



Statement on Equity - Opera InReach

Forward

Opera InReach bases itself in a search for greater access to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Justice (EDIJA) in every area of opera (when used as an adjective *opera* describes the industry, artform, and individual perception all as one). From a sectoral understanding, an artistic understanding, and an individual understanding, opera is an idiom understood to be based in Eurocentricity, exclusion, and elitism. There is a great effort needed to break down these perceived bases is multifaceted and constantly in need of scrutiny, reexamination, and evolution. We seek first to understand what these words mean, and through careful examination and discussion, effectively ensure that our understanding of these terms is reflected in every action we make. Opera InReach is an organization born out of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic; we do not take this lightly. Opera InReach works to ensure that what originated us informs our practice, and we constantly work to adapt our understanding of our world, realigning our principles of EDIJA as a result. The work needed to properly understand our goal and develop our commitment to EDIJA is one and the same, we do not see this as a commitment but as who we are. Due to this, Opera InReach has created a set of **Truths & Questions** that we continue to ask ourselves when reflecting on our commitment. These are constantly evolving and are reassessed as the world continues to understand them differently.

Truths & Questions

Diversity: the acknowledgment of various individuals insinuating the beginnings of tolerating the differences those individuals carry. It is an appreciation and affirmation of existence and uniqueness but carries very little power in regards to action and also can serve as a blanket term to appeasing issues rather than getting to the crux of them on an individual basis.

Diversity asks, "Who is in the room?"

Equity: is the needed response to diversity, a principle that acknowledges the disadvantages that certain demographics face and demands that actions be tailored towards ensuring those within that demographic are accommodated. It acknowledges that while we strive for equality, because of the history specific demographic groups have faced, that doesn't necessarily mean that everyone is treated the same.



Equity responds, “Who is trying to get in the room but can’t? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?”

Inclusion: the practice of ensuring that all have a space to be included specifically those that have not historically been excluded or marginalized. While inclusion works towards the right goal, it only acknowledges half the problem, living in a world of racial bias means that simply being included isn’t enough.

Inclusion asks, “Have everyone’s ideas been heard?”

Justice: The principle of doing what is right. When we think about justice, OIR thinks about actions that help the person who has not been helped. Fair and just action that is demanded of all of us. Justice allows those who ask for inclusion to demand more than performative action; it asks to go further to ensure that when that inclusion happens, it can be maintained.

Justice responds, “Whose ideas won’t be taken as seriously because they aren’t the majority”

Commitment to:

- 1. Promoting EDIJA as a priority in informing our actions rather than as an afterthought succeeding an action**

We strive to understand our actions through EDIJA first. Before even creating a project, a session, or beginning the process of consultation or collaboration, OIR commits to ensuring that the Truths & Questions that we govern ourselves upon have been processed and thoroughly attributed to the actions that follow

- 2. Producing content that authentically represents oppressed peoples and creating spaces where oppressed peoples can see themselves as neutrality rather than an addition**

This informs the repertoire we perform, the people that make up our organization, and the subject matter we choose to highlight in our projects and consultations. We make the effort to represent Black, Indigenous, and persons who identify as of Colour, members of our LGBTQ2SIA+ communities, and other individuals who are currently underrepresented in opera and are inauthentically represented in opera. This understanding prioritizes certain groups over others because of the search for equity rather than the hope for equality.



3. Creating a safe space for our community and the people that associate with our community

We ensure that the spaces in which we create (physical or virtual) are known by all to be safe and that they are protected in those spaces. Our definition of a safe space grows and adapts to the situations we find ourselves in our world. Creating a safe space extends beyond ensuring that everyone is treated fairly, it means that we are open to criticism, send surveys to those in which we engage learning what we can continue to work on, and staying up-to-date with current events and news to know how our space needs to adjust to ensure specific demographics are safe and acknowledged in troubling times

4. Thoughtful dismantling of oppressive barriers that prevent access to opera

The need for greater attention to EDIJA comes from the historic barriers that prevent individuals from accessing opera. These barriers present themselves differently in different areas of opera and must be understood to the fullest extent possible before moving forward. These barriers include race, ethnic background, sexuality, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, and geographical location

As mentioned initially, these concepts, truths, questions, and understandings are constantly evolving. This is just an example of what has gotten us to this point and Opera InReach is committed to understanding our role in EDIJA as we continue to grow as an organization. The time is now to act in favour of those who have to long been suppressed in their ability to act. We will continue to assess our ability to be a voice for those who have been ostracized by opera and commit ourselves to ensure the EDIJA informs all of our practice authentically and ethically.

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