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PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION AND COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

BEING MOVED BY MUSIC.

I pursued composition because I was moved by the beauty, power, playfulness, and excellence of music. Music can be so many things, even all at once, and I could recount stories of encounters with any of these qualities. But I think it was my encounter with beauty in music that lies at the origin of my compositional journey.

I was eighteen, playing a video game on my computer and shuffling on YouTube from video to video. At one point a piece of choral music came on, and I physically had to stop playing so that I could start the video over and give it my fullest attention. I already knew music could be cool and exciting. I had no idea it could be beautiful. More, I didn't know beauty could do that to me. That experience set me on a path toward recreating it, for myself as well as others. I wanted to make something beautiful, and give others the same experience I had.

PLAY, WORK, PRACTICE, PROCESS.

Composing can be fun, but it can also be a lot of work. This is true of musicianship at large, and surely of art in general. We've all likely heard the saying, "When you do what you love you'll never work a day in your life." It's a terrible saying. Even something as fun as making music can be a lot of work, and you'll spend plenty of time not enjoying it. We ought to get more comfortable with that, and allowing ourselves to balance more between the work and play of art. I believe these two things can and should be partners in the acts of creating. When they are I am the happier and more satisfied for it.

Composing is also a practice, as well as a process. Doctors of medicine and similar fields of health are said to be "practicing", and their established businesses are often referred to as "practices". It suggests to me that each act of their work is something of a rehearsal for the next. As for myself, I believe I'm never going to be done learning and I hope to maintain that posture for as long as I live. I also hope to cultivate a deep understanding of my practice, and to gather an understanding of my creative process. I want to understand what works for me while composing. I want to have the efficacy and flexibility to move decisively from imagination to realization. I want to create things I like, but I also want to enjoy and move competently through the acts of creating them.

MAKING THE MUSIC I LIKE.

I'm interested in creating as well as listening to music in a variety of styles, genres, and idioms. I started with songwriting, then turned to more classical (mostly conventional) practices of composition. Later I became interested in more contemporary ("new music") idioms, both acoustic and electronic. It can be exciting to let each of these areas influence the others to see how I might continue expanding my imagination and practice.

As an educator of musicians and composers, I want to help my students develop the same self-awareness and facility. I want to help them celebrate what moves them, what excites them. I want to help them work more playfully, practice more methodically. I want them to make things they like, and to cultivate a sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the acts of creating.

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PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC EDUCATION

MUSICIANSHIP AND EDUCATION.

I pursued music, as an art and as a profession, because I was moved by it. Encounters with the beauty, power, playfulness, and excellence of music struck me and set me on a path toward musicianship. Today I am a performer and a creator of music, and I continue to be moved by and respond to music as well. Music is also a place where I can make connections between elements of my personal, social, and cultural experiences. These connections may be rooted in the grasping of a message, or aligning with a mission of some kind. Or, they may simply be rooted in appreciating my experiences of art and of living. That would be, should be reason enough.

In addition to musicianship, I turned to education because I came to appreciate the joys and thrills of discovery. Reaching that moment of illumination while examining a piece of music can be electrifying. During my studies at Northern Illinois University I was tasked with giving a presentation to the composition seminar, and I chose to present on Salvatore Sciarrino's *Un'immagine di Arpocrate* (for orchestra, chorus, and piano). While highlighting some of the elements that made up its greater form I happened to make a connection for myself. About twenty minutes into the piece there is a great explosion of sound from the ensemble. Later in the piece this great explosive gesture is repeated: but in reverse. While highlighting this I realized that these great gestures amounted what could be interpreted as large, and slowed down sound envelopes. The first gesture took the shape of an attack, followed by a decay, then a sustain, and finally a release. And the second simply mirrors it in reverse. I could hardly contain my excitement at the realization.

MUSIC EDUCATION: RESPONDING TO MUSIC.

I want to help my students engage with and respond to music. My encounters with beauty, power, playfulness, and excellence in music sparked curiosity and ignited passionate interest. And so in my time with my students I want to create space for their own encounters, whether it's with the first movement of Beethoven's 5th or Kendrick Lamar's *Luther*. These encounters become opportunities to give them the tools to respond, to understand and name the technical elements of music.

MUSIC EDUCATION: PERFORMING MUSIC.

Performing music is another opportunity for a deeper degree of intimacy with the elements of music. During my studies at the University of Iowa, my assistantship gave me several opportunities to help students realize musical excerpts in performance. For example, during one of my aural skills lessons I led my students in an abridged performance of Terry Riley's *IN C*. Following the performance we spent time reflecting on the experience.

"New Music" and contemporary musical idioms can be rather polarizing for students of music. Some are fascinated, while others are disgusted or even offended. I once saw a student violently overturn their desk during an examination of Schoenberg's *PIERROT LUNAIRE*. Riley's piece is an excellent point of entry to some of these practices, because of its consistent pulse and its centrifugal tonality. Following the performance some students better appreciated its unconventional form and structure, and some others did not! Whatever their feelings, they came to understand how it worked and were thus equipped to better understand similar works in the future.

MUSIC EDUCATION: CREATING MUSIC.

Creating music is yet another opportunity for musical encounters. Improvisation and composition are powerful tools for engaging with one's liminal and subliminal understanding of music. Our world practically drips with music, and we begin to form the schemata for our musical conventions from infancy. Guided improvisation and composition give us the chance to take hold of that framework, and is another opportunity to acquire the vocabulary to name the technical elements of music. More than this, they are opportunities to engage creatively with that framework, to bend and expand it into new shapes. Engaging with music as a listener and performer is a space through which culture breathes into us. Creating music is a chance for us to breathe back into culture.

MUSIC EDUCATION: CONNECTING THROUGH MUSIC.

Music is also an opportunity for connection, and not just interpersonal connection. As noted above, music is not merely a product of individuals but also of culture. In addition to message, mission, and meaning, music is an opportunity for connection with cultural identity. In music we find opportunities to appreciate our places in the wider scope of human living, and perhaps more importantly the places of others. When music education extends beyond those we've venerated in the western canon, we begin to recognize the dignity of other artistic practices and of other peoples. Art is a human endeavor, and frankly so is humanity. It is my hope that through equipping my students for responding to, performing, creating, and connecting through music, I will help them to aspire to a richer, fuller, deeper, and broader humanity.