

How Injustice Kills the Arts

"...saying that human rights are political is like saying that starvation is a diet."

To our friends, fans, and community,

Since the COVID lockdown started, we have repeatedly found ourselves saying how lucky we are to have the relationship with music that we do. We miss singing because it is a hobby and a passion for us, but at the end of the day, music is a luxury for us. We love making people happy and singing together, but it doesn't pay our bills. We might be upset about missing music, but how much can we really complain about it while we are healthy and safe?

I don't know many musicians who do not feel incredibly blessed to have music in their lives. It is such a gift to be able to make music and share it with friends, and we've all been lucky enough to find it or have it find us. While it's easy to credit serendipity, the fact remains that we have all been lucky enough to be in a position to have music as a passion or a hobby. Why are we able to do this? Because we have so much else taken care of. We feel safe, and we have relatively stable lives and family situations for the most part (with music thankfully acting as a calming balm in the times of turmoil that arise). I can't say that people who walk through the door at a rehearsal feel unsafe or unstable on a daily basis, and I don't think that has anything to do with the magic of music; it's because **people who are not safe or stable don't get to experience music's magic**. How can anyone make room for one of life's greatest joy's when they are afraid that the metaphorical floor is about to fall out from under them?

We have historically heard about artists fighting against the injustices of their day. Musicians forced to enter through back doors at gigs due to the color of their skin, or not getting credit for their work due to their race, or those who were forced to change their religion to get musical appointments at different points throughout history. These are terrible injustices that people have had to tolerate or fight against in their times and unfortunately still today in many cases. **But how many pages could we fill with people who never got to be musicians or artists because of the struggles that they faced?**

How many people never had the privilege to learn because their life situation was so bad that the arts seemed like a faraway dream? As I look out at the socio-economic struggles faced by so many today (and especially people of color), I can't help but stop and think about how many great minds will never get their chance. **How many incredible artists will this world never see because art cannot grow in one who does not feel safe or who does not have their basic needs met?**

What we do as musicians and artists is a privilege and a luxury. It may be a divinely appointed and noble one, but it's still a privilege. As a chorus, we know that our mission to Make People Happy is one with so many other requirements. You can't be happy if you're not safe. You can't be safe if you're not free from injustice. You can't be free from injustice unless you are treated equally under law.

To those out there, who having the privilege to make music with your friends seems like a dream, don't give up. To those who think their children may not be able to enjoy art and music because they may live in fear and oppression, don't give up. Keep going. We're here with you every step of the way. As a group, we will continue progressively expanding our outreach to include the communities who need it most.

Over the past couple of years, we have made it a point to connect with communities not in our own backyard in an effort to expose students and adults alike to what we do. We have had multiple collaborations and initiatives with black communities, communities of color, and people who we historically would not have been exposed to. We have also taken the time to listen and learn. We heard students who thought music was a thing that they would do in school for a few years and never again for the rest of their lives, and we were happy to help them see that music is a lifelong joy. We also saw students with newfound excitement singing for "people who weren't related to them for once,". I could fill pages with the highs and troubling spots from these interactions. Instead, I will just say that they have been incredible for all, and we still have so much work to do. We will continue to learn and find ways to bring in both audiences and members from communities that we haven't historically reached, and we will double down on those efforts when this lockdown ends and we can sing together again.

Our mission is to make people happy, and you can't be happy when you're living in injustice. For that reason, we denounce any and all oppression, individual or systemic. This world is too beautiful for that. There's no reason for any life to be looked at as less than another. Words are not enough, and as a group, we will do our part. As individuals, we will too. To those who say that we shouldn't be political, I agree, but **saying that human rights are political is like saying that starvation is a diet.** This is not politics; this is decency. This is hoping for a world better than the one we live in for all.

As we sing in one of our favorite songs to perform, "*To fight for the right, without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause!*" We are going to continue to do the right thing and be on the right side of history with this. We hope that you will too.

If you want to speak, we want to listen. Please feel free to reach out and have a discussion.

With respect and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'NB' with a large, sweeping flourish that loops back to the left.

Nate Barrett
Music Director, Morris Music Men