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# What Will Change: Tanya Kalmanovitch on Music and Social Change



**what-will-change-solid-color**

*The next four years will prove to be unprecedented in the roll-back and dismantling of environmental protections. In our new series, What Will Change, Tishman Center Affiliated Faculty reflect on the environmental and social justice impacts of the election results from the perspectives of their research,*

*practice, and passion.***by: Tanya**

**Kalmanovitch**It is a commonplace to say that music is the ‘soundtrack’ to social change, but music does not merely accompany social movement. Rather, it is an invisible engine of change. Music transacts between the internal realm of human experience (memory, emotion, culture) and the physical. By making interior experience audible and actionable, it facilitates the conversation between private thought and collective action. Music lives both in the private heart of cultural and personal identity, and at the social, economic and political margins of public life. So it’s not surprising that music did not appear as a campaign issue in 2016. But music is not apolitical: it is tangled up with our sense of identity and agency, our economies, power dynamics and social structures. To pay attention to music, then, is to pay attention to things whose value cannot be adequately described in the terms of the market – and whose future, therefore, cannot be left to the market alone. Inasmuch as music speaks to the world we wish to live in, music shares many common issues with environmental sustainability and environmental justice. The new administration’s promises of greater deregulation, attitude of climate skepticism, and promotion of industry over public good carry consequences for those

who work to defend the invisible, essential assets that allow human life to flourish. The new administration's promises and policies are grounded in a system of belief that holds some lives as worth more than others, other lives as contemptible, and nonhuman life as beneath consideration. Three weeks after the election, we can see how racism, misogyny, xenophobia and climate skepticism are becoming normalized in public office and media conversations. A future that denies the indivisibility of all lives is unsustainable. A future in which individuals whose identities do not align with positions of power are not free to sound their voices is unsupportable.

## **To my students in music, I ask the following:**

1. Do not become disenchanted. Make yourself available to the company of heroines and heroes across time and place, and remind yourself, after Viktor E. Frankl, of "the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way".
2. Cultivate personal agency. As musicians, we tend to think of

our profession as an endangered way of life. We must balance our roles as creators and conservators against our response to the social, political and economic forces that shape our lives and livelihoods. If your response, after Leonard Bernstein, is to “to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before”, then do so with an ever-expanding awareness of the choices you are making and why you are making them. Music is, after all, a discipline of choice-making and connection.

3. Our livelihood as musicians, and the possibility of our continued life on this planet, has suffered greatly as a direct response to political decisions. We have limited information about the new administration’s positions on a host of issues that directly affect musicians. Political action does not take place only at the highest office: become more aware, and more active in asserting your voice about the factors that have altered what it means to work and be paid as a musician. (To name a few: copyright modernization, music licensing, federal support for the arts and immigration).

## To my colleagues in musical higher education, I suggest the following:

1. We need a pedagogy of resilience and hope. If our role as educators is to prepare our students to become the problem-solvers of tomorrow, then we need invigorated curricula that help students to question, comprehend and respond to the forces that shape our lives. This calls for a deeper commitment to the sometimes-uncomfortable task of cross-disciplinary dialogue: both offering and asking for support and guidance outside the arts.
2. Actively expand our educational mission to include the defense of all music and musicians, and particularly to persons whose identities are under attack in the rhetoric of the 2016 election.
3. Expand our musical missions to address the stubborn disconnect between music's widely acknowledged social power, and its marginal social, economic and political place. This might mean asking difficult questions and

admitting to those places  
where we do not yet know our  
answers. It means redoubling  
our efforts to address this  
challenge in new ways.

## To the general public, I offer this call to action:

1. Cultivate your own  
musicianship. Music, after all, is  
not a thing but a verb: it is an  
act that pierces the veil of the  
ordinary and sets into play a  
conversation between our  
interior experience and  
collective experiences.  
Listening, singing, playing,  
attending performances – these  
are all musical acts. They are  
not escapes from reality, but a  
profound mechanism by which  
we can come into deeper  
contact with the world we are  
in now, and the world in which  
we wish to live.

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