



Lior Willinger, Piano

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About Active Listening

Active Listening is the series that unites composers with audiences who care about social justice. Each composer has chosen to address a social justice issue they feel passionate about. In the program notes that follow, actions which listeners can take are provided. The goal of this series is to inspire empathy, educate listeners, and offer steps to actively support each cause. Active Listening will later take a global platform as the commissioned works will be recorded along with an interview with each composer to become part of a YouTube series. This project has been funded by an award from the Presser Foundation.

Transference by Frances Pollock

Transference is a theoretical phenomenon characterized by unconscious redirection of the feelings a person has about a second person to feelings the first person has about a third person. How does this manifest in our lives? We begin to see patterns and predict behaviors that might or might not be real. Transference is useful in understanding social connections in our communities but it can also lead us to profile and fear strangers based on preconceived notions of what we think we know.

We started with a message with absolutes that we were sure of. We chose sides, fought the fights we were sure we'd won, and knew that a victory was only a vote away. Now that we have picked sides, what do we do when the other team has won? Who do we blame? Who do we fear? And what happens to those absolutes that we were so sure of?

Here is a list of things I would like listeners to do to help the cause:

1. READ-read everything. Read works by people who are different than you, read alternate histories written by scholars of that area, read think pieces by people who are a different race, age, gender, region, religion, etc. from you, read things that are different from what your peers and colleagues are reading.
2. Always position yourself in the world-Do your best to understand what you represent in the world. You do this by reading and studying other cultures.
3. Listen and ask questions-Perspective primarily is built out of real-world experience. We are constantly reinforcing the narratives we think we understand. Does someone have a drastically different opinion than you? Ask them about it and consider how they developed that perspective. I've never seen a mind permanently changed by name-calling.
4. Don't be afraid to challenge a perspective-If someone says something that offends you, point it out and ask for their time to discuss it.
5. Be kind. This has and always will be the most important thing you can do to another person.

I would love for a donation to be made to Alexander Blake's group "Tonality" <https://ourtonality.org/>

-Frances Pollock

CLIMA by Chen Zhangyi

In 2018 - the unusually cool weather brought about by the monsoon surge was a rare occurrence in equatorial Singapore, and that prompted me to write something related to nature and environmental protection. CLIMA is created with the intention to raise awareness for climate change, global warming, and their potentially catastrophic ramifications.

Some baby steps to resist climate change:

1. Be mindful of wasting resources like water and electricity - turning off the tap while soaping the dishes, not cranking up the heater/AC!
2. Use less disposable materials - I try my best to bring our own mug to cafes and use recyclable straws.

3. Car-pool more to save on gas!

I think the great thing about going greener is also to reduce unnecessary expenditure!

-Chen Zhangyi

Towers by Shelley Washington

I was asked to write a piece inspired by a particular social justice issue that is close to my heart, and I chose to highlight the simultaneous feeling of power and powerlessness, and the often crushing isolation that comes with my being a black woman in higher academia. Throughout my life in schools, including two Masters degrees, I was among a tiny handful of people of color and the only black woman in my program. As I head into a PhD in music composition in the Fall of 2018, I'm afraid it will remain the same. I love that I'll be able to raise awareness, but I hate being "one of the only." Casey Quinlan, and many other authors on the subject of PoC in higher academia, wrote that "one of the greatest challenges of being a black college student at a predominantly white college is the pressure to represent your entire race positively by succeeding at everything." I believe this sentiment extends to all marginalized groups in the United States in some ways. It is lonely. It is exhausting. And though yes, it is getting slightly better, it will take a very very long time to rectify.

I recognize the specific privilege that comes with being biracial; having lighter skin and certain features have allowed me certain 'advantages' that many of my darker sisters and brothers have not experienced. Many of them have had much worse, scarier, lonelier experiences than I, all while being isolated in the academic pursuit they are chasing. To them, I see you. Let me be your shoulder to lean on. I know I'll probably need your shoulders too.

TOWERS is for me, and for all those who reside in their own stronghold. Though we often feel confined to our own separate spires in our own separate kingdoms, I know that someday we'll all be able to come down. Slowly but surely, we will all rise together.

Some small doable things that might help:

1. Take the initiative to learn about the history of African Americans in America, and examine the timeline of when we were allowed to go to the same schools as everyone else. It wasn't too long ago, and being aware of that is important.
2. Speak up on behalf of your POC peers if the content provided by your teachers is exclusively white/western/exclusionary/etc. and ask them to include a more diverse curriculum.
3. Don't always carry the expectation for your POC peers to speak up about issues regarding diversity- if a colleague or professor says something problematic that would potentially harm a POC colleague, don't be afraid to speak up, even if you "don't know how to eloquently word it"- speak up to defend your colleagues in the moment rather than issuing an apology on behalf of the speaker after the fact ("I'm sorry you had to hear that earlier...")
4. Don't just listen when a POC colleague speaks up about an issue- listen and internalize and think about why they said what they said- if they said something you didn't quite understand, research!

-Shelley Washington

Until there is nothing left by Natalie Draper

“Until there is nothing left” is a meditative solo piano piece written for Lior Willinger for his project “Active Listening.” This project focuses on deforestation.

Trees provide shade, convert carbon dioxide to oxygen, and provide extensive root systems to prevent flooding—they are a crucial part of nearly every environmental ecosystem. Yet, deforestation is a devastating problem from urban and suburban landscapes to the tropical rainforest.

I grew up just outside of Washington, D.C. in the Maryland suburbs. My parents’ neighborhood has small, brick houses with yards full of huge, old trees. In the last few decades the county has allowed developers to doze these houses in order to build ostentatiously larger houses made of cheap materials. The dozing process is ruthless—the entire yard is razed and no trees are spared. It is jarring to walk through the neighborhood now. A few houses remain that are still like my parents’ house, but most are gone and many yards are simply brown squares, waiting for a new architectural monstrosity. When houses are built, few trees, if any, are planted to replace those that are lost. Walks through the neighborhood are hotter and less pleasant, as there is less shade. My parents’ neighborhood is in many ways a microcosm for how our culture thinks about land use: development is prioritized and environmental losses are ignored.

On a different continent, deforestation takes on a more epic story. In the last 40 years, more than 20% of the Amazon rainforest has been destroyed. In the Mato Grosso region of Brazil—home to a variety of climatic regions, including parts of the Amazon rainforest—deforestation has been particularly devastating to the environment. As I was reading about deforestation in Mato Grosso, I became interested in linking my piano piece with a time-lapse that could demonstrate the recent rate of change in vegetation. I contacted a college friend who now works for NASA and directed her to latitude and longitude points in the Mato Grosso region. Using NASA’s satellite imagery, she was able to put together slides and a time-lapse video from 1984 through 2018 showing the dramatic change to the landscape over this 35-year period.

There are many ways in which big business and development seem like forces that are impossible to stop. I don’t believe this is the case. Whenever I walk through my parents’ neighborhood we hear other neighbors lamenting the loss of trees. Meanwhile, on a more global scale, there are many organizations working to save the Amazon rainforest. As a global community, we are increasingly aware of the fragility of our planet and the need to preserve the land and communities around us. I would ask you to consider four action items after listening to my piece and watching the satellite imagery from NASA:

1. Please consider making a donation to Amazon Watch, which is an organization that is invested in protecting the Amazon rainforest and its indigenous populations:
www.amazonwatch.org

2. Please consider making a donation to the Rainforest Trust, which works to purchase and protect the rainforest through partnerships and community engagement:
www.rainforesttrust.org
3. Stay engaged with your local communities. Make sure that local land-use decisions are ones you agree with. If destructive decisions are being made, call your representatives. Write letters. Speak up. Don't assume the issue will take care of itself.
4. Learn about gardening and land use; plant a tree!

-Natalie Draper

H8 Speech by David Smooke

I conceived this piece to support two of my favorite organizations whose purposes go hand in hand: The American Civil Liberties Union and the Southern Poverty Law Center. The ACLU works to protect our right to engage in political discourse without limitation, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, and more than 200 years after the drafting of the U.S. Constitution this aspiration remains the foundational principle of our democracy. However, some speech is inherently abhorrent, as it might be filled with hate, can incite violence, or otherwise preempt other voices from being heard. Therefore, while I truly believe that everyone should have access to the public sphere, I also understand the importance of holding people accountable for what they say. This is where the SPLC comes in, identifying people and organizations whose ideas involve silencing others. In this way, we fight for our right to assemble and protest, but also for other people's right to condemn the content of our speech and for what we say to have real consequences in the social sphere, although never in the political domain.

The piece itself vacillates between two emotional poles—violent storminess and calm sweetness. These two states vie for supremacy throughout this short composition, akin to how protestors and counterprotestors might react when occupying a shared space. I use the shortened version “h8” instead of “hate” in the title not just to evoke the informal speaking style found in texts and twitter posts, but also because this formulation evokes an insidious aspect of hate speech itself: many neo-Nazi groups use the symbol “88” as a shorthand for “heil Hitler,” since “h” is the eighth letter of the alphabet. These sorts of dog whistle codes abound in our online discourse, and part of the SPLC’s work is to catalog this language of the abusers.

Specific activities include:

Donate to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Donate to the Southern Poverty Law Project.

Check the SPLP list of hate groups to see who is in your area or is actively trying to influence people you know.

Research the sources for all of your information. Check media bias charts

(<http://www.adfontesmedia.com/media-bias-chart-3-1-minor-updates-based-constructive-feedback/>) to see what the agenda is of the person telling you information.

Listen to others. Support their right to speak but also hold them accountable for the content of their speech.

-David Smooke

Love into Concrete by Judah Adashi

Whenever someone is killed by violence in Baltimore City, an organization called Baltimore Ceasefire invites people to gather at the site of the murder for a Sacred Space Ritual. Led by co-organizer Erricka Bridgeford, these are not vigils, but “a way to put love & light into the place where our Sister was taken by violence...to make it sacred ground.”

Love into Concrete is my musical response to the experience of a Sacred Space Ritual. The title was inspired by Bridgeford, who describes the communal act as "pouring love into the murder spot" or "pour[ing] light into the concrete."

The work is dedicated to Erricka Bridgeford and Baltimore Ceasefire.

-Judah Adashi

The composer shares the following from the Baltimore Ceasefire website (baltimoreceasefire.com):

"Donate, buy apparel, attend public meetings, host a public meeting in your community space, attend Sacred 7 rituals, host a life-affirming event during a Ceasefire weekend, attend life-affirming events during Ceasefire weekends, take the Baltimore Peace Challenge, commit to community outreach in between Ceasefire weekends, share social media posts on Facebook & Twitter & Instagram, join our email list, advocate for the Ceasefire /Peace Challenge in your schools, churches, work places, etc., put a poster in your window at home, keep flyers in your places of business, and anything else you can think of to spread the message!"

Pipeline (SPP) by Wendel Patrick

A musical conception of the school to prison pipeline.

Having engaged through the arts with students in Baltimore City schools for twenty years, I have witnessed the stark contrast and clear disparity between resources effectively denied to schools and students in areas of poverty and those available to schools and students in more affluent communities. A few years ago, when I was working with a remedial reading class in a Baltimore City public school, I asked the teacher if the students would be reading their assigned book at home. I was informed that there were no books for the remedial reading students to take home and that there was only one book for the entire class to use. Though it was early in the school year, the teacher had already exhausted her photocopying budget in her personal attempt to provide reading material for the students. This is one of many glaring but all too commonly found examples of a public school system creating scenarios for its students where failure is all but guaranteed. In the same school, there was an armed guard patrolling the school halls. Physical altercations that might lead to detention or suspension in wealthier schools

would instead lead to arrests and criminal charges for these students. The result: These students enter the criminal justice system at an early age.

The opening of Pipeline (SPP) symbolizes the hope, innocence, potential, and power of a child. As the mood shifts, the music moves to illustrate a student's passage through childhood and an educational system much like the one described above, showing flashes of that same promise while passing through stages of disillusionment, betrayal, abandonment, and, ultimately, resignation.

Please strongly consider volunteering in an underfunded city school. The system needs help, and your time and talents can make a difference in the trajectory of a student's life.

-Wendel Patrick

We are by Ari Sussman

"So we are speaking up for those who don't have anyone listening to them, for those who can't talk about it just yet, and for those who will never speak again. We are grieving, we are furious, and we are using our words fiercely and desperately because that's the only thing standing between us and this happening again."

-Emma Gonzalez

"We will stop using our weapons for war. We will hammer our swords into plows and we will use our spears to make tools for harvesting. All fighting between all people will end.."

-Isaiah 2:4

I think that the best thing that anyone can do is to call your congress-people on both sides of the aisle. It's important to be respectful but to clearly articulate your points to them. As a citizen of their jurisdiction, you have every right to protest and fight for what is moral and right. It is theoretically their responsibility to listen and absorb your message. You may never know how your words may impact the lives and mindsets of your representatives and American citizens.

For humanity's sake, go be the change you desire to see.

-Ari Sussman

Settle by Ledah Finck

We settle for less; we settle for giving a dollar when we wish we could give warmth and safety. Some of us settle in big furnished houses where the electricity is always on, some settle down when we don't know where else to go, and some settle in whatever scrap of shelter we can find.

When I moved to Baltimore from North Carolina in 2014, and during all my visits to Baltimore before that, one of the most immediate and jarring things I noticed was the ubiquity of people who clearly spent a lot of time on the streets. I've never been directly affected by

homelessness, and likely never will be thanks to the network of relatively resource-rich friends and family I'm privileged to have. However, living in Baltimore or in cities like it means that during the course of most days, when walking to work or home or the store, you can expect a small encounter with a person who asks for spare change or for help of some other kind. It's a reality that I and many of my peers don't know that much about, and we struggle to know the "correct" way to respond to this kind of interaction with a stranger on the street. I've also learned that there is a good deal of stigma and stereotyping towards those experiencing homelessness: they enjoy it, they're lazy, they're criminals. Particularly troubling to me are the split-second judgments one makes when encountering homelessness, about the person's character, the level of threat they may pose, and whether or not they are worthy of our attention or a dollar. We can't know everyone's story, and we can't help every person we interact with. But we can remember that no person wants to be without access to a healthy and stable living situation, and that most homeless individuals have likely experienced extreme hardship. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, the average life expectancy for the homeless population is between 42 and 52 years, compared to 78 years for the general population.

"Settle" was written as a reflection on life for those who don't have a home and who subsist in places not meant for habitation. The piece is driven by one melody, which is repeated over and over in different framings; by the end, it's probably gotten repetitive and familiar, but fragments are cut away until almost nothing is left. For the midsection, a nocturne-like melody in one hand is unpredictably obscured by blaring interruptions from the other hand, a musical depiction of the stresses of the lack of a private, quiet space in which to address basic needs. My intent is to encourage listeners to consider compassion towards those who experience homelessness, and to consider active gratitude and stewardship towards whatever home and larger community they possess. There is a deep lack of long-term support available for people experiencing homelessness and for addressing its causes and symptoms, but many organizations, largely non-profits, exist that accept monetary donations and that rely on volunteers to help support the homeless. These include Healthcare for the Homeless and Neighbor to Neighbor. In Baltimore City, organizations such as My Sister's Place, Helping Up Mission, and Baltimore Station serve homeless populations and accept donations and volunteering. If you're approached by a homeless person, the advice I've been given is to give what you're comfortable offering, which might just be a smile and a kind word. Those things can go a long way. Otherwise, it helps to know that a night in many shelters costs a few dollars—a level of support that is within many of our means.

-Ledah Finck

Dreamcatcher by Marcos Balter

Earlier this year, thousands of children were separated from their families due to the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance policy." Adults attempting to cross the border into the US were placed under custody and criminally prosecuted regardless of whether they were seeking asylum. This heartless policy resulted in children being taken away and put in detention facilities. The battle for humane treatment of immigrants continues as thousands of migrant families are still detained, the termination of temporary protected status for 406,000

immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, and Honduras looms, the protections of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which prevents deportation for about 800,000 undocumented immigrants who arrived as minors (known as Dreamers) and offers access to work permits and education, are set to expire. A new proposal to replace the Flores settlement would allow migrant families to be detained indefinitely while their immigration case is pending.

So what can we do?

1. Check out 5calls.org. Stay up-to-date with the immigration issues and push your officials to act.
2. Donate to groups doing good work on behalf of immigrant children. Here's a portal to help over a dozen organizations: <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/kidsattheborder>
3. Lastly, keep caring about important issues even if they fall out of the news cycle. Continue to push for justice if there is work to be done.

-LW