to Brown, the race, gender, and employment figures each come to 32. The tallies and the classifications behind them are Garcia’s own; his message does not say how the posters’ identities were determined. Garcia presented the figures rhetorically: “Who is doing the most ‘discursive work’ on the SEM-L, especially in response to Dr. Brown’s intervention? Who is notably absent? What conditions might be impacting the participation of non-white and non-cisgendered SEM members? These are all Extremely Rhetorical Questions, by the way. I leave these questions as a homework assignment, so to speak” (Sakakeeny 2020).
Jul 8, 2020	The Board calls a vote of no confidence in Cooley’s presidency; it passes with the support of 6 of the 7 members in attendance; by Garcia’s account the vote was 6–1, with another member, past president Gregory Melchor-Barz, absent (SEM Board 2020; Garcia 2020).
Jul 9, 2020	- The SEM Board of Directors announces a hiatus on the SEM-L listserv and the SEM Facebook Group (except for announcements) and circulates a membership survey on revising the forums, asking for responses by July 19 (Sakakeeny 2020). - The Board wrote that it had “received multiple complaints regarding SEM-L,” with subscribers concerned “about several posts that reinforced the discourse of systemic racism, were hostile toward BIPOC members, and contained a white-supremacist tone,” and that “Luis-Manuel García compiled statistics showing that recent authors on SEM-L were overwhelmingly white and tenured.” It said: “We are concerned about the imbalance of voices; both forums clearly need policy revisions to better serve SEM today. We therefore called for a hiatus on both forums (except for announcements) while we poll the membership and work out the next steps” (Sakakeeny 2020).
Jul 22, 2020	- In his President’s Column, “Unprecedented and Meaningful Change,” Cooley addresses Brown’s letter and his June 12 reply (Cooley 2020b). - The column opened: “SEM must change. Now is the time. There are no quick fixes. The process will be painful, yet the social, moral, and scholarly costs of not changing are too great. SEM cannot claim to be an antiracist organization, and we have not yet come to terms with the colonial and imperial legacies that still shape core activities of our scholarly society as an institution. SEM as an institution and I as its current President have ignored, dismissed, suppressed, and harmed many of our members with racist acts, the reinscriptions of hegemonic power, and the active and complicit protection of the status quo and thus white supremacy. I apologize on behalf of myself and SEM. I must do better. We must do better” (Cooley 2020b). - He wrote: “In a hasty response to Dr. Danielle Brown’s ‘An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies, Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education’ posted to SEM-L on 12 June 2020, I committed to using the position of power and privilege of the SEM Presidency to address the concerns that Dr. Brown brought forward. But then I overstepped when I made the aspirational claim that I believed she would find SEM a different place should she return to us, a phrase that many read as dismissive. The feedback was immediate, from many sources, and well deserved. I am humbled. I acknowledge that I do not know what it feels like to be silenced, dismissed, ignored, profiled, harmed because of my race. I acknowledge that my employment, discipline, and even position on the Board of SEM all affirm the legacy of colonialist and imperialist enterprises. I embody privilege. Who am I to presume that I know—really know—anything about the subtle insults, erasures, humiliations that Black and other SEM members experience over and over again in life, including when engaging SEM (see long-standing SEM member and current College Music Society President Eileen M. Hayes’s message to CMS). I apologize for the anger and hurt I caused by my insensitive statement. I recommit to listening to our membership. I am listening and concede that SEM is not changing as fast or as effectively as is necessary. Yet we must change for many reasons but most of all because it is the right thing to do. And it is time.” (Cooley 2020b).^[3]
Jul 28, 2020	- Luis-Manuel Garcia forwards to the British Forum for Ethnomusicology list a message reproducing the Board’s July 20 timeline of events, which he says he “abridged and edited for readability” (Garcia 2020). - In the same message, Garcia wrote that “the SEM President is in open and protracted conflict with the Society’s first-ever majority non-white and majority non-male Board,”^[4] which, he said, “has been entirely occupied with managing white fragility and white anger—including white litigiousness.” He closed with a call to action addressed to “my dear white ethnomusicologists” to “come collect your own,” noting that Cooley “holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from Brown University” and calling on Brown’s music faculty and alumni to “reach out to our President and initiate a dialogue about accountability and active anti-racism” (Garcia 2020).

Date	Event
Aug 20, 2020	- Eleven past presidents of SEM publish an open letter, circulated to the SEM-L listserv from the Society's official account and hosted by the Society under the title "Open Letter from SEM Past Presidents on Racism" (Sakakeeny 2020; SEM Past Presidents 2020). - Addressed to the Board, Council, and membership, it read: "We, the undersigned past presidents of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), publicly support the views Dr. Danielle Brown expressed in her 'Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies' and those of the marginalized scholars who have raised their voices in protest before and since that letter appeared. Deep-seated white supremacy and colonialism shape SEM, and SEM is a site in which these systems of power are produced and reproduced. This situation demands a strong and proactive response. We offer our time, energy, and commitment to the SEM Board, the SEM Council, and the SEM membership to work on initiatives that will address this reality" (SEM Past Presidents 2020). - The signatories were Gage Averill, Harris M. Berger, Beverley Diamond, Charlotte Frisbie, Ellen Koskoff, Anne Rasmussen, Timothy Rice, Anthony Seeger, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Ruth M. Stone, and Deborah Wong (Sakakeeny 2020).^[5]
Aug 24, 2020	Seven members of the SEM Board issue a statement to the membership disclosing the July 8 no-confidence vote and its aftermath: "Following months of ongoing concerns that we communicated to Dr. Tim Cooley multiple times, both orally and in writing, we called a vote of no confidence in his presidency on July 8. The vote passed with the support of 6 out of the 7 Board members in attendance at the meeting. In the absence of Dr. Cooley's expected resignation after the vote of no confidence, six Board members wrote a letter on July 15 recommending his resignation and requesting a response by July 17. On July 24, Dr. Cooley responded that he is not planning to resign" (SEM Board 2020).
Sep 12, 2020	- The SEM Council Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, a nine-member body formed by a July 30 vote of the SEM Council "in response to a request made by six members of the Board to the Council to work through an impasse in the SEM leadership," submits its report to the Council chair (Sakakeeny 2020).^[6] - The committee had reviewed documents provided by Cooley, the other Board members, and the SEM Ethics Committee, and had met separately with Cooley, the other Board members, and SEM's executive director. The first of its unanimous recommendations is "that President Tim Cooley tender his resignation as soon as possible": "Although he is by no means responsible for all the challenges the Society and its membership face, we find that his actions have not only inhibited the ability of the other members of the Board to act on those challenges in a timely and considered manner, they have frequently exacerbated the challenges faced by the Society and alienated other Board members" (Sakakeeny 2020).
Sep 17, 2020	Cooley resigns. His letter reads in full: "With this letter I offer my resignation from the position of President of the Board of Directors of the Society for Ethnomusicology. As a member of SEM for over thirty years, opportunities to serve in appointed and elected roles have been a privilege and honor. I leave now knowing that in each of these roles I served the society and its members with dedication, integrity, and malice toward no one. Whether or not the current Board impasse was ever necessary, now it is time for SEM to refocus its attention and energy on the difficult but positive work of transforming SEM into a truly anti-racist scholarly society" (Sakakeeny 2020).
Sep 21, 2020	The Board emails the membership announcing the release of the committee's report and Cooley's resignation (Sakakeeny 2020).^[7]
2020–2021	The Society's record of its presidents gives Cooley's term as 2019–2020, a single year (the office has run two years since 1971), and lists Tomie Hahn as interim president for 2020–2021 and then as president for 2021–2023 (SEM Presidents).

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Notes

1. The reply is timestamped Friday, 12 June 2020, 3:31 p.m., the same day Brown posted her open letter to SEM-L.
2. The Board’s July 20, 2020 communication itself is not public; it is known here only through Garcia’s reproduction, which he describes as “abridged and edited for readability” (see the July 28 entry below).
3. “Colonialist and imperialists enterprises” is as printed in Cooley’s column.
4. The characterization of the Board’s composition as a first is Garcia’s own; it is not corroborated by the other sources cited here.
5. The two surviving versions of the letter differ. As emailed from the Society’s account (sem@indiana.edu) on August 20, 2020 at 12:51 p.m. and reproduced in the archived thread, it carries eleven signatures (Sakakeeny 2020). The version posted to the SEM website carries ten, omitting Ruth M. Stone (SEM Past Presidents 2020). The list as circulated is followed here.
6. The quoted description of the committee’s formation is the report’s own, which attributes it to an August 23, 2020 email from the Council chair and four other Council members to the committee’s members.
7. The September 21 email is not itself reproduced in the archived thread; it is known here through the compiler’s note introducing the committee report and resignation letter (Sakakeeny 2020).