

Dear Members and Friends,

I wish to let you know where the LSA stands in light of the events of recent months that have stirred up an unprecedented and necessary national conversation about systemic racial injustice and the acceleration of the profoundly inhumane treatment of people of color. Not to take a stand, not to ask ourselves what we are doing to perpetuate the racism around us would be irresponsible. We, as players of such a rare and beautiful instrument as the lute, must not let this moment slip by unnoticed as we practice, hiding behind our music stands as if these justice issues had nothing to do with us.

They do, for if performing or listening to music tells us anything, it is that we humans are all connected. And if we sometimes can't figure out how to connect with words, music can and often does fill the void. It moves the soul like nothing else can, perhaps revealing truths we could not see otherwise. At moments like this we must examine our hearts and be honest about what we see. As a society, is there anything we are doing, or not doing, that is contributing to where our world is now?

As a small esoteric Society of predominantly white-raced people, what should we do? Claiming "color blindness" is not only not enough, it's part of the problem. We have to take a look at our organization, without making excuses, and ensure that our doors and our hearts are explicitly open for people of all races to be exposed to the music and the instrument we love so much.

Nor should we shy away from being honest about the historical period during which the lute flourished, a period when social norms prevailed that are anathema to us today. I'm thinking of the fact that the lute's primary association was with the privileged, wealthy class; that, for all we know right now, the vast percentage of music was composed and performed by white males; that enslaving entire populations of dark-skinned people was deemed an acceptable practice. We cannot change any of that. Nor is it the correct conclusion that we should not play this music! What we can do is learn the lessons of the past and ensure that those norms do not drive our actions today. And this is what the LSA is called to do.

What could this look like for the LSA?

1. As your President, I pledge to take advantage of opportunities to educate myself in matters of racial equality and equal opportunity. I have already started this, and I encourage everyone to do likewise.
2. Early Music America has formed an Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) taskforce, led by Patricia Ann Neely. They have already begun posting resources that I plan to look at, and I urge current Board Members to do the same so that future conversations can come up with concrete ideas and that these can come about with eyes wide open. For starters, I recommend a talk given by Patricia Ann Neely, [A Circle of Fifths: a retrospective and remedy for addressing diversity in Early Music in America](#).
3. We should all think about what a "culture of inclusion" might look like for an organization like the LSA. One thought is to expand our reach, and come up with ways to share our music in spaces frequented by those who do not come to formal concerts. After all, if they never encounter the music or the instrument how would they ever get the idea to pursue an interest in it? I call on our local chapters, who know the local scene, to come up with ways this could be done.

4. Finally, it's not enough to say we are inclusive if no one knows we are. We should optimize our social media presence for this. We should be aggressive in our efforts to publicize our events not only before but also after they happen.

Getting over this hurdle will not be easy. While I feel that our LuteFest does create an environment where players of all levels of ability can and do share experiences -- whether over the table in the dining hall, or in the dorm after the evening -- until we can get our music and awareness of the lute out to a wider public, we will continue to have difficulty attracting a diverse group of participants. Once we have success in this effort, we can talk about the integration of race equity into all aspects of the organization.

In humility and determination,

Catherine Liddell

President  
Lute Society of America