



Vijay Iyer &lt;[REDACTED]&gt;

## Your feedback on Code of Conduct for Musicians/ open letter?

7 messages

Jen Shyu <[REDACTED]>  
To: Vijay Iyer <[REDACTED]>

Wed, Dec 6, 2017 at 1:57 AM

Dear Vijay,

Hope this finds you well...and not too crazed!

Wondering and hoping if you might be able to give us (the small group of women including Tamar and Maria working on these docs...) your advice on these two (confidential for now) docs attached -- As Maria and I mentioned before in our last email to you, the idea is for this open letter to be very widely signed in the music world and for the Code of Conduct to be asked by people on the music business side of things, and to make this code sort of a prerequisite to working in some festivals, venues, and institutions.

We really need to have trusted men look at this, as we are all women and composed this - so we need more perspectives. We're also approaching lawyers to look over these docs as well...

Both things will be available on a website that is modeled after the [notsurprised.org](http://notsurprised.org) movement... We also are going to include a "resources" tab with, among other things, a link to [betterbrave.com](http://betterbrave.com), a tab for Letters of Support, and a Testimonies tab. One of us created the website draft here (again, confidential, please do not share!!): <https://too-many.org/>

Anyway, I am hoping and wondering if you might be able to skim over these two docs before **Sunday 10pm** (the group of women is meeting for a conference call that night to compile all our feedback) and send me any comments that stick out to you or look wrong to you, or anything that you'd like to add -- the Open Letter is priority because we hope to release it on Tuesday Dec. 12...so if you are pressed for time, just looking at the Open Letter for now is cool...

Again, we're keeping it confidential so that it can be released with as many trusted eyes like yours having seen it...please let me know if you're interested in giving your feedback, but if you're simply too busy, i totally understand!!!

Vijay!

take good care, and till soon,  
jen

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New album *Song of Silver Geese* on Pi available [HERE](#) and [HERE!](#)

[www.jenshyu.com](http://www.jenshyu.com)  
2016 Doris Duke Artist  
2017 Downbeat's Rising Star Female Vocalist  
2016 MAP Fund Grantee for 50-state US tour  
2011 Fulbright Scholar to Indonesia  
2007, 2009, 2014 Asian Cultural Council Fellow

New solo **Nine Doors** (12 minute collage):  
<https://youtu.be/yowKtENyRuc>

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### 2 attachments

 **Code of Conduct Music Targeted Circulation.pdf**  
109K

 **open letter Targeted Circulation.pdf**  
162K

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Vijay Iyer <[REDACTED]>

Wed, Dec 6, 2017 at 7:36 PM  
**vi-027**

To: Jen Shyu <[REDACTED]>

Hi Jen. Could you please forward this to the group?

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Dear friends/colleagues/members of the collective of authors,

I hope this finds you well. Thank you for the generous use of your individual and collective time, effort, and labor (including tremendous emotional labor) to craft these very powerful documents. I believe that the launch of this initiative will be a historic, transformative moment for our communities. I'm honored to have the chance to weigh in on the contents and to take part in the debate, development, and ultimately, dissemination of these documents. I absolutely believe in the concept of a Code of Conduct, and I admire the clarity and nuance with which you have articulated the motivation, the mission, and the many, many difficult details.

I hope you'll take my comments here in the spirit that they are intended -- from a collegial standpoint of solidarity, allyship, and care. Forgive me if I over-explain details that are obvious.

First of all, I want to make a sort of general point about what is at stake here. I'll start by sharing this link with you, because I feel that it needs to be addressed in the context of our specific musical community. I hope you'll take the time to read it. It's a moving and harrowing piece, so please consider this a trigger warning of sorts. It's about Emmett Till's accuser, and it's written by a woman of color.

<https://medium.com/@SIIPCampaigns/the-real-reason-why-we-cant-just-believe-all-women-f6eac4105990>

I bring this up because while we are absolutely embedded in a framework of endemic male privilege, and find ourselves in a zeitgeist moment of high-impact public responses to it, we are still trapped a horrible historical nightmare of state-sanctioned white supremacy -- and, in particular, a system of severe, unrelenting anti-Blackness. Every single one of us is right in the middle of it all, as participants in our specific musical network; as "jazz" musicians, we circulate in an industry that plunders, commodifies, belittles, and mimics Black cultural production, without a shred of compassion for Black life in general. This is still a culture that would deny the basic humanity of Black people, in which armed police officers and civilian vigilantes can retroactively report "feeling physically threatened" while shooting bullets through the body of an unarmed Black person and subsequently be deemed "innocent."

Let me add, immediately, that I am not casting doubt on any of the accusers who have courageously come forward in our music scene, publicly or privately, whether using their names or remaining anonymous. It is true that many of the accused are Black men, and many of the accusers are white women; but I want to be clear that I believe every one of the accusers.

I don't need to remind any of you, but I will say this just to make it plain: if we don't figure out a way to carefully address all of this at once -- race, gender, sexuality, and power -- we are opening the door to some pretty dangerous situations.

I am simply mindful of how things might backfire. Here is an example, which is sadly as innocuous as these things get. Very recently, a friend and colleague (a young African American male professor, whom some of you know) shared with me a disturbing anecdote, in which he was accused of "physically threatening" a more senior white female colleague at a well-known university. He had found himself in a situation where a group of her students approached *him* to air their grievances about *her*, and he was trying to be a good colleague and mediate, for the greater good of the community. He arranged to listen their claims alone, take notes, and report back to her.

Apparently upset by this affront to her authority, the white woman professor completely fabricated a charge of "feeling physically threatened" while she was talking to him about this situation -- in which, remember, he was *trying to help*. She then *took her charge to the dean*. That's right: she used her white privilege to try to get our friend fired by lying about him. Fortunately, this dean knew the accused person very well, saw through the woman professor's flimsy accusation, and advised him simply to steer clear of this woman as though his life depended on it. The two remain colleagues at the same university, on strained terms, nearly two years later. On a daily basis, he is forced to navigate an ongoing, unsettling situation in the same space as his more powerful "accuser."

As you see, there is no linear axis of power; it doesn't only flow "downward" from male to female, tall to short, rich to poor, cis to trans. We more regularly experience intersecting, even contradictory power differentials. And especially in our world, anti-Blackness consistently becomes the most dominant force, the one power relation that repeatedly trumps all others.

So, back to our Code of Conduct. Here's a line in the current draft where we open the door to some dangerous situations: "When power or authority is involved, it is not possible to give true consent."

**vi-028**

I understand why that line was written, and why it was included; I also understand what was intended by it. But in practice, what would be meant by "power" here? Physical strength? Size? Age? Gender? Wealth, status, privilege? Being "physically threatening"? How would we measure any of that against the persistent precarity of Black life in the U.S. and Europe?

Even bracketing the race issue, one could ask: in what human relationship is power *not* "involved"?

Similarly, I understand why we would want to use words like "intolerable." But I also think that such words could, down the line, be used carelessly and even dangerously.

I don't know how to include language about race in this document; perhaps it would even be counterproductive to do so, given the aims of disseminating this widely and the widespread state of almost insurmountable illiteracy about structural racism. But I think we should take some time to reconsider every line of it carefully from that perspective -- i.e. not for potential accusers, but for potentially vulnerable accused people who find themselves at the intersections -- to make sure that we are not pushing too hard and creating danger.

My last point is this: while we must be firm in laying down boundaries, and be clear about inappropriate behavior, we also want to *invite* people to participate in a new system of ethics. So perhaps we could find a way to be more positive, even aspirational, in language and tone. Such an ideal shines through in many places in the document already (e.g., "Committ [sic] to creating new platforms for balanced gender and multigenerational creativity and communication"), but on balance it feels as though it is canceled out by a tone of virtual accusation.

I don't want this to be interpreted as "gee, lighten up" or as trivializing the remarkably effective work that you have already done. Also, this is decidedly *not* a #notallmen kind of argument that I am making. I am only sharing a general concern about how this might propagate, one which I feel can be addressed swiftly through a few minor modifications. And I had to raise the larger caveat about race and precarity with the hope that we can all bear it in mind, every step of the way.

Thank you for reading. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

With love and respect,  
Vijay

ps -- Feel free to write to me directly, [REDACTED]. FYI, I will be overseas and possibly unreachable from Dec 10-18.

[Quoted text hidden]

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Jen Shyu <[REDACTED]>  
To: Vijay Iyer <[REDACTED]>

Wed, Dec 6, 2017 at 9:17 PM

Dear Vijay,  
Thank you! I am forwarding your message to the group right away (from the plane!), and then will read thoroughly! Just want to get it to the group asap. Truly thank you and more soon,  
Jen

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New album *Song of Silver Geese* on Pi available [HERE!](#)

**vi-029**