

Chris Lee — IDEA Committee and Black Lives Matter

I'm the chair of the NACO—the orchestra IDEA committee. I'm a member of the National Arts Center IDEA committee. I guess we're starting from scratch for whoever's watching this. So, IDEA stands for inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility. It's about making our field and the orchestra, the symphony Orchestra experience all of those things, so when we look at our audience, we want it to be—we want everyone to feel welcome coming to an orchestra concert. We want everyone in our community in Ottawa and all Canadians to feel included and feel like they belong at one of our concerts. And we want everyone in Canada, all Canadians to feel like they would belong as members of the orchestra, as members of the staff, and we also want the music we play to reflect our culture, the culture of Canada and of all Canadians. So, the symphony orchestras is on one hand—one idea that would be the sort of museum piece that plays music from Germany and Austria, from 1725 to 1875.

It's sort of interesting, like we brought the symphony orchestra over from Europe, but those symphonies back then they played the music of their time, right. And they didn't play only music from 100 years ago or from 200 years ago. So, it's really a normal part of the art form to play the music of the time, and also the music of where the orchestra is. So, for us, the idea of us playing Canadian music of our time, it really should be a normal standard thing, and especially as a National Orchestra.

So those are the broad strokes of the idea committee. For us, the NACO idea committee is just about, just mainly about inclusion. Including everyone, making sure people feel welcome, and included—in the audience, on stage, the guest artists, the conductors, the staff. Those are the broad strokes,

Obviously, like, it is interesting, you know, when you asked me originally, for a half second, I was like, oh, why're we going to talk about that, I thought we were going to talk about Covid, but COVID does sort of play into it. Covid happened—a lot of people were at home or not working. And I think this past summer, unfortunately these things have happened for many summers—like what happened with Breanna Taylor and George Floyd in the States, and a lot of people were—but there were more eyeballs on it this summer. And there was more frustration, more pain, that there were still these issues with, with police brutality, and people dying in those cases, you know, black people dying in the hands of—you know, unarmed black people dying at the hands of police for essentially, for no reason, in those two cases. And so, you know, this is very recent history, but obviously there was, you know, a big uproar in the States and in Canada as well. And I think it led a lot of different institutions to look at themselves and say: well, are we, what role are we playing? Are we making sure everyone is included? Is there any systemic racism here? Like, when you hear the Prime Minister of your country, Justin Trudeau saying: well, we have problems here in Canada with systemic racism, anti-black racism, these are not only problems in the States, and people need to become more aware of it. And then there's just a trickle down when the leadership starts to acknowledge that as well. And so, then I think that that that led to a lot of different institutions, saying: okay, hold on, we need to make sure you know, that we are very inclusive, that we are not part of this problem of systemic

racism. And I think that that would be part of the seeds of us having these different committees at the Arts Center and exploring these issues. I mean, we don't have the answers to any of these questions, but we're exploring them, and we're definitely committed to being a diverse, open place that's welcoming and that all Canadians feel they can belong.